

**EXPLORING THAI AND GERMAN CUSTOMERS' MEAL
EXPERIENCES AT GERMAN RESTAURANTS
IN PATTAYA – THAILAND**

DARIN DARARUJA

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Thesis
entitled
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IN PATTAYA – THAILAND**

.....
Ms. Darin Dararuja
Candidate

.....
Chen Ka Tat Nixon, Ph.D.
Major advisor

.....
Asst. Prof. Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra,
Ph.D.
Co-advisor

.....
Asst.Prof. Auemphorn Mutchimwong,
Ph.D.
Acting Dean.
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Mahidol University

.....
Veerades Panvisavas, Ph.D.
Program Director
Master of Management Program in
Tourism and Hospitality Management
International College
Mahidol University

Thesis
entitled
**EXPLORING THAI AND GERMAN CUSTOMERS' MEAL
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was submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management (Tourism and Hospitality Management)
on
July 26, 2013

.....
Ms. Darin Dararuja
Candidate

.....
Budsakayt Intarapasan, Ph.D.
Chair

.....
Chen Ka Tat Nixon, Ph.D.
Member

.....
Asst. Prof. Sompong Amnuay-ngertra,
Ph.D.
Member

.....
Asst.Prof. Auemphorn Mutchimwong,
Ph.D.
Acting Dean.
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Mahidol University

.....
Prof. Maleeya Kruatrachue, Ph.D.
Dean
International College
Mahidol University

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Darin Dararuja

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GERMAN RESTAURANTS IN PATTAYA – THAILAND**

DARIN DARARUJA 5238813 ICTH/M

M.M. (TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT)

**THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE : CHEN KA TAT NIXON, Ph.D., SOMPONG
AMNUAY-NGERNTRA, Ph.D.**

ABSTRACT

This study explores how restaurant operators create a meal experience in German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand. The study focuses on four aspects of the Gustafsson's Five Aspects Meal Model: the room, the meeting, the product, and the atmosphere. German and Thai customer answers to study surveys and interviews provided insights into the dining experience. From these answers, we can prioritize aspects to create a satisfying dining experience.

Both German and Thai customers rated the taste of food as the most valuable aspect of the dining experience. They also wanted pricing that gave good value for the quality of the food. These two indicators, taste and pricing, primarily determine the likelihood of a return to a restaurant. Ambience should be created and maintained to reinforce these stronger indicators. Effective service delivery further enhances customer satisfaction.

**KEY WORDS: CUSTOMER'S MEAL EXPERIENCE/ TOURIST'S FOOD
CONSUMPTION/ RESTAURANT/ THAILAND**

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ประสบการณ์การบริโภคของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยและเยอรมันที่ร้านอาหารเยอรมันในพัทยา
EXPLORING THAI AND GERMAN CUSTOMERS' MEAL EXPERIENCES AT GERMAN
RESTAURANTS IN PATTAYA – THAILAND

ดาริน ดารารุจา 5238813 ICTH/M

กจ.ม. (การจัดการการท่องเที่ยวและการบริการ)

คณะกรรมการที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์: CHEN KA TAT NIXON, Ph.D., สมพงษ์ อำนวยเงินตรา,
Ph.D.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเรื่องนี้มุ่งศึกษาวิธีการประกอบธุรกิจร้านอาหารที่ส่งผลต่อประสบการณ์การบริโภคของลูกค้าที่ใช้บริการร้านอาหารเยอรมันในเขตพัทยา โดยมีขอบเขตของการศึกษาอยู่ที่องค์ประกอบหลักของทฤษฎีแบบอย่างด้านประสบการณ์ของลูกค้าในมื้ออาหาร 4 ประการคือ ห้องรับประทานอาหาร การปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างมื้ออาหาร สินค้า และบรรยากาศ โดยใช้แบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์กับลูกค้าชาวเยอรมันและชาวไทย คำตอบของแบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์ดังกล่าวนี้จะช่วยเปิดประเด็นว่ามีองค์ประกอบใดองค์ประกอบหนึ่งของประสบการณ์การบริโภคอาหารสำคัญกว่าองค์ประกอบอื่นๆหรือไม่

ผลการศึกษาพบว่าทั้งลูกค้าชาวเยอรมันและชาวไทยให้ความสำคัญกับรสชาติของอาหารมากที่สุด ลูกค้าทั้งสองกลุ่มประทับใจในราคาของอาหารที่คุ้มค่ากับคุณภาพของอาหาร นอกจากนี้ยังมีปัจจัย 2 ประการที่ส่งผลมากที่สุดต่อการตัดสินใจของลูกค้าทั้งชาวเยอรมันและชาวไทยในการกลับมาใช้บริการร้านเดิมอีก กล่าวคือ การจัดและบำรุงรักษาบรรยากาศของร้านซึ่งเป็นปัจจัยที่จะช่วยเพิ่มโอกาสที่ลูกค้าจะกลับมามากขึ้น และปัจจัยอีกประการหนึ่งคือ การสอนและฝึกฝนความสามารถด้านบริการของพนักงานเพื่อให้บริการที่เพิ่มความพึงพอใจให้แก่ลูกค้ามากขึ้น

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of study

Every restaurant owner wants to increase profits and satisfy customers. To achieve this goal, restaurants need strategies to keep present customers and attract new customers while keeping their competitive advantages and high quality customer service. Sophisticated customers want more than products and services. Customers want an experience that satisfies personal sensations. Learning how customers describe the elements of restaurant service will improve the understanding of customers' dining experiences. Restaurant owners and managers can then find the best way to create a strong customer base.

People frequently choose a restaurant to socialize. Restaurants assume a vital role for achieving social ambitions (Chow, Lau, Lo, Sha, & Yun, 2007). People differentiate themselves from others by using food and etiquette as symbols to show individual expression of their preferences (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). In short, restaurants do more than satisfy hunger. Customers also consider a restaurant as a place to socialize and create enjoyable experiences (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). A visit to a restaurant is an occasion to satisfy their desires in a social and cultural context. Accordingly, restaurant operators must understand the perspectives of various customers.

Memorable dining experiences depend on various components that include customer interactions and participation (Gupta & Vajic, 2000). Using the Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM) developed by Gustafsson (2004) and Gustafsson et al (2006), the present study assesses customer meal experience from the restaurant customer's point of view. Initially, FAMM was used to rate restaurants from the perspective of Western management. The FAMM theoretical model examined the five aspects of a meal: room, meeting, product, atmosphere, and management control system. These aspects relate to management and customers within the restaurant setting. The purpose

of this study is to investigate customer perspectives toward their meal experiences. Restaurant managers can then consider a holistic view of the customer dining experience.

This study applies FAMM to commercial restaurants in Thailand. Management can use this FAMM research to better understand customer perspectives. Understanding varying perspectives of target customers from different backgrounds is a core part of the hospitality product. This study will use the important factors affecting meal experiences to identify any similarities or differences in perspectives of customers on their meal experience. By examining varying perspectives, restaurant operators can learn the important factors for managing and arranging components to provide an enjoyable dining experience for customers.

1.2 Statement of problem

An exploration using FAMM to obtain the varying perspectives of Thai and German restaurant customers provides important benefits. Most tourism statistics show that restaurant service generates significant revenue for national and local economies. The total expenditure by international tourists in 2010 approached 919 billion dollars (UNWTO, 2011). Tourists spend approximately 25% of the total spending for accommodations and dining (Nield, Kozak, & LeGrys, 2000). The average tourist spends one fourth of his or her budget on the restaurant experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). In Thailand, the GDP of the hotel and restaurant sector expanded by 7.9 percent in 2010. The number of tourists hit 15.8 million in 2010, an increase 12 percent compared to 2009 (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2011). A greater or steadier influx of tourists will continue to impact Thailand's Gross Domestic Product. In Pattaya, Thailand, the average expenditure of foreign and Thai tourists on food and beverage accounted for 20-25% of total expenditure per person per day (Department of Tourism Thailand, 2011). Most of tourists in this destination spend between 300-500 baht per meal and eat at a restaurant two or three times per day on average (www.virtualtravelguides.com, 2013). Thus, money spent in restaurants impacts the tourist industry enormously.

Organizations that market Thailand as a destination will appreciate this study's investigation of restaurant attributes, an important part of the tourist experience.

Although existing studies discuss customers' meal experiences, they do not clearly explain how restaurants can achieve the right meal experience for customers (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). The present study explains the different factors that affect meal experiences. FAMM provides a useful tool for investigating customers' meal experiences, since it identifies five crucial aspects for developing favorable meal service and experiences for customers. One study found some disadvantages in FAMM, however, when the model was applied in different situations (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). That study concluded that creating meals to satisfy customer needs in line with the intention of restaurant operators as stated in FAMM was impractical. Despite the fact that a significant number of studies investigate meal production and consumption in restaurant settings, that study recommended additional research in this field (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). The present study explores the customer perspectives on the different FAMM aspects. The present study also examines whether customer perspectives are in line with each dimension of FAMM.

Researchers can provide a better understanding of meal experiences if they realize that a meal involves complex phenomena (Meiselman H. L., 2000). Other researchers have examined the factors that collectively affect a customer's meal experience, but a number of these studies focused on other meal models (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005). Little empirical research examines customer experience from a holistic point of view (Jensen & Hansen, 2007). To expand that limited research, the present study looks for new evidence that supports FAMM. The present study also examines the perspectives of tourists on their meal experiences in Thailand.

Although so much money is at stake, restaurant management teams in Thailand have shown little interest in scientific research on these subjects. To stimulate an interest in scientific research, this study seeks to identify components that will increase the profits of restaurants and the satisfaction of customers. Here is the problem statement for this study: How do Thai and German customers perceive FAMM aspects in the context of German restaurants in Pattaya, a major tourist destination in Thailand?

1.3 Research questions

The study of the different dimensions of FAMM, which is a Western concept in total meal experience, serves as a tool to help this study investigate customer perspectives at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand. This study proposes to elicit answers to the following questions:

- 1) To what extent are the dimensions of FAMM perceived as important by Thai and German customers?
- 2) How do Thai and German customers perceive the similarities and differences in their meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand?

1.4 Research objectives

The perspectives of German and Thai customers were used in this study since they are customers at German restaurants in Pattaya. FAMM was used as a frame of reference to guide this research.

The aim of this thesis is to fill the research gap on the perspectives of customers when eating at different German restaurants.

Specifically this research seeks to:

- 1) investigate Thai customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand,
- 2) investigate German customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand, and
- 3) compare Thai and German customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand.

The study uses two methods for gathering information. First, the study uses a semi-structured interview to obtain how important elements of FAMM influence German and Thai restaurant customer perspectives on their dining experiences. Second, the study uses a self-administered questionnaire to verify whether there are the similarities and differences from customers' perception of their dining experiences or not. Individual in-depth interviews, a qualitative approach, set the scope and pattern of attributes regarding customer meal experiences. Those interviews generated certain findings. The survey questionnaire was developed from

those interviews. The answers to the questionnaires were then compared to the previous findings (Details will be explained in **Chapter 3**).

1.5 Rationale of research

Although there are many studies utilizing FAMM to explore customer meal experiences in a Western restaurant and food service context, few studies investigate the perspectives of the meal experiences using this model in a different cultural context. A deeper knowledge about points of view on each dimension of FAMM will help restaurant operators recognize key elements for restaurant development. Previous studies explored meals from the perspective of restaurant operators rather than focusing on customer points of view (Jensen & Hansen, 2007). Knowledge about meal experiences from a customer perspective is required to conduct more research (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Warde & Martens, 2000). This research places importance on generating insights from customer opinions related to FAMM.

Findings of this study may be used as a development tool to improve an understanding of customer behaviors in the field of restaurant operations. Recommendations can also be shared with those who provide unique ambience and meal experiences, including those who want to become restaurant owners, managers, and food and beverage managers. Also, a comparison of different restaurant customers will provide insightful information for the hospitality and service industries, especially in terms of segmenting the tourism market (Kim, Wen, & Doh, 2010).

1.6 Significance of research

By understanding customer perspectives towards the elements of FAMM, restaurant operators can improve strategies to enhance meal experiences, add value to their product, and successfully interact with customers from different cultures. Specifically, this research will (1) provide theoretical advancement in the field of restaurant service by determining how dimensions of FAMM are perceived by both Western and non-Western customers in a different context from where FAMM was invented, (2) identify the most important similar and different perspectives of Thai and

German customers in a non Western cultural context, (3) provide insights for improvement opportunities in German restaurant service operations, and (4) guide other researchers when investigating similar areas with customers from different cultural backgrounds. Armed with a deeper understanding of their customer's points of view, restaurant owners and operators can ultimately offer surprising quality to their customers.

1.7 Scope and limitation of the study

This study explores two significant dimensions of restaurant operation: the meal experiences of customers and the dimensions of the FAMM. This study focuses on only four dimensions of FAMM – the room, the meeting, the product, and the atmosphere. It excludes the management control system aspect, since the management control system is considered and experienced by customers as the backstage element (Walter, 2011). Consequently, study results may not be generalized to all German restaurants in Thailand. Results can only be generalized to German restaurants within Central, North, and South Pattaya, and Pattaya-Naklua, since the venue of customer meal experiences are limited to German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand.

Different German restaurants were chosen based on main menu items. Those menu items had to be German cuisine. Also, the study chose only German restaurants that received significant recommendations from popular tourist food and beverage websites and from magazines used extensively by tourists. In addition, the selected restaurants included the elements of an “à la Carte restaurant” defined by Hansen, Jensen, and Gustafsson (2004, p. 86) as “(a) restaurant with the right to serve all types of food and alcoholic beverages, and that has a menu and at least one Chef and one waiter with the commercial purpose”. Hence, the findings of this study should be used cautiously in making generalizations about other types of restaurants in areas other than Pattaya.

This study used only Thai and German tourists who ate at German restaurants in different areas of Pattaya, Thailand for its research. In spite of this limited sample group, these customers are highly representative of tourists from Asian and Western countries. Moreover, these customers are as qualified as any other group

to evaluate their own experience of service, décor, and product in German restaurants in Pattaya. A report of tourism statistics in Pattaya from January to December in 2010 and 2011 showed that Thai tourist arrival (1,727,397/ 1,867,368) was the largest group among Asian countries. German tourist arrival (401,368/ 404,420) was the second largest group from European countries after Russian tourists (1,696,515/ 2,204,459) (Department of Tourism - Thailand, 2012). Compared to other cities in Thailand, Pattaya shows the largest number of German tourist arrivals. Based on these statistics, the study used Pattaya as the area of research.

Moreover, the study chose German restaurants because statistics indicate that the number of German restaurants substantially exceeds the number of restaurants serving other national cuisines in Pattaya (Web Sawadee Public Company Limited, 2010; German, Austrian & Swiss Restaurants A-Z, 2011). Also, applying FAMM, a concept used in Western countries, to restaurants serving Western cuisine in Thailand is a primary objective of this study. Comparing the perspective of Asian and Western customers amplifies the benefits of this study.

This study makes findings drawn from commercial restaurants. Further research focusing on other types of restaurants and other countries would help clarify whether the dimensions of FAMM in meal experiences are interpreted or perceived differently in other contexts. Also, additional research could study other dimensions of the hospitality product where competition in other countries and cultures is increasing.

CHAPTER II

LITURATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Some studies have investigated meal experiences using different models in varying contexts. The study by Hansen (2005) elaborated on the study of Andersson and Mossberg (2004). That study by Hansen found that customers consider the following five factors as providing potential satisfaction during the meal experiences: Cuisine (food varying from basic and plain to delicious and exceptional), restaurant interior (physical environment and interior design influencing customers to stay longer), service (levels of service), company (other diners sitting at the same table) and other guests (other customers affecting the meal experience). These factors affect the customer meal experiences and satisfaction.

The study by Meiselman (2003) found that food, environment, and context are the significant factors that affect customer evaluation of meal experiences. The study by Warde and Martens (2000) found that customers eat out for enjoyment and pleasure as well as for sustenance. Thus, customers consider accessibility, delivery, enjoyment, and environment as influential factors when choosing or rating a restaurant. These earlier studies confirm that customers evaluate their meal experience by considering factors other than food quality.

The present study primarily applies a meal model called the Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM) developed by Gustafsson (2004) and Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006). According to the description of FAMM by Jensen and Hansen (2007), this meal framework looked at the food itself, the interactions of the customers, and the environment. Those elements provide a sensual experience to restaurant customers. FAMM examines professional management of a restaurant from the point of view of the restaurant provider. In contrast, this study examines the importance of each dimension in this model as perceived by tourists. After collecting

data, this study will analyze customer perspectives on meal experiences in the context of German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand.

2.2 Theoretical framework and conceptualization

2.2.1 Key concepts

2.2.1.1 Concept of meal experiences

Carbone and Haeckel (1994, p. 9) define an experience as the “take-away impression formed by people’s encounters with products, services, and business – a perception produced when humans consolidate sensory information”. Alternatively, experiences have been described as memorable events that engage customers emotionally in individual ways (Kleynhans, 2003). Hence, in the context of restaurant service, a meal experience is an outcome that results from customer interactions with services and products. The experience may result from interactions between provider and customer or between customer and customer (Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003). Furthermore, the meal experience is the total dining experience. That experience includes both tangible aspects such as setting design, decorations, and food products and intangible aspects such as ambience or atmosphere (Kleynhans, 2003). The outcome of a restaurant service experience could result from tangible outputs like products offering, value, emotions and judgments (Johnston & Clark, 2005).

The above descriptions of an “experience” are partly in line with other definitions where outcomes of experiences are described as cognitive. People’s beliefs about place, people, and products affect an experience. Those beliefs can be noted by physical responses to the place, people, or products and by emotional responses to an encouragement to interact with people (Edvardsson, 2005; Edvardsson, Enquist, & Johnston, 2005). Likewise, Lashley, Morrison and Randall (2005) found that the dimensions of meal experiences relate to the purpose of the occasion whether eating at home or in a commercial restaurant. The guests, the atmosphere, the physical setting, the food, and the service all relate to physical and psychological components. The study by Jensen and Hansen (2007) noted that tangible

and intangible parts of a restaurant need to be created in a holistic way to offer positive customer value. Intangible parts include relations with the staff and other customers.

In this research, the “meal experience” refers to tangible and intangible experiences that cause a cognitive, emotional, and physical response. Treatment of a customer affects those responses. Interactions with other customers, service staff, service place, and products also affect those responses. As explained by Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006), FAMM provides symbols which help restaurant operators understand the meal experience. Symbols include involvement with the design and space arrangements, social interactions, and product aspects.

(i) Customer perspectives on meal experiences

Restaurant operators can benefit from learning how individuals interpret a restaurant’s environment, service, and product. Customers experience production and consumption of services simultaneously. The physical environment can affect the behaviors and perceptions of customers (Bitner, 1992). A customer’s perception of a restaurant’s ambience can stimulate certain responses from a customer. Those responses include changes in attitudes, emotions, value perceptions, and behaviors (Bitner, 1990; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993). Similarly, a study by Ha and Jang (2010) noted that a customer’s positive response to the restaurant’s atmosphere might result in positive emotions and favorable imagery of a company’s services and products. Furthermore, a study by Bitner (1990) also found that ambience potentially affects perceptions of a service operator’s performance. For example, ambience can affect quality expectations. Ha and Jang (2010) concluded based on several previous studies that customers perceive quality based on the ambience. In short, the ambience of a restaurant induces feelings that cause impressions of a restaurant. Accordingly, restaurant operators should seek a combination of tangible and intangible components to create an enjoyable customer experience since it could affect customer emotions and behaviors (Teng, 2011).

The physical environment can also influence evaluations and perceptions of the quality of product, service, or place even before eating. In fact, perceptions of quality occur in anticipation of an actual visit or real time experience

(Ha & Jang, 2010). Thus, restaurant owners should carefully consider facility aesthetics, lighting, and layout, key dimensions of the physical environment, since these attributes substantially influence decisions to enter a restaurant. Influence is particularly strong when physical atmospherics create sensual experiences that affect emotional states. For example, pleasant feelings or good mood can make customers linger. For these reasons, exploring how perceptions vary according to physical attributes can be important, as long as the exploration yields an evaluation of product and service.

2.2.1.2 Concept of Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM)

According to the description of FAMM (see Figure 2.1) by Gustafsson (2004), a restaurant visit initially explains the model. FAMM was developed as a tool to research various elements of food service in restaurants chains and individual restaurants. Gustafsson (2004) demonstrated that this model consisted of five aspects. The first aspect is the “room” which means the actual restaurant. The second aspect is the “meeting” that includes interactions between customers and staffs and interactions among the customers themselves. The third aspect is the “product” or the food and beverage. The fourth aspect is the “management control system” which includes all managerial factors for control of the restaurant operation. The fifth aspect is the “atmosphere”, the overall ambience and feeling.

FAMM development started in 1990. Subsequently, there were adaptations in 2004 and 2006 (see Figure 2.2). The 2004 and 2006 versions contain the initial five aspects, but those versions modify management control systems and atmosphere aspects (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009).

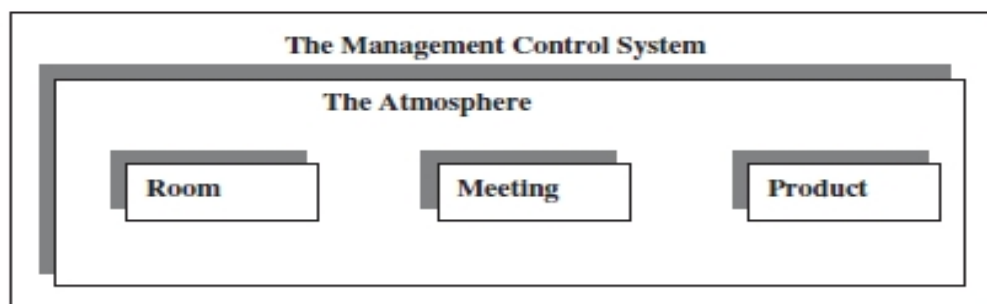


Figure 2.1 The Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM) from a producer's perspective, Gustafsson (2004)

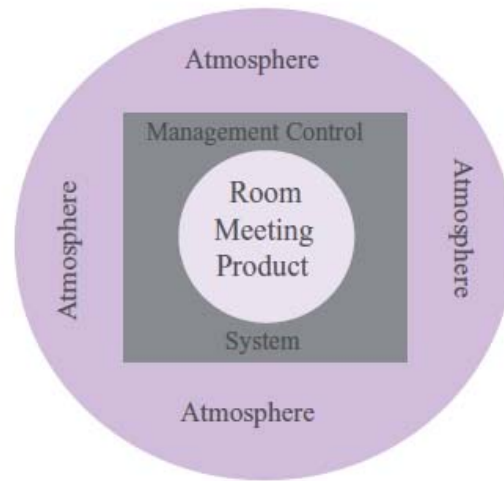


Figure 2.2 The Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM), adapted from Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006)

Even though FAMM hardly examines restaurant processes from a customer point of view (Walter, 2011), this study still utilizes FAMM as a framework, because the model is fairly comprehensive. Also, the model gives management the responsibility for creating extraordinary meal experiences (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). This study, however, uses as guidelines only four dimensions of FAMM – the room, the meeting, the product, and the atmosphere. This study excludes the management control system aspect because that aspect is not regarded as significant. The management control system operates backstage where customers have few interactions (Walter, 2011). Nevertheless, insights into perspectives on the other four aspects remain crucial for the development of a management control system. Jensen and Hansen (2007) noted that the management control system including back up services should initially create the feel of a meal. Accordingly, only four of the five aspects of FAMM are discussed hereafter.

2.2.2 Literature review based on FAMM

This section discusses in detail four dimensions of FAMM and links FAMM to the concept of meal experience.

2.2.2.1 The Room

The “room” is the place of a meal’s setting. The concept includes the shape and appearance of the room as well as its utilization by both customers and staff (Gustafsson, 2004). To become a professional setting, the room should be furnished with a knowledge of architectural style, design, and decoration (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). The design of a restaurant may influence the duration of customer stay (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). Bitner (1992) used a term called “servicescapes”, the interior environment of a room, to explain the atmospherics and the interactions of customers. Bitner’s study categorized the physical environment into three main dimensions: (1) ambient conditions (include the background characteristics in the service place such as temperature, lighting, noise, music, and scent), (2) spatial layout and functionality (the ways in which equipment and furnishings are arranged; and the ability of the same items to facilitate performance and the accomplishment of goals), and (3) signs, symbols and artifacts (displayed items on the exterior and interior of a structure are examples of directly expressed communicators)”. For Carlback (2008), the room concept includes the proper use of space for serving and eating. Space should be fully utilized to generate benefits to the restaurant business. In particular, restaurant owners should design space to effectively support and organize work functions.

(i) Meal experiences through the “Room”

A well-designed servicescape based on Bitner’s (1992) suggestions relates to the room aspect of FAMM in several ways. The servicescape can influence or aid the efficiency of restaurant staff. The servicescape can help customers carry out their dining activities or assist their interactions with customers and staff. When restaurant staffs feel comfortable in the workplace, interactions will be more enjoyable for both staff and customers.

Exterior designs such as restaurant signs, outdoor table layout, and parking lot lighting, affect customer perceptions of convenience, timing, social interaction. They also encourage more spending. The exterior design creates expectations for the interior. Customers expect to find that the interior and exterior designs match (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). A harmonious exterior and

interior design attracts customers. Also, this design will eventually generate more restaurant revenue. Accordingly, restaurant operators should design rooms that are consistent with the overall concept of the restaurant.

The interior design can greatly influence a meal experience. The design can even vary the experience of the same meal consumed in a different place (Meiselman, Hirsch, & Popper, 1987; Edwards, Meiselman, Edwards, & Leshner, 2003). The interior design may cause customers to enjoy a particular place. Some studies found that the physical environment, such as facility aesthetics, lighting, and layout is the key dimension that affects perceptions of satisfaction. The environment also affects behaviors. Depending on the environment, customers might spend more time lingering and consuming services (Ryu & Han, 2011).

The inference from these studies is that emotional responses triggered by the physical environment can facilitate and create enjoyment and hedonic consumption. Specially designed facilities can increase the level of excitement or arousal so that customers want to experience eating in that restaurant. The entire sensory experience provided by the restaurant environment results in the overall aesthetic and emotional impact (Alice, Chu, & Lam, 2004). Despite the considerable impact of the physical environment, however, restaurant operators should not neglect social and cultural factors that might be just as important.

2.2.2.2 The Meeting

The meeting aspect includes the interactions between customers, staff members, and customers and staff (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). In short, the meeting aspect includes all interactions between people in the restaurant. As noted in FAMM, customers rate service quality by how staff treats them. Interactions with the staff greatly affect customer enjoyment (Edwards & Gustafsson, 2008). Accordingly, staff should learn rules of manners and etiquette that enhance social interactions (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006).

According to Lundberg and Mossberg (2008), restaurant employees can get education and training from three sources. First, staff can learn “hard skills” through formal school training. Second, staff can learn “soft skills” from sharing information with their colleagues. Third, staff can learn “aesthetic skills” by interacting with customers. Learning practical skills can motivate staff to please

customers. Tailored service is as essential as service delivery (Mattila, 2001). By learning to empathize with customers, waiters can better handle different types of customers in different situations. Since customers can have different perceptions of service encounters, increasing service staff awareness of different customer needs and responses will be an important goal of training. As a result of good training, staff and customer interactions and staff performance can create a favorable impression of the restaurant. Accordingly, restaurant operators can benefit from providing practical training.

(ii) Meal experiences through the “Meeting”

Service encounters comprise a crucial element of a meal experience at an à la Carte restaurant (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005). One author expressed concern that restaurant operators might neglect this important component by emphasizing entertainment as the way to arouse the senses (Walter, 2008). As a result, service encounters might be inconsistent with the entertainment. For this reason, restaurant owners need to know how social interactions during food service shape the customer perceptions. Those interactions can satisfy a desire for individualized service. Furthermore, the meeting should not only be treated as the management of intangible aspects. The meeting should also be considered as social interactions between customers because customer interactions affect how customers react to tangible and intangible elements (Walter, 2011). Thus, examining the whole interaction process is important.

Not only the previously mentioned factors can create the atmosphere, an aspect in FAMM. Interactions with other guests from a different culture can result in a good or poor meal experience (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). A deep understanding of interactions between culturally diverse customers is therefore another critical factor for improving customer perceptions.

2.2.2.3 The Product

The product aspect is a core component of FAMM. “Product” mainly means food and beverages. FAMM views the product as a part of a combination with three other aspects, the room, the meeting, and the atmosphere (Hansen, 2005). The FAMM model focuses on the sensory experience presented by

the product (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). That study suggested that the presentation of food and beverage should be created in a holistic way to provide a satisfying meal experience. As explained in the study by Kleynhans (2003), presentation of food, the aroma, and the taste of food affect the senses. That study noted that presentation of food refers to the balance and combination of different elements to create visual excitement. Effective presentation will enhance the meal experience and make food more desirable. A pleasant aroma stimulates the appetite and makes a dining experience memorable. Obviously, the taste of food should evoke a positive sensory response that will lead customers to return to a restaurant.

A menu balanced with different foods and dishes should be arranged to make customers comfortable with unfamiliar or foreign cuisines (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). That study mentioned that chefs need to be familiar with basic foods, culinary techniques, and typical flavor in order to create authentic dishes. Warde and Martens (2000) confirmed that product creation requires both aesthetic knowledge and practical culinary skills. Additionally, an optimum menu will be planned comprehensively to balance taste, nutrition, color, and form (Dornenburg & Page, 1996).

(iii) Meal experiences through the “Product”

The first contact with the food is called the moment of truth (Edwards & Gustafsson, 2008). The first impression of a restaurant frequently derives from the appearance of the food (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005; Warde & Martens, 2000). Based on the appearance, customers will decide whether the food corresponds with their expectations.

The menu itself or recommendations by the restaurant staff affect the entire meal experience (Meiselman H. L., 2000). Thus, service staff needs to know the different types of food and beverages on the menu. Without that knowledge, service staff cannot give appropriate suggestions or respond to customer inquiries. At the same time, restaurant staff needs to respect customer choices. Remembering choices will impress customers when they return.

If the wait staff is properly trained to give helpful suggestions, wait time will be reduced and customers will be more likely to enjoy a product that

matches their needs. Wait staffs should make recommendations that please customers and fulfill their expectations regarding the product or service (Gustafsson, 2004). One study concluded that the performance of restaurant staff was as significant as the food and beverages (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005).

Customers have different preferences. Customers evaluate quality of product based on different cultural, social and environmental factors. Dealing with customer preferences effectively will favorably affect a customer's view of the overall quality of the product (Carlbäck, 2008). Hence, restaurant operators can improve their product by properly training staff.

2.2.2.4 The Atmosphere

Kotler (1973, p. 50) defined atmospherics as “the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability”. Kotler further emphasized that atmospheric attributes could be used as a marketing tool to evoke pleasant behaviors and feelings where products or services are consumed. In the description of FAMM, the term “atmosphere” as defined by Edwards and Gustafsson (2008), includes the surrounding attributes, such as music, lighting, color, and space in the room. The atmosphere aspect is often viewed as intangible and is frequently discussed in relation to the room aspect (Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik, 2009). Some previous researchers have said that atmosphere is an intangible aspect that can be felt rather than seen but still influences perceptions and responses to the environment (Baker, 1987; Baker, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988; Becker, 1981; Darley & Gilbert, 1985; Russell & Snodgrass, 1987; Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986; Wineman, 1982). In this meaning, the atmosphere represents perspectives influenced by other aspects of the FAMM framework, including the room, meeting, and product. It is compatible with a study by Kotler (1973) that a well designed atmosphere is an arousal factor that stimulates spending. In a retail context, a proper display in a store can be a powerful way to provide a pleasant shopping experience that gives a retailer a competitive advantage (Alice, Chu, & Lam, 2004).

Other researchers describe atmosphere as an environment that comforts and supports guests and eases verbal communication between customers and staff (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). Atmosphere can be formed

by interactions between individuals and their physical environment. Atmosphere created by those interactions can evoke perceptions that shape emotions, beliefs, and physiological sensation that in turn influence decisions to stay (approach behavior) or leave a restaurant or store (avoidance behavior) (van Heerden, Botha, & Durieux, 2009).

(iv) Meal experiences through the “Atmosphere”

Atmosphere can be seen as glue that connects customers to a verbal expression of their meal experience (Hansen, 2005). In a study by Hansen, Jensen, and Gustafsson (2005), two main categories, the product and the environment, formed the atmosphere. The environment consisted of interactions between people and place. Consequently, atmosphere could be seen as the perception of tangible factors such as color, furniture, and tablewares, and intangible factors such as interactions and communication with people (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006). That study noted that product and environment can be used to create a comfortable atmosphere. However, Edwards and Gustafsson (2008, p. 31) stated that “atmosphere plays a significant role in influencing customers’ evaluation of the intangible elements; and a restaurant, which has excellent food and service but a poor ambience, can be successful, although customers’ expectations were higher when the ambience and other design elements were positive”. The restaurant setting and other atmospheric components don’t merely attract customers, they also reduce the risk of creating unpleasant feelings to customers (Alonso & O’Neill, 2010).

2.2.3 Summary of theoretical framework

Although this study discusses various theories regarding different dimensions of meal experiences, this study uses FAMM as a framework, since the main objective of this study is to investigate customer points of view on meal experience using aspects from FAMM. FAMM initially used perspectives of restaurant management to deliver enjoyable meal experiences, but the perspectives of customers might not be the same. Hence, applying dimensions of FAMM in the context of restaurant service will be a primary aim of this study.

2.3 Term of definitions

à la Carte restaurant. A restaurant with the right to serve all types of food and alcoholic beverages, and that has a menu and at least one Chef and one waiter with the commercial purpose (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2004).

Authenticity. The food consumed by the population or inhabitants (natives) of a specific country when they still had traditional lifestyles (Kleynhans, 2003).

Five Aspect Meal Model (FAMM). A tool to investigate different aspects of meal service in restaurants chains and individual business. While it is mainly used to structure the production process of a meal experience, this model consists of five aspects which are the actual restaurant (the room), the interaction with staff and fellow guests and interactions between these groups (the meeting), the food and beverage itself (the product), the factors concerning economic aspects, laws and logistics (management control system), and the overall ambience and feeling (the atmosphere) (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, & Mossberg, 2006).

Moment of Truth. The contact or interaction between a customer and a firm (through a product, sales force, or visit) that gives the customer an opportunity to form or change an impression about a firm (Business Dictionary.com, 2011).

Perception. The process by which sensations are selected, organized, and interpreted (Solomon, 2002).

Perspective. A way of thinking about something that is influenced by the type of person he/she is or by an individuals' experiences (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2011).

Sensory experience. The experience evoked by the characteristics of products as perceived through the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing (Öström, Rapp, & Prim, 2008).

Service encounter. "(A) period of time during which a customer directly interacts with a service – including personnel, physical facilities, and other tangible elements" (Bitner, 1990, p. 70).

Servicescape. The environment in which services are provided and where customers interact. It was classified into three dimensions of the physical environment:

(1) 'ambient conditions', (2) 'spatial layout and functionality', and (3) 'signs, symbols and artifacts' (Bitner, 1992).

2.4 Conceptual framework

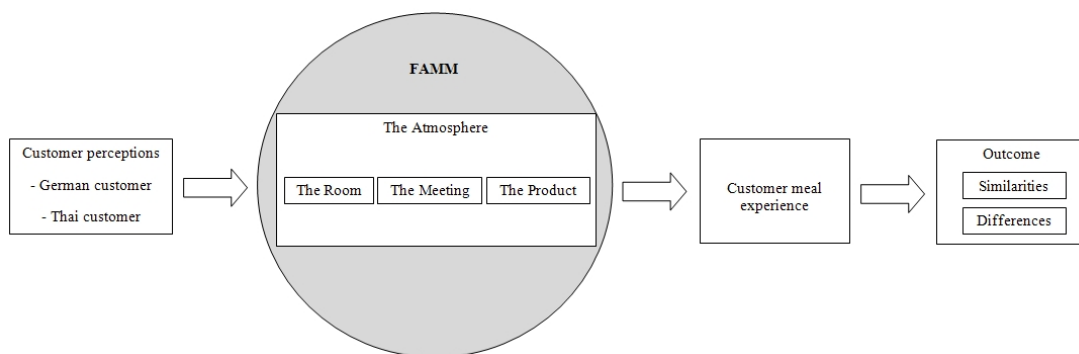


Figure 2.3 Conceptual framework of the present study

CHAPTER III

MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

A review of previous studies supports the assumption that customer perspectives of meal experiences vary. Thus, investigating customer perspectives regarding each dimension of FAMM fills a research gap. Exploring restaurant customer perspectives using FAMM serves two purposes. First, it will provide theoretical advancement in the field of restaurant service by finding how dimensions of FAMM are seen by both Western and non-Western customers in Thailand, a context different from the Western context where FAMM was invented. Second, operators of German restaurants in Pattaya Thailand can use customer perspectives to improve restaurant quality.

The framework of the research methodology is outlined as follows:

- Objectives and scope of study
- Research purpose and approach
- Sample selection
- Research instruments
- Data analysis
- Validity and reliability

3.2 Objectives and scope of study

3.2.1 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- 1) investigate Thai customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand;

2) investigate German customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand;

3) compare Thai and German customer perspectives on meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya – Thailand.

The study's main purpose is to fill a research gap concerning customer perspectives of the meal experience using different dimensions of FAMM.

3.2.2 Scope of research study

- The study will focus only on Thai and German restaurant customers visiting and consuming food at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand.
- The study will only include Thai and German restaurant customers that can communicate in Thai and German and who are 18 years and older. Gender is not a criterion of selection.
- The study will focus on customer perspectives toward their meal experiences using the FAMM developed by Gustafsson (2004) and Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006).
- The study will focus on perspectives of Thai and German customers toward their meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand, a major tourist destination in Thailand.

3.3 Research methodology

The objective of this study is to use FAMM to get comprehensive insights into customer perspectives toward their meal experiences at commercial German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand. Also, the study will describe findings regarding the relationship between different dining elements and customer perspectives towards their meal experiences. In order to meet the objectives of the study, exploratory mixed method design research was conducted.

3.3.1 Research purpose – exploratory mixed method design

This study applied the exploratory mixed method design to collect data for the reason explained by Creswell (2008). This method allows the researcher to identify

measures based on data obtained from interviews instead of approaching a topic with a predetermined set of variables.

Under this design, qualitative data is collected to investigate the phenomenon first. After that step, quantitative data is compiled to explain relationships that appeared in the qualitative data. This study first gathered qualitative data regarding customer perspectives toward meal experiences. Subsequently, the study used quantitative data to explain relationships that occurred between different cultures and customer perspectives.

3.3.2 Research approach – qualitative and quantitative

This study mainly used a qualitative approach to investigate and describe the meal experiences of Thai and German customers. At the same time, this study used an exploratory mixed method design that included a quantitative approach. Thus, the research methodology was divided into two phases. In the first phase, the study collected qualitative data from a small sample of individuals. In the second phase, the study used quantitative data to extend the qualitative findings. That extension of findings resulted from an examination of a large, randomly selected sample population. In short, a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to get an in-depth view from a comparatively small sample. Then the quantitative approach permitted a broader investigation of the research problem.

In the first phase using the qualitative approach, therefore, individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data that provided insights into how respondents interpret their meal experiences. That step identified the key aspects that influenced perspectives as well as the patterns of customer perspectives. Then, using a quantitative approach, a survey questionnaire was used to verify whether there were any similarities or differences of perspectives for the two sampled groups. This study did not generalize the findings from the sample population, tourists visiting Pattaya Thailand. Rather, the study sought insights into which variables influenced perceptions toward meal experiences.

3.4 Sample selection

3.4.1 Tourist selection

For the qualitative approach, this research used purposive sampling to select participants who would voluntarily share their thoughts and experiences. The target samples of this study were Thai and German tourists who visited Pattaya Thailand and dined at German restaurants. One criterion for the sample was dining frequency. That means the present study sought tourists who traveled and dined out often. Another criterion limited the sample to tourists who had taken a holiday in the previous week. A person's ability to remember and recall rather detailed events over one year earlier might be limited (Hoare, Butcher, & O'Brien, 2011). The sample individuals were contacted directly by the researcher who explained the reason for the study and the interview. All individuals gave permission to take part in this study.

Convenience samples are widely accepted in social science and service marketing research (Mohr, 1990). This sampling concept, therefore, was used to select the target population for quantitative research in the present study. Thai and German tourists were randomly selected from German restaurants where they were eating. Potential respondents were first asked to complete a screening questionnaire to establish that they met the research criteria. If they met criteria, respondents were given a brief explanation of the research project. All respondents were assured of confidentiality to encourage candid responses. Customers were then asked whether they were willing to complete a survey questionnaire. If a person agreed to take part in this research project, they were given a survey questionnaire that was collected before they left the restaurant.

3.4.2 Restaurant selection

Thai and German tourists from ten German à la Carte restaurants in North Pattaya-Pattaya-Naklua, Central Pattaya, and South Pattaya were surveyed for this study. In those locations, it was possible to collect data from a large number of individuals from varying backgrounds. These restaurants were selected for the following reasons: First, they were significantly recommended to Thai and German tourists on popular food and beverage websites (Web Sawadee Public Company

Limited, 2010; German, Austrian & Swiss Restaurants A-Z, 2011). Second, the restaurants were scattered throughout three main regions in Pattaya. Third, these restaurants were supervised by a German manager to ensure the authenticity of cuisine. Fourth, primary items on the menu were German cuisine. The following are the intentionally selected restaurants that met these criteria:

Table 3.1 Selected restaurants by locations

Region of location	Number of restaurants	Name of selected restaurants
North Pattaya – Pattaya Naklua	5	Anton
		Bei Gerhard
		Hirschgarten
		Klein Heidelberg
		Zum Bazi
Central Pattaya	3	Brauhaus
		Curry Up
		Schnitzel Hans
South Pattaya	2	Das Berliner Bistro
		Deustches Haus

3.4.3 Sample size

3.4.3.1 Qualitative approach

For individual semi-structured in-depth interviews, the sample size should include 20-40 informants to make results from exploratory qualitative research valid (Walker, 1985). In addition, another criterion to determine the sample size is saturation of information. The sample size is sufficient when the samples repeat identical information rather than contributing new information (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.4.3.2 Quantitative approach

According to Yamane (1967), using a simplified formula to calculate the sample size for a 95% confidence level and precision of 0.5 are assumed.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Total amount of target population

(this research Thai and German tourists from 2010 = 2,128,765)

e = Allowance error of sampling (the level of precision) (this research = 0.05)

$$n = \frac{2,128,765}{1 + 2,128,765(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 399.997$$

$$n \sim 400$$

Hence, the expected total sample size of this research will be 400 samples.

3.5 Research instruments

This research problem will be solved by collecting new data and by analyzing existing data as described in the following section.

3.5.1 Primary data sources and methods

The primary data sources used in this study are interviews and questionnaires. The interviews of individuals chosen by purposive sampling were semi-structured in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews aimed to obtain customer perspectives in a dining experience. The survey questionnaire with closed-ended questions was self-administered by sampled tourists at on-site restaurants. These types of surveys have been useful for obtaining information regarding variables in tourist perceptions. The surveys can be quantified, especially in the case of close-ended fully structured questions.

In other studies of customer perceptions, perceptions were measured by using either one method of data collection or a single source of information. Those limits on data collection might result in significant measurement bias. Bias was a concern here, since descriptions and perceptions of experiences are quite subjective

(Stalcup & Pearson, 2001). Study participants might be unduly influenced by their emotional state. Subjective comments by participants might affect the findings of a study.

To avoid bias, two main studies with two different methods for different groups were developed. This research method allowed for triangulation. “(T)he term (triangulation) is loosely borrowed from trigonometry, where it refers to a method for calculating the distance to a point by looking at it from two other points” (Vogt, 1993, p. 234). Thus, to improve the validity and reliability of findings, this study used three main data collecting methods: Individual semi-structured interviews, survey questionnaire, and empirical secondary data.

3.5.1.1 Individual semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured in-depth interview format was chosen as an appropriate method for the qualitative part of the study. Such an interview can effectively get in-depth background and other primary information. Further, the personal interview helped develop the questionnaire that was used in the subsequent quantitative study. Also, the interview was used to validate or confirm the findings of the quantitative research.

This method allowed informants to answer questions and describe their experiences. Importantly, the researcher could add questions as necessary to clarify responses. Consequently, the semi-structured interview reduced the chances of participants misunderstanding a question. It can also decrease the possibility of receiving unresponsive answers, which would eliminate the usefulness of the answers. Moreover, the interviewer could avoid leading questions that suggested the answers.

For the semi-structured interview, questions were organized consecutively to elicit perspectives regarding meal experiences during holidays. Follow-up and probing questions were asked when necessary and appropriate. Then informants were asked for some background facts. At the end, participants were told to add any other comments they wished to make.

3.5.1.2 Survey questionnaire

The survey questions were designed to be easily understood and to be relevant to the objectives of this study. The sample population did not speak

English as their mother tongue. For the German language questionnaire, questions based on the survey were first written in English. Then a German native speaker familiar with the subject matter of the study translated the questions into German. Accordingly, all idioms and local expressions were appropriately used and expressed. The answers to the German questions were subsequently translated back into English.

Although the Thai language questionnaire and participant answers were translated from and to English by the researcher, a professional translator approved their accuracy. Personal interviews from the qualitative study were similarly translated. Prior to completion, the questionnaires were given to restaurant managers and a few customers to test the clarity of the questions and ensure the reliability of the data.

3.5.2 Secondary data sources

Although interview and survey data are primary data for this study, secondary empirical data from multiple sources will also be used. Journals, books, internet sites, articles, magazines, dissertations, newspapers and conference papers are treated as existing data that explain consumer behavior in the tourism and hospitality industry. Information from these sources was used to develop a literature review and the research tools. Those sources were also used to explain how the study relates to dining experience perceptions of tourists from a different culture.

3.6 Data collection

3.6.1 Interviews

Prior to the main interview, an interview template written in Thai and German, the “guide”, was developed to frame the main aspects and key themes relating to meal experience. An analysis of the empirical secondary data showed several aspects. These aspects were subsequently used as the basis for questions developed in the guide for the semi-structured interviews.

Before starting the interview, the researcher explained the type and purpose of the interview. During the interviews, informants were encouraged to

discuss all key aspects based on the interview guide. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the informants and transcribed into text for data analysis. After each interview, the researcher took field notes regarding important statements. The researcher also wrote a memorandum citing gestures and facial expressions. By observing facial expressions, the interviewer could more easily understand what the informants wanted to say.

3.6.2 Survey questionnaire

The study used a field survey and a self-administered survey questionnaire to collect primary data. The field survey gathered information directly from tourists on site at German restaurants in Pattaya. After finding participating restaurants, the researcher went to the target restaurants to meet the managers at the end of April 2012. During the meeting with the managers, the researcher explained the research process, asked for the permission to collect data, and arranged a suitable time to distribute questionnaires. One week prior to distributing the questionnaire, the researcher again visited the managers to remind them of the date and time. The survey questionnaires were given to Thai and German customers from the beginning of May, 2012 to the beginning of August, 2012. The researcher and a research assistant distributed questionnaires to the customers when they arrived but delayed the interview until they had finished their meal. Thus, the interview did not interrupt the meal and ensured that customers already had experience with the food and service. To minimize bias and vary sources, the data was collected during weekdays and weekends during all operating hours. The data collection was expected to be completed in approximately one month. The data collection period was extended, however, since data collection was not completed in this time frame.

3.6.3 Researcher observations

The researcher verified the information gathered from the structured survey questionnaire and interviews with personal observations when possible. The aspects will be drawn as follows:

3.6.3.1 Overview of restaurant's descriptions

The selected German restaurants were located in different areas throughout Pattaya, Thailand. In general, the design and decoration were not authentically German. Rather, the restaurants were more likely to use a common European style. Some restaurants provided both indoor and outdoor dining areas with table layouts that were suitable for individuals or groups of various sizes. Staff personnel were Thai, but they were supervised by German managers. Staff commonly communicated with foreign customers in English, but some staff also spoke German. Not all staff wore uniforms.

3.6.3.2 Activities and the flow of restaurant customers

The dining experience in different restaurants followed a common pattern. When customers arrived, staff welcomed, seated, and gave them menus. Servers later took orders and brought food to the tables. After eating, customers left the restaurant.

Since the data collection process occurred during low season, restaurants were not busy or crowded. Unlike the high season when tables are in demand, customers might have felt less rushed and might have enjoyed greater privacy. Customers in German restaurants varied, but it seemed that there were more tourists than residents or local people. Most people came in couples, but some were with a group. Customers included both first time and repeat customers.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Data characteristics

The questions for both personal interviews and surveys were derived and developed from a review of FAMM literature. The questions were divided into three main categories - the room and atmosphere, the meeting and atmosphere, and the product.

- The Room and atmosphere category included the location, the interior design, the exterior design, the table layout, and the tableware settings.

- The Meeting and atmosphere category included staff attentiveness, attitude and behavior. The category further included staff outlook, staff knowledge of menu items and ability to make recommendations. Finally, the category included staff sympathy, guest privacy and comfort.
- The Product category included the overall food presentation, the food taste, the menu variety and rotation. It also included the price and value for money.

Interview and survey results regarding these categories will be discussed in the findings and analysis section of this study.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were employed in this study. This study used qualitative content and analysis to find the perspectives of customers on their meal experiences. The similarities and differences of those perspectives produced themes and concepts that led the study to find new insights. Quantitative content analysis determined how many times and in which ways the themes and concepts were used in interviews. The results of these analyses are combined with the literature review to provide insights and recommendations.

3.7.2 Qualitative approach

Data analysis commenced after the first interview. Interviews were discontinued when new data did not contribute to emerging theories. Data were analyzed using content analysis and coding. The coding process began while conducting and listening to interviews and continued when writing memoranda. The formal coding was done in two steps. In the first step, the perceptions of tourists were investigated. In the second step, the perceptions towards dimensions of meal experiences were analysed.

After completing these steps, the discovered themes and sub-themes were categorized to determine what aspects were perceived as important to tourists in their meal experiences. Moreover, the results of this study will be summarized and formulated into recommended strategies to improve restaurant quality.

3.7.3 Quantitative approach

The statistical computer software SPSS 16.0 produced an analysis of the collected data. The analyses were undertaken and the reasons for them were described as follows:

3.7.3.1 Frequency analysis

Frequency analysis was used to analyze demographic variables in part one of the survey used in this study. That analysis provided frequency and percentage statistics that helped identify the characteristics of German restaurant customers.

3.7.3.2 Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to calculate the mean and the standard deviation (S.D.) for application to Likert style questions. The findings of the descriptive analysis in part two of the study, the part that discussed attributes in meal experiences, showed the strength of each attribute from customer perspectives.

The information discussed in this part will use data from the survey questionnaires. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of each statement regarding different attributes of the restaurant experience. The level of importance of various attributes was analyzed using statistical data that applied the 5 point Likert-scale for the main 16 questions of customer dining experience. The statistical data of the mean score and the S.D. diverged from the mean score as shown below:

1.00-1.80 shows the mean score of customer opinions at the “not important” level.

1.81-2.60 shows the mean score of customer opinions at the “slightly important” level.

2.61-3.40 shows the mean score of customer opinions at the “moderately important” level.

3.41-4.20 shows the mean score of customer opinions at the “very important” level.

4.21-5.00 shows the mean score of customer opinions at the “highly important” level.

3.8 Validity and reliability

As defined by Lincoln and Guba in the study of Hoare, Butcher, and O'Brien (2011), credibility refers to the truth of the findings. To ensure that the responses of all participants were included in the findings, member checks were utilized. Participants were asked to clarify their initial understanding of the main issues from the preceding conversation and their reflections. The interview template confirmed that all the main and follow-up questions were understood and thoroughly asked and answered. The interviews were recorded to ensure that variations could be thoroughly analyzed later (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005).

The selection of the interviewees, places of interview, number of interviews, method of data collection, and data analysis were discussed and described previously. The interview procedure was systematically planned and conducted to make data collection reliable. The interviews and questionnaires were discussed in different groups and were pre-tested. The researcher conducted all the empirical work and interviews and made field notes throughout the process. The interview process was stopped at the point when patterns in the interviews became repetitive.

In conclusion, the researcher found that reliability and validity of research was enhanced by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to compare similar and different interpretations of the results. This comparison process produced a better understanding of which factors related to the model used in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the structured questionnaires were analyzed to add academic concepts relating to restaurant service. Quantitative and qualitative findings of customer perspectives of meal experiences as described using aspects of The Five Aspects Meal Model were used for this analysis.

From the end of April 2012 to August 2012, Thai and German survey questionnaires were distributed to customers at German restaurants. Customers were interviewed from beginning of May to the beginning of August 2012. The period from May to August is the low season in this tourist destination. Because the data was gathered in the low season for only three months, the sample size for surveys and interviews did not reach expected numbers. Accordingly, this study has some limitations because of the sample size.

Two hundred sets of the structured self-administered survey questions were distributed to customers in ten German restaurants. Only 160 sets were answered, however. Of the 160 sets, only 141 met the sample requirements.

The sample size for qualitative study was much smaller than the quantitative sample. For the qualitative study, there were 3 German customers and 2 Thai customers. These five customers ate at 4 German restaurants. Two were from the same restaurant. The other three customers were from three different restaurants. All German customers who gave in-depth interviews were males between the ages of 50-83. All Thai customers were females between the ages of 24-30.

In the findings, restaurant and customer names will not be identified. The study was not designed to compare results from specific customers or restaurants. Further, anonymity reduces bias against any interviewees or restaurants.

4.2 Quantitative and qualitative findings report

The research study was divided into two sections for data analysis as follows:

Section 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Section 2 Customer opinions towards attributes in meal experience

For a better understanding of the data, two symbols were abbreviated.

\bar{X} stands for the mean score of sample

SD stands for Standard Deviation

4.2.1 Section one: Demographic profile of respondents

To better understand the background information in the findings, respondent profiles were included. Those profiles will also provide useful information to restaurant managers and future researchers. The nationality, gender, and age of study participants are described in frequency and percentage in Tables 4.1-4.3 below.

Table 4.1 Frequency and percentage of respondent nationality

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Thai	36	25.53
German	105	74.47
Total	141	100.00

The researcher observed that restaurant customers who answered the quantitative survey were mainly German tourists. 105 respondents were German while 36 respondents were Thai. Restaurant managers stated that there were more German customers than Thai customers during the period of data collection. Moreover, many Thai tourists might have refused to answer the survey.

Table 4.2 Frequency and percentage of respondent gender distribution

Nationality	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Thai	Male	4	11.10
	Female	32	88.90
	Total	36	100.00
German	Male	94	89.50
	Female	11	10.50
	Total	105	100.00
	Total	141	100.00

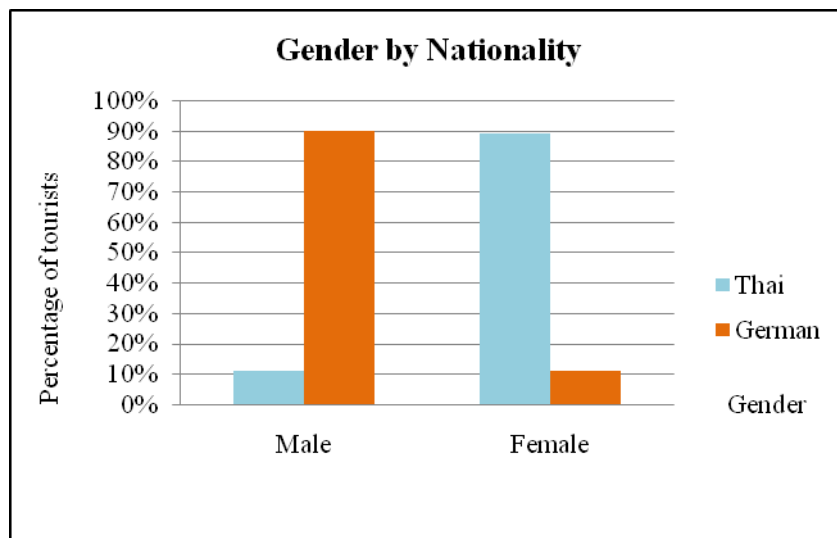
**Figure 4.1** Number of tourists per gender profile

Table 4.3 Frequency and percentage of respondent age distribution

Nationality	Age	Frequency	Percentage
Thai	18-24 years	3	8.30
	25-34 years	16	44.40
	35-44 years	6	16.70
	45-54 years	8	22.20
	55-64 years	3	8.30
	65 years and over	0	0.00
	Total	36	100.00
German	18-24 years	1	1.00
	25-34 years	5	4.80
	35-44 years	14	13.30
	45-54 years	33	31.40
	55-64 years	28	26.70
	65 years and over	24	22.90
	Total	105	100.00
Total		141	100.00

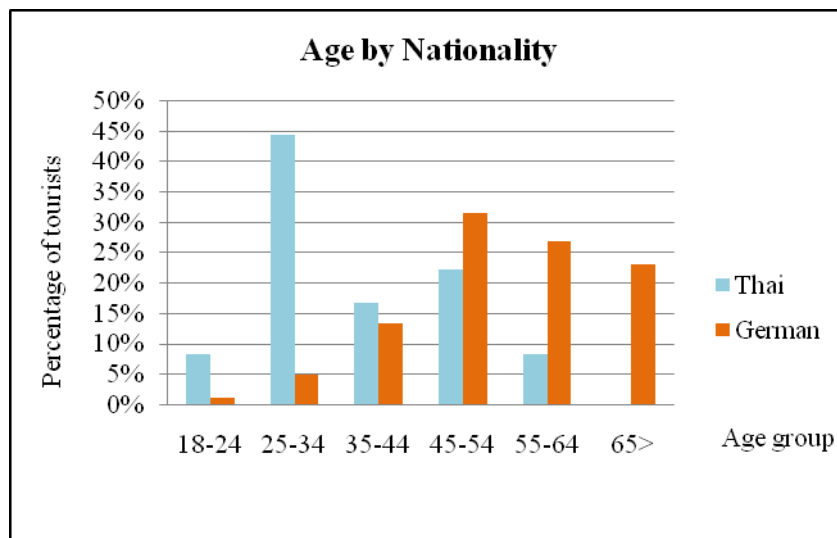


Figure 4.2 Number of tourists per age profile

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show that the largest gender-age group of Thai respondents was females between the ages of 25 and 34. That group accounted for 44.4% of the respondents. Of German respondents, the largest gender-age group was males in the age group of 45-54, accounted for 31.4% of the respondents. Of Thai respondents, the smallest age groups were between the ages of 18-24 and 55-64. Those age groups accounted for 8.3% of the respondents. Only 1% of German respondent was between the ages of 18-24.

4.2.2 Section two: Customer opinions towards attributes in meal experience

Surveys and customer interviews provided the information in this section. The survey questions were generated from different attributes based on FAMM. The tables in this section report nationality characteristics according to four main categories – the room, the meeting, the product, and the atmosphere. Details of these categories are discussed in Chapter 3. Tables 4.4-4.9 show descriptive statistics of mean scores and standard deviations of sixteen attributes of these categories. Those tables also show how respondents rated the importance of each category.

4.2.2.1 Surveys of Thai tourists

Thai respondent mean score on average for the overall importance level rated was 4.09 or mainly in the level of “very important”. The highest mean score (4.36) was for the “product” category. The lowest mean score (3.56) was for the “room-atmosphere” category. The findings of surveys are specifically reported in each category as follows:

Table 4.4 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for Thai tourists – The Room and Atmosphere

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Room - Atmosphere							
4. The table layout is spacious and well-organized	0	1	4	14	17	4.31	0.79
	(0.00)	(2.80)	(11.10)	(38.90)	(47.20)		
5. The tableware (e.g. cutlery, glassware, additional spices) is functionally and conveniently set to the guests	0	1	6	17	12	4.11	0.78
	(0.00)	(2.80)	(16.70)	(47.20)	(33.30)		
1. The restaurant location is conveniently accessible	0	0	11	12	13	4.06	0.83
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(30.60)	(33.30)	(36.10)		
2. The interior design and decoration match with the theme of restaurant (e.g. furniture, color, decoration items, music)	0	3	13	15	5	3.61	0.84
	(0.00)	(8.30)	(36.10)	(41.70)	(13.90)		
3. The exterior design is displayed appropriately (e.g. outdoor- surrounding area, restaurant's name sign)	1	5	11	11	8	3.56	1.08
	(2.80)	(13.90)	(30.60)	(30.60)	(22.20)		

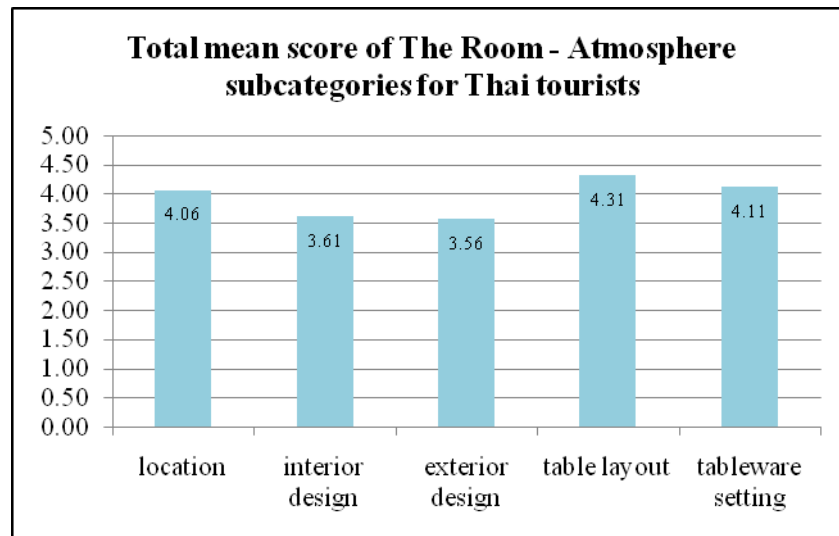


Figure 4.3 Total mean score of The Room – Atmosphere subcategories for Thai tourists

Table 4.4 shows that the highest mean score of 4.31 was for the “spacious and well-organized table layout” attribute. The next highest mean score of 4.11 was for the “functional and convenient tableware settings attribute.” The lowest mean score of 3.56 was for the “appropriately displayed exterior design attribute.”

Thai customer interviews indicated that the “room and atmosphere” attributes were important for meal experiences. Some of the replies are as follows:

The table layout

– Thai customers perceived that the design and layout of furniture such as tables and chairs influenced feelings of spaciousness, convenience, and comfort:

One Thai customer said, “It’s not really spacious, there are some tables pretty close to each other and when you want to leave the tables to the restroom for example, and you need to ask other customers sitting close to you to move. I feel it’s not comfortable and may annoy other guests to move in and out as well. I feel that’s important when you are having food.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

The tableware settings

– Thai customers indicated that table settings were important for their meal experience:

One Thai customer said, “I would say that the additional spices or necessary tools on the table setting is important to have food here. . . .” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

– Another Thai customer was impressed by a tableware setting that gave a sense of spaciousness:

“. . . they don’t provide many things, just salt, pepper, tissue papers and the flower vase. Somehow, it’s good that not so many things are put on the table because you have enough space while eating, and especially the size of dish was quite big, so if they have many items on the table, I would feel inconvenient while eating.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

– Another Thai customer was impressed by the quality and cleanliness of utensils:

“They use the clean and big size of tools for eating like the dish or bowl because they serve food in a big portion, even it’s simple style, nothing special.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

According to survey findings, Thai respondents rated the exterior design attribute as the least important one in the “room-atmosphere” category. The interviews, however, showed that Thai customers considered it important as follows:

The exterior design of restaurant

– One Thai customer said that the name sign or exterior design should be attractive and inviting to customers:

“. . . In my opinion, for this restaurant, they should improve on advertisement or decorating signs to promote in more attractive manner . . . because when we, Thai people, want to try any restaurant or even the foreign food, we often realize that it could be expensive or it offers special kind of food only.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

– Another Thai customer said that the name sign of restaurant should be not only attractive, but it should also clearly present useful information:

“ . . . you may see it if you are walking around here, but it’s not outstanding anyway. And when you get into the area where the restaurant is, you may also get confused where exactly the entrance of the restaurant is . . . you may need to walk around the building or ask somebody where is the entrance of this restaurant.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

Table 4.5 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for Thai tourists – The Meeting and Atmosphere

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Meeting – Atmosphere							
7. The attitude and behavior of staff are good	0	0	5	14	17	4.33	0.72
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(13.90)	(38.90)	(47.20)		
11. The guests have the feeling of comfort and privacy with other guests	0	0	3	21	12	4.25	0.60
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(8.30)	(58.30)	(33.30)		
8. The outlook of staff is tidy, clean and neat	0	2	3	20	11	4.11	0.78
	(0.00)	(5.60)	(8.30)	(55.60)	(30.60)		
10. The staff have sympathetic mind to handling complaints	0	1	6	17	12	4.11	0.78
	(0.00)	(2.80)	(16.70)	(47.20)	(33.30)		
6. The staff are attentive and respond to the request of guests	1	2	3	17	13	4.08	0.97
	(2.80)	(5.60)	(8.30)	(47.20)	(36.10)		
9. The knowledge of the staff of the menu is good and staff are able to recommend the menu to guests	0	2	7	17	10	3.97	0.84
	(0.00)	(5.60)	(19.40)	(47.20)	(27.80)		

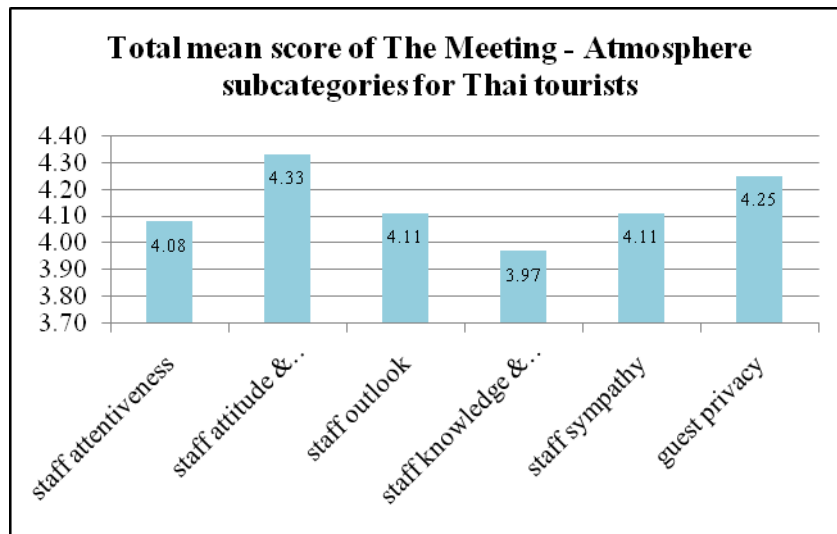


Figure 4.4 Total mean score of The Meeting – Atmosphere subcategories for Thai tourists

Table 4.5 indicates that Thai respondents considered “staff attitude and behaviors” with a mean score of 4.33 as the most important factor in this category. The second highest mean score of 4.25 was for the feeling of “comfort and privacy with other guests.” “Menu knowledge and recommendations of staff” were the least important factor with the mean score of 3.97.

In the interviews, Thai customers noted that the attributes of the “meeting- atmosphere” were important for their meal experiences. Some of the replies are as follows:

The attitude and behaviors of staff

– Thai customers agreed that politeness and friendliness of staff influenced their feelings and the expectations:

“I personally want to be treated in a polite way, and if they would be friendly as well, then that would be the advantage to impress the customers, and for me as well.”, said one Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

Another Thai customer said, “The service here is ok, not a premium one like fine-dining restaurants, but the staffs give me the good feelings, friendly and nice. . . .” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

– Thai customer felt that “greeting” and “seating” were important professional services:

“I think it’s not professional yet because when I entered the restaurant, they didn’t greet me. They didn’t take us to the seats. We had to find the available table ourselves when we didn’t reserve in advance.”, said one Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

– Thai customers indicated that interactions with staff produced a good atmosphere when the staff was polite:

“With staffs, I feel comfortable with them . . . they were polite when they talked to me . . . they use a polite tone of speaking”, said one Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

The feeling of comfort and privacy with other guests

– One Thai customer commented that other guests could disturb comfortable feeling:

“I once experienced the next table caused too much noise from their conversation, because they came in a group of German guys, and they talked quite loud. It was annoying but I couldn’t do anything” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

– Privacy while eating concerned one Thai customer:

“Certainly, I think when you are in public like in the restaurant, you should respect people in the same place to you, not to annoy them. I personally always put myself into other people’s shoes, so I would not do that to anybody” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

Survey findings showed that Thai respondents rated the “menu knowledge and recommendations of staff” attribute as least important in the “meeting-atmosphere” category. In interviews, however, Thai customers considered that attribute important.

The menu knowledge and recommendations of staff

– Thai customers thought that a recommendation of a menu item by staff was important and could even influence the taste of their meal:

One Thai customer said, “If I’m the first-time customer and have no experience of German food before, I think menu recommendation is rather important because I don’t know what should be good or what is the hot item, unless the staffs are able to give some suggestions. Particularly, if the menu is written in German, the staffs could help me a lot to make a decision what will suit my desire the best or I may even take the menu what they recommended.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

“. . . they sometimes even suggested what would suit to your taste as I said like the kind of sauce to eat with roasted duck or asked about if I would like to have any additional spicy taste, I appreciated.”, said another Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

Table 4.6 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for Thai tourists – The Product

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Product							
13. The taste of food	0	1	4	12	19	4.36	0.80
	(0.00)	(2.80)	(11.10)	(33.30)	(52.80)		
16. The food is value for money	0	2	2	14	18	4.33	0.83
	(0.00)	(5.60)	(5.60)	(38.90)	(50.00)		
12. The overall presentation of food (e.g. temperature, aroma, appearance)	0	1	3	15	17	4.33	0.76
	(0.00)	(2.80)	(8.30)	(41.70)	(47.20)		
14. The variety of menu items	0	0	6	20	10	4.11	0.67
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(16.70)	(55.60)	(27.80)		
15. The menu rotation of the dish of the day	1	1	8	19	7	3.83	0.88
	(2.80)	(2.80)	(22.20)	(52.80)	(19.40)		

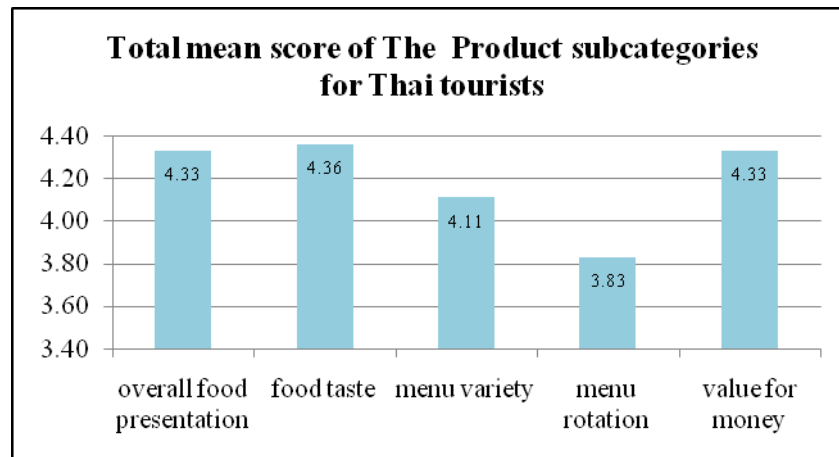


Figure 4.5 Total mean score of The Product subcategories for Thai tourists

Table 4.6 showed that Thai respondents thought the most important “product” attribute was the “taste of food,” which had a mean score of 4.36. The mean score of the “overall food presentation” and the “price and value for money” were equally rated at 4.33. Thai respondents indicated that the “menu rotation of the dish of the day” was the least important with the mean score of 3.83.

In interviews, Thai customers indicated that “product” attributes were important for their meal experiences. Some of the replies are as follows:

The taste of food

– Generally, Thai customers commented that a good food was a food that tasted good:

“I think food here tastes quite good. I tried both German and Thai menu and I think they did a good taste.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

“. . . I think generally here the taste of food should be fine to Thai people because it is full-flavored. Some people might realize that German food might not be tasty but not here!” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

– Besides the tastiness of food, one Thai customer indicated that good food needs to be fresh with good quality ingredients:

“I would say that if you don’t offer good quality of food, it could not bring about the good taste, in my opinion. I had roasted duck here, it was fresh and nicely crispy done . . . I was also impressed by the quality of beef here, because when I order any menu with beef; I am often aware of the poor quality because most of the restaurants I experienced provided the cheap quality of beef, it was sticky and it always spoiled that taste of your dish. But here, it was delicious, soft and juicy beef. I like it” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

The overall presentation of food

– One Thai customer stated that food presentation could influence the appearance of a meal. The appearance, cleanliness, and temperatures of the dish were important:

“It was simple, it looks clean. That was the very important thing to me. It was in a good temperature as I ordered warm food and it was still warm and not dried out when it was served.” (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

– One Thai customer mentioned that a simple appearance of the food was acceptable as long as the taste was not spoiled. The taste was perceived as more important:

“Nothing special, it looks simple but it doesn’t affect its taste. I think it’s ok.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

– Further, another Thai customer suggested that the appearance of food should be compatible with the rest of the restaurant:

“If they do focus on food presentation so much, it would be strange because the decoration and design of restaurant is not outstanding. So if they would have tried to present a lot on food, it could have looked incompatible.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

The price and value for money

– One Thai customer mentioned that the value for money was reasonable:

“Good quality of food, good taste, and reasonable price . . . I don’t think it’s too high or too low. It’s acceptable.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

- For Thais, another important aspect was affordability:

“It’s not too expensive and not really cheap. It’s affordable to me. For German food, it’s reasonable, maybe because of some imported ingredients.”, said one Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

- Another Thai customer indicated that the quality or quantity of the food affected the perception of good value:

“. . . I sometimes had food with more expensive price than here but it was not as good as here . . . the food quality is good and more delicious than comparing to the same price to having food at steakhouse with worse quality.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

According to survey findings, Thai respondents rated “rotation of the dish of the day” as least important in the “product” category. In interviews, however, a Thai customer considered it important as follows:

The menu rotation of the dish of the day

- One Thai customer indicated that a staff recommendation of the menu of the day could affect her selection:

“Supposed to be that I’m the first-time customer and got no menu recommendation by the staffs. I may skip the first-page menu which offers the meal of the day over and wouldn’t ask anything further from the staffs what it’s about. I come here because I really want to try German food and when I got recommendation of the meal of the day, I think I may like it, then I would try it out.” (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

4.2.2.2 Surveys of German tourists

The mean score on average for the overall importance level rated by German respondents was 4.13 or mainly at the level of “very important”. The highest mean score reported by German respondents was for the “product” category,

while the lowest mean score was shown in the category of the “room–atmosphere”.

The survey findings are specifically reported in each category as follows:

Table 4.7 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for German tourists – The Room and Atmosphere

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Room - Atmosphere							
4. The table layout is spacious and well-organized	0	1	22	40	42	4.17	0.79
	(0.00)	(1.00)	(21.00)	(38.10)	(40.00)		
5. The tableware (e.g. cutlery, glassware, additional spices) is functionally and conveniently set to the guests	0	2	26	34	43	4.12	0.85
	(0.00)	(1.90)	(24.80)	(32.40)	(41.00)		
3. The exterior design is displayed appropriately (e.g. outdoor- surrounding area, restaurant’s name sign)	11	5	18	39	32	3.72	1.24
	(10.50)	(4.80)	(17.10)	(37.10)	(30.50)		
1. The restaurant location is conveniently accessible	4	9	26	39	27	3.72	1.06
	(3.80)	(8.60)	(24.80)	(37.10)	(25.70)		
2. The interior design and decoration match with the theme of restaurant (e.g. furniture, color, decoration items, music)	2	15	33	38	17	3.50	0.99
	(1.90)	(14.30)	(31.40)	(36.20)	(16.20)		

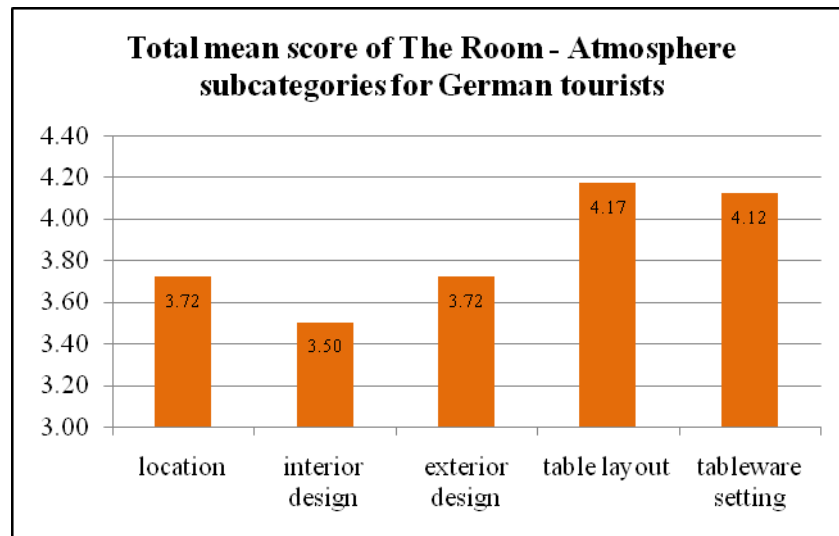


Figure 4.6 Total mean score of The Room – Atmosphere subcategories for German tourists

Table 4.7 shows that the highest mean score in this category was for the “spacious and well-organized table layout” attribute with a mean score of 4.17. The next highest score was the “functional and convenient tableware settings” attribute with a mean score of 4.12. The lowest score was for the “interior design and decorations of restaurant” attribute, which had a mean score of 3.50.

In interviews, German customers indicated that “the room-the atmosphere” attributes were important for their meal experiences. Some of the replies are as follows:

The table layout

– German customers considered the layout of a restaurant as providing a sense of comfort and spaciousness:

“It’s a quite big restaurant and they have a lot of space. They did not put too many tables inside . . . I was there once in the evening, and it was very crowded there but enough space . . . I think this is the most important one to me among interior aspects.”, said one German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– Another German customer felt that the table layout affected the feeling of privacy and enjoyment:

“So I think there’s a lot of space between the tables. That’s quite nice. You are not disturbed by anybody else . . . even when it’s crowded. It’s not a problem because it’s large enough. It’s very spacious inside . . . I’m not disturbed by other guests normally because it’s spacious.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– German customers thought that the style and quality of furniture such as tables and chairs was important:

“. . . they have wooden tables and chairs, which are different and not stable (shaking), especially when you eat soup. I don’t like it . . . It kept simple, no fixed cushion on the chair, no armchairs . . . It’s not uniform if you compare the front side of the chairs and the back row of chairs in restaurant are all different, and this is something could be improved, preferable the same style.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“This is one of the best restaurants I know in Pattaya. They have really nice chairs, very good tables. It’s really perfect. They have cushions on the chair, they have armrest. This is very comfortable.”, said another German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

The tableware settings

– German customers also indicated that table setting was important for their meal experience:

“It’s good. There are spices on every table. Also tissue papers provided. Well . . . it’s not exclusive but fine at the standard level.”, said one German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“. . . they have enough spices there, normal things like tissues and toothpicks, but it’s totally ok . . . Oh yes! What I think it is very good is that they have a little trash can where you can put things like used paper or something like that. I think this is a very good idea.”, said one German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– Moreover, German customers were impressed by the quality and cleanliness of service utensils:

“Very stable and a good quality . . . This is the main thing. I think it’s not luxury knife or fork but they are stable and good quality. They don’t use the very cheap aluminum tools that you find sometimes in Thai restaurant.”, said one German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“First, it is not expected to find the high decoration of glassware or tools on the table in this type of restaurant and in this style . . . but at this restaurant, I found it was good. It was clean. That was very important.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

Survey findings from German respondents rated the “interior design and decorations of restaurant” attribute as the least important one in the “room–atmosphere” category. From the interviews, however, German customers considered it important as follows:

The interior design and decorations of restaurant

– German customers thought that restaurant cleanliness was important:

“. . . . the inside area of this restaurant is clean. It’s very important even if it’s not stylish design. But it’s ok. It’s good with simple style.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . . and it’s very clean which is very important. Well-decorated and clean as well.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“The decoration is not so nice there. It’s very simple. Nothing special, but it’s clean.”, emphasized a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

– Interior design and space management can affect German customer feelings:

“It’s a good combination. Of course, it’s quite difficult to take only one point . . . it’s good with simple style.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“It’s a very good decoration when you compare to other restaurants in Pattaya. They have some plants inside. It looks good and very spacious.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– German customers mentioned that some components of a restaurants interior such as music, color, and temperature can affect the atmosphere:

“For the atmosphere, I like there even no air-condition. I even asked the staffs to turn the fan off because if there is a fan closed by, food will become cold. I prefer the non-air condition area.”, said one German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“I think in the evening they have music background, very soft and not noisy . . . they have bright wall color that makes restaurant itself looks bright inside.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– One German customer emphasized that the furniture in the restaurant should be stable and properly arranged:

“. . . . The bar tables in front are in the same level sometimes overlapping. If you eat soup there, it would be a problem. They have comfortable chairs but too small tables and you have to be very careful when you are eating because it’s not stable.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

Table 4.8 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for German tourists – The Meeting and Atmosphere

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Meeting – Atmosphere							
7. The attitude and behavior of staff are good	0 (0.00)	4 (3.80)	9 (8.60)	33 (31.40)	59 (56.20)	4.40	0.80
8. The outlook of staff is tidy, clean and neat	0 (0.00)	2 (1.90)	10 (9.50)	38 (36.20)	55 (52.40)	4.39	0.74
6. The staff are attentive and respond to the request of guests	0 (0.00)	1 (1.00)	14 (13.30)	37 (35.20)	53 (50.50)	4.35	0.75

Table 4.8 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for German tourists – The Meeting and Atmosphere (cont.)

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Meeting – Atmosphere							
11. The guests have the feeling of comfort and privacy with other guests	1 (1.00)	5 (4.80)	17 (16.20)	43 (41.00)	39 (37.10)	4.09	0.90
10. The staff have sympathetic mind to handling complaints	3 (2.90)	4 (3.80)	20 (19.00)	35 (33.30)	43 (41.00)	4.06	1.01
9. The knowledge of the staff of the menu is good and staff are able to recommend the menu to guests	1 (1.00)	7 (6.70)	19 (18.10)	40 (38.10)	38 (36.20)	4.02	0.95

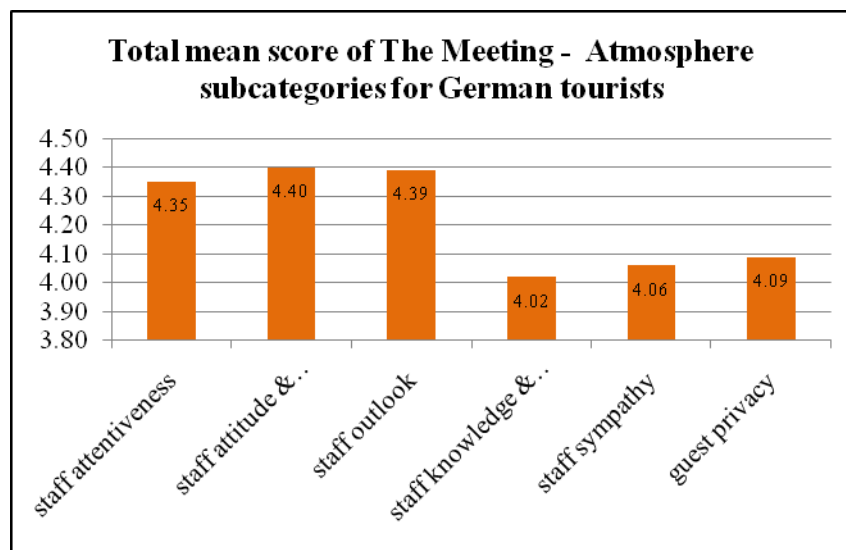


Figure 4.7 Total mean score of The Meeting – Atmosphere subcategories for German tourists

Table 4.8 shows that German respondents considered “staff attitude and behaviors” as the most important factor in this category with a mean score

of 4.40. Nearly the same in importance was “staff outlook” with a mean score of 4.39. German respondents considered “menu knowledge and recommendations of staff” as the least important factor with the mean score of 4.02.

In interviews, German customers mentioned that the attributes of the “meeting- atmosphere” are important. Some of the replies are as follows:

The attitude and behaviors of staff

– Staff friendliness and politeness were perceived as important elements that could affect German customer impressions:

“I have to say this is excellent. When I arrived there, I thought the waitress was not so friendly. But when I was sitting there for some time, they have been very friendly and very polite, very good when serving food.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“They are friendly and polite. That is ok.”, commented one German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“Everything was good, not unfriendly. They are polite . . . Being polite is the most important one because when I enter the restaurant and if I feel that the staffs are not polite or the staffs don’t care for me at all, then I don’t even want to eat at that restaurant anymore.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . They are really friendly, not at the first impressions, but after some time, very friendly and very polite, very good.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

The staff outlook

– German customers thought that a staff uniform with a clean look was important:

“What I don’t like is that, the staffs don’t consistently dress up in uniform . . . I found nothing special impressed . . . but they are looking clean.”, commented a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“I think it’s somehow standard there that they are having uniform shirts, all the same color but I can’t remember if they have any sticker of

restaurant's name or so on it. But it's clean, totally ok.", said another German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

The menu knowledge and recommendations of staff

– German customers did not always think that the ability to recommend or provide information about menu items was important, but they thought that this skill could be helpful when a customer needed help:

“The staff didn't give any recommendations from menu. I took my dish from the menu myself. If I don't know what the food is, it would be important for me to have somebody to explain to me. But in this case of this restaurant, I don't need it.”, commented a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . . I didn't ask for that, so it's fine that they didn't give any recommendations Generally, it's not important for me because I'm able to read the menu and about the food itself So I don't think they can give a lot of recommendations, maybe just in case they had a special dish of the day or something like that.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

Table 4.9 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for German tourists – The Product

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Product							
13. The taste of food	0	0	2	29	74	4.69	0.51
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(1.90)	(27.60)	(70.50)		
16. The food is value for money	0	0	9	31	65	4.53	0.65
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(8.60)	(29.50)	(61.90)		
12. The overall presentation of food (e.g. temperature, aroma, appearance)	0	1	7	39	58	4.47	0.67
	(0.00)	(1.00)	(6.70)	(37.10)	(55.20)		
14. The variety of menu items	0	9	19	36	41	4.04	0.96
	(0.00)	(8.60)	(18.10)	(34.30)	(39.00)		

Table 4.9 Frequency, percentage, mean score, S.D. and the level of importance of restaurant attributes for German tourists – The Product (cont.)

Attributes	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Highly important	\bar{X}	S.D.
The Product							
15. The menu rotation of the dish of the day	0	9	22	47	27	3.88	0.90
	(0.00)	(8.60)	(21.00)	(44.80)	(25.70)		

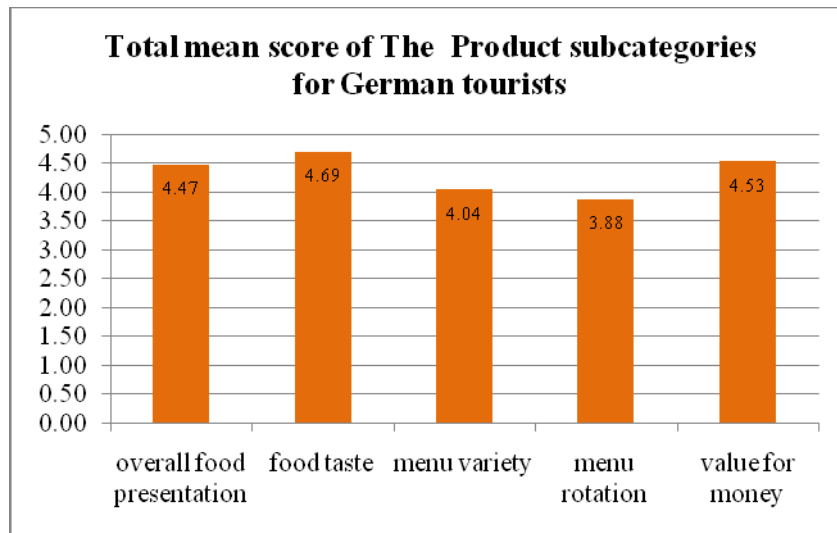


Figure 4.8 Total mean score of The Product subcategories for German tourists

Table 4.9 shows that German respondents rated the “taste of food” as the most important attribute with a mean score of 4.69. The next highest score was 4.53 for the “price and value for money” with a mean score of 4.53. The least important attribute was the “menu rotation of the dish of the day” with a mean score of 3.88.

In interviews, German customers mentioned that the “product” attributes were important for their meal experiences. Some of the replies are as follows:

The taste of food

– One German customer thought that tasty food needs to be fresh with good quality ingredients:

“The taste of food was very good and it was fresh. I think you can’t do a lot of things wrong with the hard bread roll with minced meat, spices and onion. But what is very important with that is the meat is very fresh, because if you just keep the meat one day in the fridge, it will not be tasty again. But here it was tasty.”, said one German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– Further, German customers thought that good tasty food should be comparable to what they experienced or could feel a sense of authenticity:

“They are making food which is good and done by the German recipes . . . They are doing simple home-cooking, good standard food. It’s good like mum is cooking. I don’t need any other additional spices or anything else. It’s very good with fried potatoes with onion and bacon. It was roasted and excellent.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“I experienced that the taste of main dish and the dessert here is comparable to the taste of dishes in Germany. It was very good. About the soup, I generally love eating soup and I have the impression that the soup of this restaurant tastes even better if compare to soup in Germany . . . They had special taste of food here. It was very good. The soup has some Thai influence in my opinion, and it was delicious. I love it!”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

The price and value for money

– German customers thought that the “price and value for money” was reasonable:

“When you are coming from Germany as a tourist for making vacations and you see the menu for this price and it’s low price here, of course, it’s perfect!”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . price is ok, not too expensive, very good in general for breakfast, lunch, and also dinner.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

– One German tourist thought that the price was affordable and cheap:

“For German, it is of course very cheap compare to food in restaurant in Germany.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“Absolutely, when you compare the prices of food here to the prices in Germany, of course, food here was prepared for you, was served to you . . . the price of food at this restaurant for tourists is very cheap, but not comparable to people who work here.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

– German customers indicated that quantity and quality affected the value for money attribute:

“120-150 Thai Baht with a big portion. It’s well-done and soft meat, a lot of meat from à la Carte and as well the variety of vegetables.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“. . . In Germany, I go to the mid to top-class restaurants where the spending is more than 50 Euros per person. Then it is good and this kind of restaurant is comparable to this restaurant in Pattaya. This restaurant is much better than a standard restaurant in Germany when I go out for the quality of food.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . I prefer going to another German restaurant in this region because of food quality with lower price. Even the decoration inside, nice fountain, these things are what that restaurant cannot compete against this one.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

According to survey findings, German respondents rated the menu rotation of the dish of the day attribute as the least important one in the product category. In an interview, however, one German customer considered it important as follows:

The menu rotation of the dish of the day

– One German customer stated that the offered menu of the day or special dish of the day could impress the customer:

“I had menu of the day and it was very good. I didn’t look at other menu lists because once I saw the menu of the day, and I found that it looks

good, then I took it, and I was not disappointed at all.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

4.2.2.3 The most impressive attribute by German and Thai tourists

Table 4.10 Frequency and percentage of the most impressive attribute by nationality

Attributes	Nationality		
	Thai	German	Total
The Room – Atmosphere			
1. The restaurant location is conveniently accessible	1 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.71)
2. The interior design and decoration match with the theme of restaurant (e.g. furniture, color, decoration items, music)	2 (5.56)	1 (0.95)	3 (2.13)
3. The exterior design is displayed appropriately (e.g. outdoor- surrounding area, restaurant’s name sign)	0 (0.00)	4 (3.81)	4 (2.84)
4. The table layout is spacious and well-organized	1 (2.78)	1 (0.95)	2 (1.42)
5. The tableware (e.g. cutlery, glassware, additional spices) is functionally and conveniently set to the guests	0 (0.00)	1 (0.95)	1 (0.71)
The Meeting – Atmosphere			
6. The staff are attentive and respond to the request of guests	5 (13.89)	4 (3.81)	9 (6.38)
7. The attitude and behavior of staff are good	3 (8.33)	5 (4.76)	8 (5.67)
8. The outlook of staff is tidy, clean and neat	0	3	3
	(0.00)	(2.86)	(2.13)

Table 4.10 Frequency and percentage of the most impressive attribute by nationality
(cont.)

Attributes	Nationality		
	Thai	German	Total
The Meeting – Atmosphere			
9. The knowledge of the staff of the menu is good and staff are able to recommend the menu to guests	1 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.71)
10. The staff have sympathetic mind to handling complaints	2 (5.56)	2 (1.90)	4 (2.84)
The Product			
12. The overall presentation of food (e.g. temperature, aroma, appearance)	5 (13.89)	0 (0.00)	5 (3.55)
13. The taste of food	11 (30.56)	45 (42.86)	56 (39.72)
14. The variety of menu items	3 (8.33)	16 (15.24)	19 (13.48)
15. The menu rotation of the dish of the day	0 (0.00)	3 (2.86)	3 (2.13)
16. The food is value for money	2 (5.56)	20 (19.05)	22 (15.60)
Total	36 (100.00)	105 (100.00)	141 (100.00)

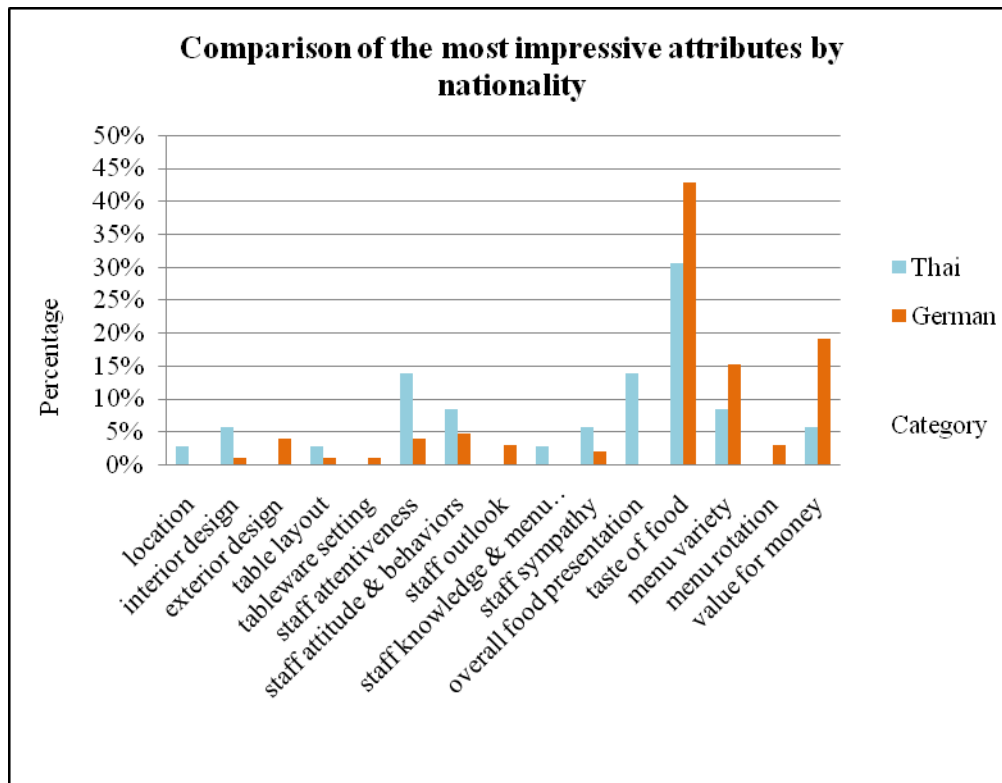


Figure 4.9 Percentage of the most impressive attributes by nationality

Table 4.10 shows that Thai customers were impressed the most with the “taste of food” (30.56%). Attentive staff followed with 13.89%. German customers were also impressed the most with the “taste of food” (42.86%), but followed with “price-value” for money (19.05%). Thai and German customers rated the most impressive attributes differently in some categories as follows:

- *The Room – The Atmosphere*

Thai respondents were most impressed by the “interior design and decorations” at 5.56%. The least impressive attributes were the “location and table layout” with an equal proportion at 2.78%. Thai respondents were not impressed at all by the “exterior design and decorations” and the “tableware settings.”

German respondents, on the other hand, were most impressed with “exterior design and decorations” at 3.81%. The least impressive attributes were “interior design and decorations,” “table layout,” and “tableware settings” with an

equal proportion at 0.95%. German respondents were not impressed at all by “restaurant location.”

- *The Meeting – The Atmosphere*

Thai respondents were most impressed by “staff attentiveness” at 13.89%. The least impressive attribute was “menu knowledge and recommendations of staff” at 2.78%. Thai respondents were not impressed at all by “staff outlook.”

German respondents were most impressed by “staff attitude and behaviors” at 4.76%. The least impressive attribute was “staff sympathy” at 1.90%. German respondents were not impressive at all with “menu knowledge and recommendations of staff.”

- *The Product*

Thai respondents were most impressed by “taste of food” at 30.56%. The least impressive attribute was “price and value for money” at 5.56%. Thai respondents were not impressed at all with “menu rotation of the dish of the day.”

German respondents were most impressed by the “taste of food” at 42.86%. The least impressive attribute was the “menu rotation of the dish of the day” at 2.86%. German respondents were not impressed at all by “overall presentation of food.”

Therefore, Thai and German customers were the most impressed by three attributes – “taste of food,” “price and value for money,” and “staff attentiveness.” Perspectives from interviews of these three attributes as follows:

The Product

– Thai and German customers were impressed the most by the food they ate:

“I would say that food makes me most impressed because food is the main reason that I expected to try out.”, said a Thai customer (personal interview, August 3, 2012).

“I would say that the taste of food was the most important and most impressive to me here. It had a good taste, clean and fresh, as well since I experienced until now.”, said a Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

“It was clear that the main point of going to the restaurant generally for me is food, and from this restaurant everything was matching altogether, but food was still the one.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

“. . . the food was good, this is the big thing for me.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“Food is the most important thing!” said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

The Meeting – The Atmosphere

In the interviews, both Thai and German respondents indicated that they liked staff attentiveness.

– German customers named “showing customers to the restroom” and “greeting customers by the boss of restaurant” as examples of appreciated attentiveness:

“In general, the boss will not come to you, but when you go so often to this restaurant, sometimes he comes to you and asks after you. I appreciated it.”, commented a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“. . . they show me the way to the toilet, very friendly...and what I like too is that there was a boss saying friendly goodbye when I left the restaurant.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

– German customers thought that the speed of service was an important element of staff attentiveness:

“. . . that is ok but sometimes they have a lot of things to do and it takes 5-10 minutes until they come to the area where you are sitting.”, commented a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“I feel that it’s a good pacing. I have the impression that the staffs are looking at the table and they serve the main course after I finished the starter exactly and followed by the dessert after I finished the main course. It was very good, perfect!” commented a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

– Thai customers liked when staff was attentive and showed concern about the taste of their food. They also appreciated it when staff asked if they needed anything else:

“ . . . they do a good job. They even asked me once on the day I had roasted duck if I would like to have Thai style sauce to eat with it, because they concerned about I might not be familiar with the gravy sauce which was served with duck. I think they care about customer’s feelings at a good level . . . they approached me and took a good care if I’m still in need of anything else.”, said a Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

4.2.2.4 The revisit reason by German and Thai tourist

Table 4.11 Frequency and percentage of the revisit reason attributes by nationality

Attributes	Nationality		
	Thai	German	Total
The Room – Atmosphere			
1. The restaurant location is conveniently accessible	2 (5.56)	5 (4.76)	7 (4.96)
2. The interior design and decoration match with the theme of restaurant (e.g. furniture, color, decoration items, music)	1 (2.78)	1 (0.95)	2 (1.42)
3. The exterior design is displayed appropriately (e.g. outdoor- surrounding area, restaurant’s name sign)	0 (0.00)	3 (2.86)	3 (2.13)
4. The table layout is spacious and well-organized	0 (0.00)	2 (1.90)	2 (1.42)
5. The tableware (e.g. cutlery, glassware, additional spices) is functionally and conveniently set to the guests	2 (5.56)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.42)

Table 4.11 Frequency and percentage of the revisit reason attributes by nationality
(cont.)

Attributes	Nationality		
	Thai	German	Total
The Meeting – Atmosphere			
6. The staff are attentive and respond to the request of guests	1 (2.78)	2 (1.90)	3 (2.13)
7. The attitude and behavior of staff are good	5 (13.89)	5 (4.76)	10 (7.09)
8. The outlook of staff is tidy, clean and neat	3 (8.33)	2 (1.90)	5 (3.55)
9. The knowledge of the staff of the menu is good and staff are able to recommend the menu to guests	1 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.71)
The Product			
12. The overall presentation of food (e.g. temperature, aroma, appearance)	1 (2.78)	5 (4.76)	6 (4.26)
13. The taste of food	9 (25.00)	33 (31.43)	42 (29.79)
14. The variety of menu items	1 (2.78)	9 (8.57)	10 (7.09)
15. The menu rotation of the dish of the day	2 (5.56)	5 (4.76)	7 (4.96)
16. The food is value for money	8 (22.22)	33 (31.43)	41 (29.08)
Total	36 (100.00)	105 (100.00)	141 (100.00)

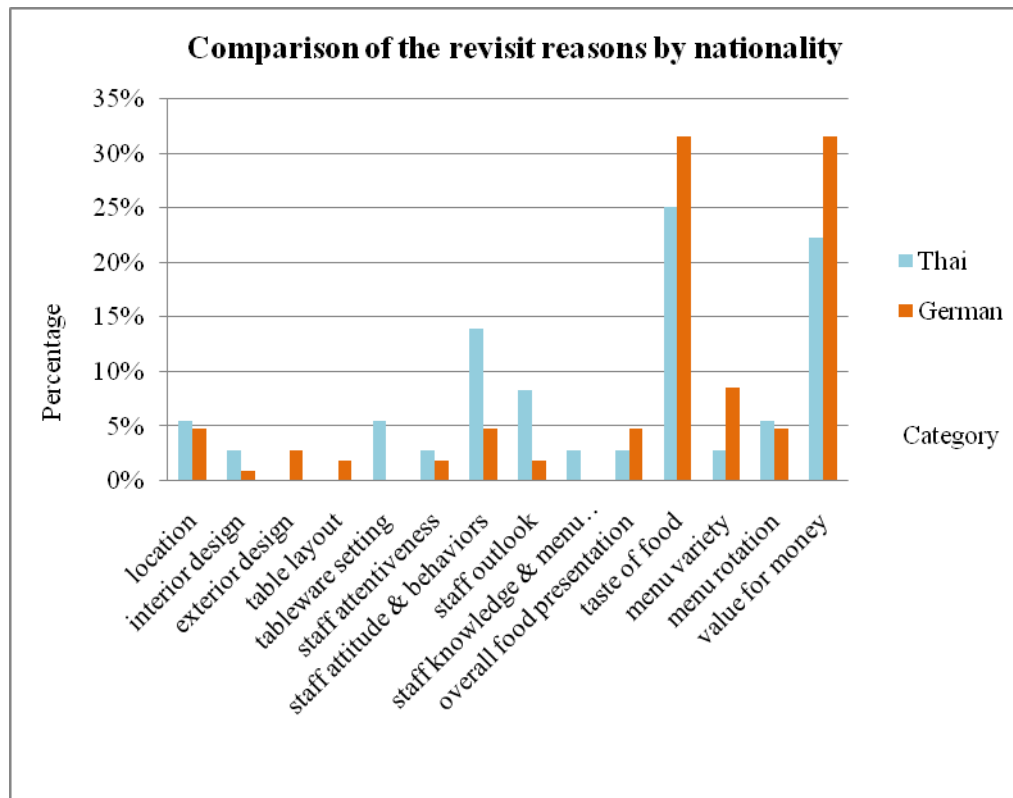


Figure 4.10 Percentage of the revisit reasons by nationality

Table 4.11 generally shows that Thai customers would most likely revisit a restaurant because of the taste of the food (25%). Next they would come again if they got good value for money (22.22%). German customers gave equal importance to the taste of food and the value for money with a rating of 31.43%. Those factors substantially exceeded variety of menu items as a reason to revisit a restaurant (8.57%). For each category, Thai and German customers rated the revisit reasons differently as follows:

- *The Room – The Atmosphere*

Thai respondents were most likely to return because of location and tableware setting at 5.56%. German respondents were most likely to return because of location at 4.76%.

- *The Meeting – The Atmosphere*

Thai respondents were most likely to return because of “staff attitude and behaviors” at 13.89%. German respondents were also most likely to return because of “staff attitude and behaviors” at 4.76%.

- *The Product*

Thai respondents were most likely to return because of the “taste of food” at 25%. German respondents were most likely to return because of the “taste of food” and because of “the price and value for money” with an equal rate of 31.43%.

In descending order, the four highest scores for reasons to revisit a restaurant as rated by Thai and German customers were “taste of food,” “price and value for money,” “staff attitude and behaviors,” and “variety of menu items.”

Perspectives from interviews of these four attributes as follows:

“I would return to this restaurant because of food. Food is the very good one for me. I can choose from a lot of variety what I want to eat.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“I still insist that I would come here because of German food because it’s not over-priced.”, said a Thai customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

“Food will be the reason to come back.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

“Food is always the main reason.”, said a German customer (personal interview, April 29, 2012).

4.2.2.5 The overall impression by German and Thai tourists

Table 4.12 Frequency and percentage of the overall impression of dining experience by nationality

The overall impression of dining experience	Nationality		
	Thai	German	Total
Very good	13 (36.1)	38 (36.2)	51 (36.17)
good	23 (63.9)	66 (62.9)	89 (63.12)
poor	0 (0.00)	1 (1.0)	1 (0.71)
Total	36 (100.00)	105 (100.00)	141 (100.00)

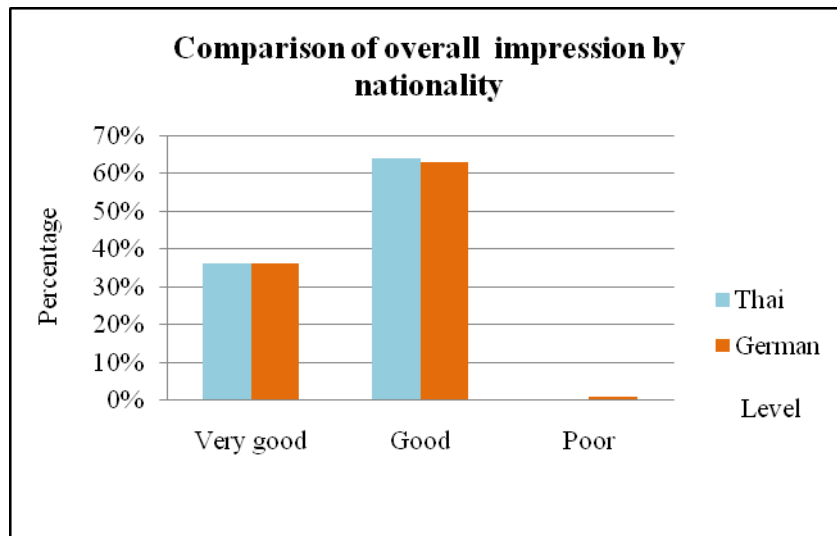


Figure 4.11 Percentage of overall impression by nationality

Table 4.12 shows that 63.12%, more than half the respondents, had an “overall impression” of “good experience.” 36.17% of respondents rated “overall impression” at the level of “very good experience.” Only 0.71% of them felt that they had a “poor” dining experience.

The majority of Thai respondents had an “overall impression” of “good.” The impressions of Germans (63.9%) were essentially the same as Thais (62.9%). Half the Germans and Thais rated their “overall impression” as “very good.”

Additional comments of surveyed and interviewed Thai and German respondents for the categories are as follows:

- *The Room – The Atmosphere*

From the surveys and interviews, both Thai and German customers considered easily available parking as important. Some of customers also commented on the restaurant’s location with parking as follows:

- German customers found that a restaurant location that provided parking could influence customer confidence:

“The location of the restaurant is good, reachable, you can reach it by public bus and there is a 50 or 100 metre further away free parking where you can leave your car anytime. I think it’s convenient that the buses can even stop exactly in front of the restaurant.”, said a German customer (personal interview, May 9, 2012).

“. . . about parking, I usually come by motorbike. I’m not sure if it’s convenient for the parking. But for me if I would take a car, it won’t be convenient . . . I think it would be quite difficult to find the parking for the car there.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

- One Thai customer felt that parking should be well-lighted with large spaces for vehicles:

“. . . I think it’s quite dark there, quite narrow to support the vehicles in case it’s crowded . . . I would say that if I come with the big car, it wouldn’t be convenient to park here or not enough space.”, said Thai a customer (personal interview, June 10, 2012).

In surveys, both Thais and Germans indicated that they wanted nice background music while dining.

- *The Meeting – The Atmosphere*

In surveys, some German customers indicated that they preferred “the approach behaviors of the boss or the chef,” such as greeting customers or asking about the taste of food. They appreciated such attentive and polite behaviors.

Previous interview quotations from Germans in the above category of the “meeting – atmosphere, staff attentiveness,” showed the same point of view.

In the surveys and interviews, German respondents showed a preference for staff who could speak German.

“. . . they are able to speak German, maybe a very important aspect for many Germans.”, said a German customer (personal interview, July 8, 2012).

Further, some Thai respondents emphasized on the surveys that friendly staff with good service was important for creating a comfortable atmosphere while dining. As noted above, the majority of Thai respondents considered “attitudes and behaviors of staff” as the most important aspect in the “meeting-atmosphere” category.

4.3 Conclusion

In summary, an analysis of the results of the surveys and interviews of customers at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand, showed that a majority of Thai and German customers had similar views on what was important. In descending order, “product–taste,” “price and value of food,” and “meeting–staff’s attitude and behaviors” were the three most important aspects in their meal experiences. There were some differences, however, in the level of importance in some subcategories of the four main categories. The overall impression was generally rated as a “good” dining experience. Also, the analysis showed that the main aspects which customers perceived as most important were the same aspects that affected their likelihood to revisit a restaurant. Further details will be discussed and compared to the previous literature review in **Chapter 5**.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The following discussion regarding meal experience will analyze findings from the qualitative and quantitative studies. Then the findings will be compared to the theory and empirical data in the literature review. Finally, new concepts discovered in aspects of meal experience will be discussed. The study results will be divided into two major parts. The first part will cover the overall customer meal experience. The second part will compare the differences between Thai and German customers for what they thought was important based on Five Aspects Meal Model. The framework of this study centers around four of the five main aspects of dining experience, hence, these four categories will be discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Customer perspectives on meal experiences – quantitative and qualitative results

5.2.1 Comparison of Thai and German customer perspectives based on Five Aspects Meal Model

The four main categories that affected experiences were based on FAMM. Those four categories are “room,” “meeting,” “product,” and “atmosphere.”

5.2.1.1 The Room

The “room” aspect includes location, environment, and facilities that affect restaurant customers and staff. This study specifically analyzed three sub-categories of the room – “location”, “interior and exterior design and decorations”, and “table layout and utensils setting”.

The survey results for the sub-categories of the room indicated that Thai customers thought that spaciousness of table layout was the most important

element. In interviews, Thais thought that the layout spaciousness and furniture design, such as tables and chairs, could affect a sense of convenience and comfort. In surveys, Thais often noted the importance of tableware setting. Thais rarely mentioned the exterior design of the restaurant.

For Thais, the placement of table settings and utensils could provide a sense of spaciousness and cleanliness. Although rarely stated in surveys, Thai interviews indicated that the exterior design was important. Thais wanted clear information on the name sign. They also wanted a sign that attracted customers. Overall, Thai customers commented that interior design impressed them the most. The restaurant location and tableware settings were primary reasons for returning to a restaurant, however.

For German customers, survey results showed that spaciousness of table layout was the most important element for the sub-categories of the room. In interviews, Germans indicated that a spacious restaurant layout could affect a sense of convenience and comfort. Also, spaciousness could affect customer privacy and enjoyment while dining. German customers also thought that the style and furniture quality were important. Germans frequently mentioned the importance of tableware settings. Germans rarely mentioned the interior design of the restaurant as being important. German customers thought that the placement of table settings and utensils could provide a sense of spaciousness and cleanliness. Although rarely stated in surveys, German interviews showed that the restaurant interior was important to them. Germans wanted cleanliness with harmonious and properly spaced interior decorations. Germans included color, music, temperature, and furniture arrangement as elements of interior design.

For their overall meal experience, German customers rated restaurant exterior design as the most important attribute of the “room.” German customers thought that restaurant location was the most likely reason for revisiting a restaurant, however.

In surveys and personal interviews, Thai and German customers both noted the importance of sufficient parking. Thai customers wanted well-lighted and spacious parking. German customers appreciated adequate and convenient parking.

In summary, surveys and interviews showed that Thai and German customers similarly thought that restaurant layout, table space management, parking, lighting, and music, were important elements of the “room” aspect. This finding supports a study by Bitner (1992) regarding well-designed restaurant settings. That study found that these room attributes would affect staff work flow and interaction with customers. If done well, those elements enhance the customer experience.

The inside furniture arrangement significantly affected the customer experience. Since layout design and arrangement affect comfort and privacy, restaurants would benefit from careful attention to these elements. In a study by Carlbäck (2008), “room” meant room usage and space management that affected the service and dining environment. Moreover, the attributes of the room that appealed to Thai and German customers were consistent with the work of Ryu and Han (2011). That study concluded that physical environment, such as facility aesthetics, lighting, and layout, was the key element that directly affected duration of stay and customer satisfaction. In summary, customer responses to the restaurant layout may facilitate a fulfilling and enjoyable dining experience.

Although Thai and German customers had few differences in their view of interior design, exterior design, and location, these factors are still important to influence customer perceptions. As supported by the study of Hinrichs, Idzeliene, & Slodnik (2009), the exterior aspects, such restaurant sign, outdoor table layout, and parking lot lighting, affect customer perceptions of convenience. Also, the exterior design creates some expectations interior design. Customers expect a harmonious match of interior and exterior design. The interior design affects duration of stay which, in turn, affects the amount spent at the restaurant. For a favorable overall impression, the “room” needed to be balanced and consistent.

5.2.1.2 The Meeting

The “meeting” relates to staff service, staff manners, and direct and indirect customer-staff and customer-customer interactions. In this study, “meeting” includes the sub-categories of “staff attentiveness”, “staff attitudes and behaviors”, “staff outlook”, “staff sympathy”, and “customer comfort and privacy.”

In surveys for “meeting” sub-categories, Thai customers thought “staff attitude and behavior” was the most important element. In interviews, Thai customers indicated that staff politeness and friendliness could influence their feelings and their treatment expectations. Thais also commented that staff greeting and seating behaviors could create a positive meal experience. Their feeling of comfort and privacy also affected their dining enjoyment.

In surveys, Thais hardly mentioned “menu knowledge and recommendations by staff.” Although seldom mentioned in surveys, Thai interviews indicate that “menu knowledge and recommendations by staff” could influence the taste of their meal, especially for first time customers. For their overall meal experience, Thai customers commented that “staff attentiveness” was the most important attribute in the meeting aspect, although “staff attitude and behaviors” was rated as the primary reason for returning to a restaurant.

German customers’ views on “meeting” sub-categories were quite similar to the views of Thai customers. For “meeting” sub-categories, surveyed German customers, like Thai customers, noted that “staff attitude and behaviors” was the most important element in this aspect. In interviews, German customers indicated that staff politeness and friendliness could affect their dining impression. Germans also noted the importance of “staff outlook” as demonstrated by a uniform with a clean appearance. Germans hardly mentioned “knowledge and recommendations by staff.” In interviews, however, Germans noted that “menu knowledge and recommendations by staff” could be helpful when customers were uncertain about what to order. Thus, a restaurant can benefit from training staff to help customers with their menu selection. For overall meal experience, German customers commented that “staff attitudes and behaviors” was the most impressive attribute in the meeting aspect. Moreover, “staff attitudes and behaviors” was also rated as the primary reason to return to a restaurant.

As noted above, the majority of Thai and German customers had similar views on the “staff attitudes and behaviors” attribute. For example, although surveys did not show that “menu knowledge and recommendations by staff” were important, the German and Thai interviews indicated that this sub-category was helpful. As suggested in the studies of Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006) and Lundberg and Mossberg (2008) that, staff training and skill development to

effectively interact with customers benefited restaurants, since these interactions were a key for motivating staff and satisfying customers. Skillful staff interactions with customers improved the overall image of a restaurant.

Thai and German perceptions did differ in a few respects, however. Only Thai customers focused on privacy as important. German customers, on the other hand, were unconcerned about customer interactions or disturbances. This finding implies that German customers are not as integrated with staff and other customers as much as Thais. This observation supports the study of Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006), which mentioned that cultural and social norms determine whether customer-staff and customer-customer interactions are good or bad.

The behavior of the restaurant manager was also viewed differently. German customers believed that a greeting by the manager or owner meant that they were welcome and important. Unlike German customers, Thai customers did not mention that behavior. Accordingly, a critical factor for improving the meal experience is to understanding the desires of customers from different cultures.

In summary, an analysis of interview and survey data determined that “attitude and behavior of staff” was the most influential attribute. That analysis tends to support the study of Edwards and Gustafsson (2008) which found that staff interaction with customers was a key to customer pleasure and satisfaction. It is worth noting that, despite varying levels of importance, the study tends to support a finding that the attributes of the meeting aspect are important for restaurant management.

5.2.1.3 The Product

The next aspect is the “product”, which includes food and food characteristics. The product in this study includes the sub-categories of “food appearance”, “food taste”, “menu variety”, “menu rotation”, and “price/value” for money.

The survey results for Thai customers for sub-categories of the product show that “taste of food” was the most important element in this aspect. In the interviews, Thai customers commented that food ingredients should be good and fresh,

since those qualities will create good taste. “Food appearance” and “price/value for money” were next in importance.

Thai customers stated that food appearance is the way food looked when served to customers. Thais wanted a clean appearance with a proper temperature. In interviews, Thais thought that decoration was not essential. Instead, they were concerned more about the taste of food.

With respect to price, Thai customers said they wanted a reasonable and affordable price commiserate with the quality and quantity of the dishes they ordered. Although rarely stated in surveys, interviewed Thais thought “menu rotation” of the dish of the day was beneficial. Thai customers noted that descriptions of the dish of the day were written in German that Thais could not understand. Recommendations by staff could therefore affect their choice of the dish of the day. Menu translation to Thai and English would help Thais choose their meal.

Regarding the overall meal experience, Thai customers commented that “food taste” was the most impressive attribute in the product aspect. Moreover, “food taste” was also rated as the primary reason for returning to a restaurant.

Surveys of German customers for the sub-categories of “product” show that “taste of food” was the most important element. In interviews, German customers wanted fresh food with a taste comparable to authentic German food. Germans thought that “price/value for money” was next in importance. German customers stated that the price of food was reasonable. The cost was affordable or even cheap for German tourists. For the quality and quantity of the food, the price for value was good in the restaurants where they were dining. Although rarely stated in surveys, interviewed German customers thought that “menu rotation” of the dish of the day could impress them if they were a first time customer. Regarding their overall impression, German customers commented that “food taste” was the most impressive attribute in the product aspect. “Food taste” and “price/value for money” were rated as primary reasons for returning to a restaurant.

In summary, the majority of Thai and German customers both thought that “food taste” and “price/value for money” were the most important attributes in the “product” aspect. This finding comports with the findings of Hansen,

Jensen, and Gustafsson (2005), which said that food taste was the most frequently mentioned attribute of the “product” aspect that affected the customer meal experience. Also, Thai and German customers agreed that fresh ingredients affected the taste of food. That finding is in accord with the study by Jaafar, Lumbers, and Eves (2008), which stated that freshness of food was important, since it affected customer satisfaction. In addition, a reasonable and affordable “price/value for money” was reported as an important attribute that could influence a decision to return to a restaurant. Both Thai and German customers considered the price and quality relationship as the essential aspect in eating out. It is believed that the majority of customers thought quality was more important than price. Customers would come more frequently if the price was appropriate to the value and quality of food.

Thai and German customers, however, did have different perspectives on “food appearance” and “overall food presentation.” The study results show that Thai customers focused on food presentation, but German customers rarely mentioned food presentation as a factor that impressed them. Thai customers suggested that they wanted clean food served at a proper temperature. The visual effect of food presentation was not really important as long as food tasted good. Thai customers did comment, however, that, once the food was decorated, the presentation should be consistent with the theme of the restaurant. This finding supports the study of Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006), which suggested that food presentation should be created holistically to offer a good dining experience. In other words, restaurant designers should prepare the product so that it is consistent with other restaurant elements. As confirmed by the study of Kleynhans (2003), which stated that a balanced combination of food, aroma, and taste of food could provide a pleasant sensory experience that makes food more delicious. A memorable dining experience might lead a customer to recommend the restaurant to family and friends. Although some Thai study participants thought full decoration of food was unnecessary, studies by Warde and Martens (2000) and Hansen, Jensen, and Gustafsson (2005) found that, in some situations, food appearance could make a good first impression that might lead customers to choose a particular restaurant.

Thai customers suggested that menus should be written in Thai or English so they could understand the menu offerings such as the dish of the day.

Staff could also help first time customers by making recommendations. German customers commented that the special dish of the day might attract and impress customers if they were at the restaurant for the first time. The study of Meiselman (2000) similarly found that menu presentation or staff recommendations could positively affect the entire meal experience. Staff recommendations and answers to questions about the menu might cause a customer to enjoy the meal. A study by Hinrichs, Idzeliene, and Slodnik (2009) noted that staff recommendations could give customers a sense of safety and comfort in making a selection, particularly if a restaurant offers foreign cuisine. Customers can then benefit from a quicker menu selection that matches their needs.

5.2.1.4 The Atmosphere

The final aspect is the “atmosphere”. When they are experienced together, “room”, “meeting”, and “product”, create an overall feeling or “atmosphere”. The “atmosphere” in this study includes sub-categories of tangible and intangible attributes from the environment, product, and social interactions. These attributes were generated from the “room” and “meeting” categories in surveys. Interview participants were asked separately about these attributes.

This study found that Thai and German participants perceived the restaurant environment similarly. Cleanliness was an important component of the atmosphere. Study participants wanted the dining area, tableware and utensils, staff, and restroom to be clean. Thus, good hygiene improved the restaurant ambiance. Thai and German customers both thought that exterior design, interior design, and decorations should match the theme of restaurant. Also, both Thais and Germans enjoyed music while they ate. Thus, Thai and German customers believed that the atmosphere affected dining enjoyment.

This finding comports with the study by Edwards and Gustafsson (2008) that found that the “room” environment, which included such elements as music, lighting, color, and space, creates a restaurant atmosphere that affects the dining experience. Moreover, the study findings support a finding by Kotler (1973) that a well-design atmosphere will arouse a sense of relaxation and comfort that encourages customers to stay in a restaurant and spend money.

Moreover, both Thai and German customers indicated that staff friendliness and politeness with good service created a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere. Interviews support this survey finding. In surveys, some German customers liked an attentive and polite boss or chef who approached to greet them or ask about the taste of the food. Some surveyed and interviewed German participants wanted more German speaking staff. Hence, this study found that both Thais and Germans thought that customer and staff interactions were important. This finding coincides with a study by Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006), which found that atmosphere, particularly verbal and social interaction between staff and guests, could promote customer comfort and support.

In summary, this study found that environment, product, and social interaction affected the atmosphere for the dining experience. As was found in the study by Hansen, Jensen, and Gustafsson (2005), two main categories created an atmosphere, namely, product and social interaction. As mentioned by Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006), both tangible factors, such as color, furniture, and tablewares, and intangible factors, such as staff performance, social interaction, and staff communication, or a combination of these two factors, created the atmosphere. Consequently, pleasant sensory responses stimulated by physical environment, people, and product, or in short, the “atmosphere,” enhanced the dining experience.

5.2.2 Customer overall meal experience

This study has identified aspects related to “room”, “meeting”, “product” and “atmosphere” that affect the overall impression of a dining experience. The study by Kleynhans (2003), similarly noted that both tangible and intangible aspects influence the dining experience. This study, however, found that aspects related to “room” were not a major concern of customers. Attributes of “product” and “meeting,” on the other hand, were the most impressive factors for both Thai and German customers. This finding also differs from the study by Meiselman (2003), which found that food, environment, and other elements in a meal experience can affect customer evaluations of a dining experience.

The importance a particular sub-category had for affecting the overall impression was determined by counting the times that a sub-category was mentioned in the surveys and interviews. The importance of overall impression and revisit intention will be discussed as follows:

Within the food attributes, “food taste” was rated as the most impressive by Thai customers. German customers indicated that “food taste” and “price/value for money” impressed them the most. “Food taste” and “price/value for money” were the main influences for returning to a restaurant for both Germans and Thais.

In surveys, “menu rotation of the dish of the day” was rarely mentioned, while “overall food presentation” did not impress customers at all. In contrast, however, interview participants were impressed negatively if presentation was simple. They felt that the restaurants could have made a better presentation for the price and quality of their food. The survey findings that customers did not value “overall food presentation” might be supported by the study of Jensen and Hansen (2007). That study implied that overall presentation of food, for example, did not satisfy customers when food was not properly combined with other elements. That study concluded that all elements, including food, needed to be presented holistically to provide value to customers. Accordingly, restaurants that effectively combine all elements might impress customers with the “overall food presentation.”

Regarding the “meeting” aspect, “staff attentiveness” was a significant factor for Thai customers, whereas German customers emphasized “staff attitude and behaviors” as the most impressive consideration. “Staff knowledge and menu recommendation,” “staff sympathy”, and “staff outlook” were not important elements for creating an impression. At the same time, however, both Thais and Germans rated “staff attitude and behaviors” as a factor that would influence a decision to return or not return to a particular restaurant. If staff attitude and behaviors were poor, customers believed that staff attitudes and behaviors would be poor in a subsequent visit to a restaurant.

Customer impressions were sometimes formed by the attributes of the restaurant itself. For “room” and “atmosphere” sub-categories, the findings of this study suggest that the interior design influenced overall impressions differently. Interior design and decorations impressed Thai customers positively but did not

impress German customers. The reverse was true for the exterior design. Thai customers were not impressed at all by the exterior design, but the exterior design did impress Germans.

Thai and German customers both thought that “table layout” and “tableware settings” did not affect their overall impression of a restaurant. Also, restaurant “location” was not a factor since it was seldom mentioned. Nevertheless, as shown in this study, both Thai and German customers mentioned that they would likely revisit a restaurant if it was in a convenient location. The finding of the present study also conflicts with study results regarding “room” and “atmosphere”, which was explained by the work of Ha and Jang (2010). That study found that customers judged the quality of the dining experience based on the physical ambience.

5.3 Conclusion

In summary, research regarding FAMM supports a conclusion that all dining aspects are important. Accordingly, this study recommends that restaurant owners and managers holistically plan and create an enjoyable dining experience for customers. In this study, German and Thai customers perceived “taste of food” and “value for money” as the most important considerations. Other factors were not indicated strongly, but interview participants stated that other factors could enhance customer enjoyment.

The majority of survey participants evaluated value for money based on the quality of the food. Thus, tourists chose a restaurant based largely on quality and pricing. In interviews, German tourists in particular stated that value for money influenced their decisions to dine at and return to a particular restaurant, since they generally pay much higher prices for dining out in Germany. They typically need to spend double or triple the Thailand cost for the same food quality. Food, labor, and facility costs drive up the price of dining in Germany.

Surveyed Germans and Thais had different expectations. German customers expected to receive good quality food at an appropriate price. When the price and quality relationship met expectations, Germans disregarded other factors. Ignoring other factors allowed Germans to accept lower standards than Thais for other

attributes. Thai customers, on the other hand, had higher expectations for design, decorations, ambience, and service. Thais thought that the dining experience in a German restaurant would differ from a Thai restaurant. Accordingly, Thais wanted to experience authentic German attributes. Thais therefore had higher standards than Germans on aspects other than price and food quality.

Additionally, study participants thought that the various attributes of “room,” “meeting,” and “atmosphere” aspects were factors that substantially affected customer moods, which, in turn, affected the impression of their dining experience. Similar to the findings of other studies, this study found that food was a restaurant’s core product. At the same time, “atmosphere” was an essential element that shaped customer feelings and impressions of a restaurant. The physical elements of the restaurant and social interactions with staff and customers created an atmosphere that enhanced or detracted from the dining experience.

In conclusion, food, physical elements, social interactions, and, in short, everything affecting the senses, create the dining experience. Accordingly, all study elements deserve attention when starting or operating a restaurant.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this study presents the conclusions of the entire study. The primary objective of this study was to explore the perspectives of Thai and German customers on their experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to investigate the customer dining experience. The analysis of data and interpretation of the results were done in accordance with the objectives set for this study.

The first part of this chapter analyzes whether study results were consistent with the research objective. Next, this chapter presents the main implications and recommendations based on study results and analysis. Finally, study limitations will be discussed to identify further research possibilities.

6.2 Research conclusion

The aim of this study was to understand the restaurant customer dining experience in à la Carte German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand. The study used survey questions and interviews to gather data. The survey questions were developed based on aspects identified in the Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM). For the study, only four of the five aspects were important for an analysis of the dining experience. In interviews, German restaurant customers were asked to comment on the four aspects.

From an analysis of the data, it is clear that good food quality with an appropriate price primarily affects the dining experience of most Thai and German tourists. This finding does not mean that other aspects lacked importance, however.

This study reached conclusions that differ from theoretical considerations of the FAMM identified in a prior study, (Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, &

Mossberg, 2006). This study concludes that a holistic approach, including ambiance, food quality, social interactions, and atmosphere, determines the dining experience.

The present study identifies the most important aspects of the FAMM and the likelihood to revisit a restaurant. An analysis of study data determined that food, price, and staff service are more important than aesthetic design or ambiance. Nonetheless, customers regarded a holistic view of a restaurant as an effective way to enhance their enjoyment and impressions of a restaurant.

6.3 Implications and recommendations

One contribution of this study is the generation of a research design that considers differences in the views of customers from various cultural backgrounds. This design will help explore issues that derive from different cultures.

Since quality food and an appropriate price are the key factors that affect customer perspectives, the following strategies might increase the number of customers in German restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand.

1. Food taste

Since the freshness of food affects food quality, restaurant owners should determine the least popular menu items. Then owners can store only small amounts of rarely purchased ingredients. Of course, owners must control food quality every day.

Cultural orientation significantly influences preferences for food and taste. Accordingly, knowledge of cultural preferences can help create new dishes. This study found that German customers wanted authentic German food, while Thai customers did not state a preference for authenticity. Hence, restaurant owners should try to create an authentic taste for German customers, even if traditional ingredients are unavailable. The menus produced from locally seasonal ingredients are recommended. Training and supervising a local chef by a professional German chef is one way to preserve authenticity. Restaurant operators should, however, create or adjust some recipes to suit a taste preferred by Thai customers.

2. Price-quality relationship

Restaurant owners should focus on the price and quality relationship. Food quality is definitely the most important element, but most customers also want food with a price that is competitive with comparable restaurants. Accordingly, restaurant providers should set competitive prices for different target groups.

This research discovered that people from different generations and cultures behave differently. Most survey participants were ages 45 to 65, the so-called “baby-boom” generation. Restaurants might want to create a special marketing plan for the unique tastes and interests of this group. Since these customers generally have stable incomes, they dine out frequently. Also, they are willing to spend more money for a pleasant restaurant experience. Moreover, people in the baby-boom age group provide a feasible market opportunity for German restaurants in Pattaya.

Younger customers between 20 and 30 generally have less money to spend on food. An affordable price for the menu of the day might attract this age group. Some customers are concerned about the quantity of food. A special set course or a buffet might satisfy this group.

In summary, price must strongly relate to food quality in order to increase the number of new and repeat customers. Restaurant managers can conduct research on the type of food for which customers will pay a higher price. They can also compare their prices with the prices of competitors. By using these strategies, managers can determine the best menu prices. Restaurant owners should also consider affordability for different types of customers. Customers might spend differently if they are first-time or frequent customers or if they are short or long stay tourists. Customer budgets for food each day is therefore an issue to be explored.

3. Food appearance

Innovations enhance a dining experience and emphasize food quality relative to competitors. Managers can also look for food innovations that benefit the restaurant economically. Restaurant operators should keep up on changing trends in food presentation. They should also put effort into designing innovative food displays. The components of food appearance such as colors and textures can add interest. Main and side dishes should be presented in appealing proportions relative to each other.

Food containers such as plates or bowls should be clean with colors, shapes, and styles that match each type of food. Restaurant operators should serve each type of food at its proper temperature. Moreover, a kitchen that is visible to diners might increase a sense of food cleanliness.

4. Menu variety and rotation

Study customers gave menu variety relatively high rankings for importance. Restaurant managers should look for new products and offer a variety of food and drinks. In addition, managers can use a popularity index to develop new menus. A popularity index will not only identify the food preferred and purchased by customers, but it can also help managers develop new menu offerings. Restaurant operators can create menus of the day to attract their primary customers. A special weekend lunch or brunch menu might be an alternative to a daily special dinner menu. The point of sale (POS) is also beneficial to customer requirements. Therefore, restaurant should apply this software to clarify how menu items should be served to the right target.

Menu variety can influence the perception of food freshness. Therefore, owners should cautiously plan the number of menu offerings so that quality and freshness are preserved in storage.

The present study found that the menu description of the special dish of the day should be readily understood by Thai customers. Adding photographs of menu items can facilitate that understanding. Customers who have never experienced German cuisine may want a clear picture of each menu item to help them make a selection. Some customers may be disappointed if food differs from the photographs, however. Thus, restaurant operators should use pictures of their own menu items to avoid customer disappointment. (See Figure 4.12-4.13).

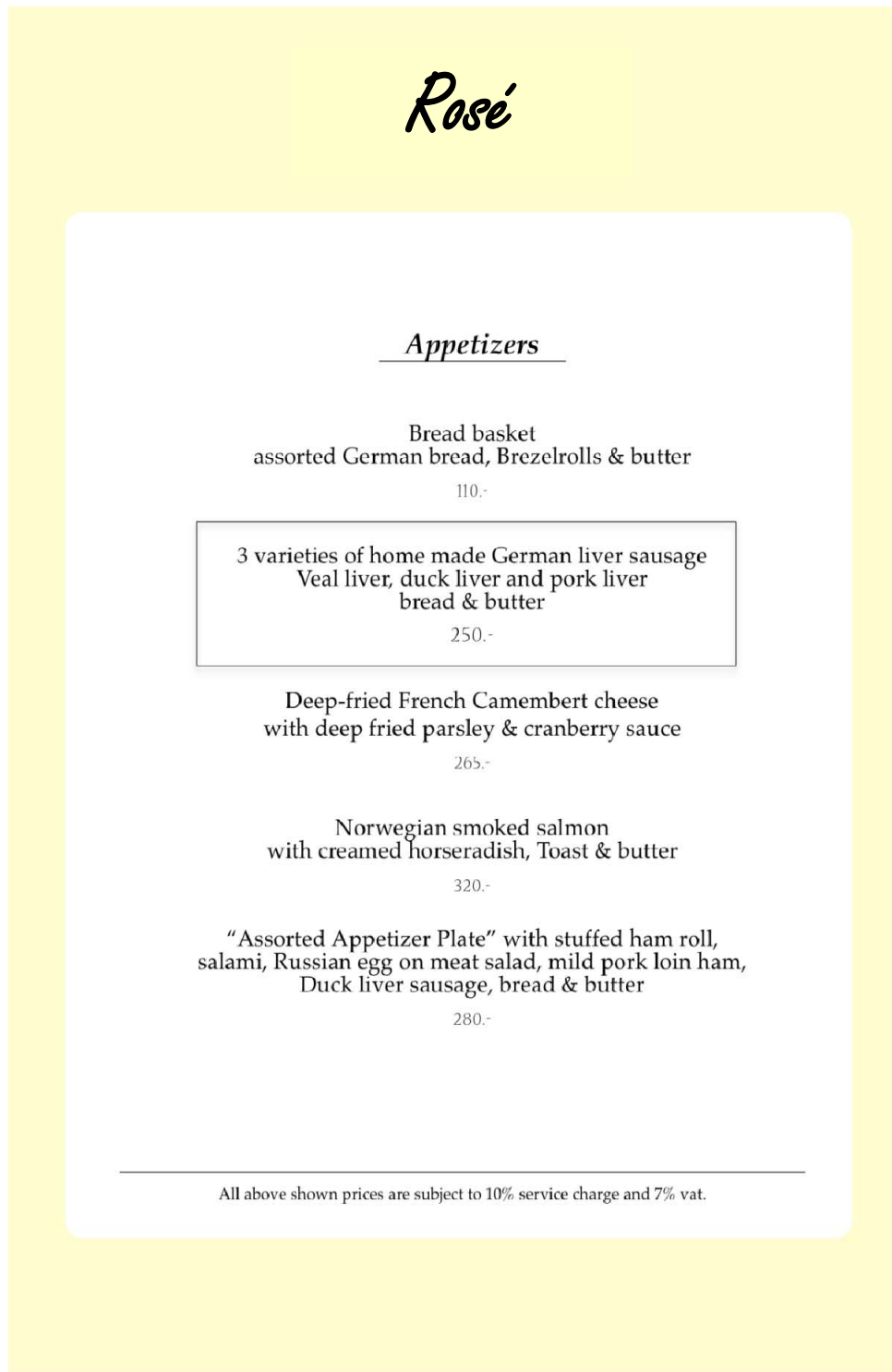


Figure 4.12 Sample of clear written descriptions on menu items

German Specialties

Pork Escalope "Vienna style" with potato salad 240. –



Bavarian pork Knuckle with vegetable pickle and pretzel 495. –



Swebian stuffed noodle with potato salad 245. –



Figure 4.13 Sample of displayed photos on menu items

5. Training service-oriented employees

Staff performance was second in importance for creating an overall impression of a restaurant. A favorable overall impression produces satisfied customers who are likely to return and give good recommendations. Since staff performance ranks high in importance for the overall restaurant image, restaurant operators should develop high quality service. For example, an orientation program can train local staff to use manners and attitudes that are familiar to foreign customers. Customer satisfaction increases if customers are comfortable in the service environment.

The present study found that German and Thai customers had different service expectations. Thais were more concerned about privacy, while German customers were more impressed with staff attentiveness. To improve staff attentiveness, restaurant managers should assign staff to watch different dining areas so that they can quickly identify customers who want help. Staff should offer prompt service and approach customers from time to time during their dining. Staff should be able to take action when customers want more privacy.

The present study reported that German customers appreciate being periodically approached by staff or management while they are dining. Restaurant managers can coach their staff by modeling interactions with German customers. This informal training will help staff interact with customers. With regard to staff appearance, German customers paid relatively high attention to cleanliness. Therefore, the staff and chef of a restaurant should be well groomed. Uniform colors can affect perceptions of cleanliness as well. Staff should consistently dress in uniform to present a professional look.

6. Restaurant design and table/space management

The present study reported that both German and Thai customers think that table layout, followed by tableware settings, are the most important design and decoration attributes. Restaurant operators should effectively arrange the space in the restaurant, particularly in the high season. Table layout should take into account the number of people in a party. The number of tables for couples should be more than for groups since most customers come in small parties. Space between tables is needed to

give customers comfort and privacy. Table assignment should be planned according to the party size and arrival rate during slow and busy times. These strategies will be an advantage to both the restaurant and customers. Customers appreciate a short wait time prior to being seated and served. Increased table turnover will generate higher revenue. The best table assignment policy maximizes flexibility in seating large and small parties. Effective assignment also contributes to high seat occupancy. The best table mix results in effective use of capacity that increases revenue per available seat hour (RevPASH) along with an increase in customer volume. (See Figure 4.14 – 4.17).

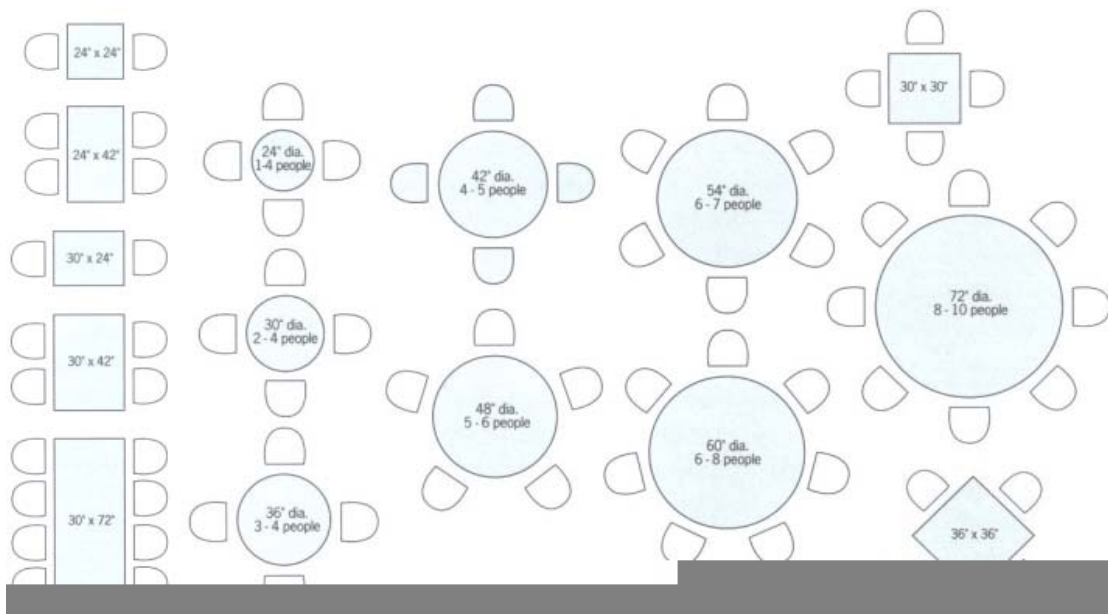


Figure 4.14 Sample of table layout – size in relation to number of parties

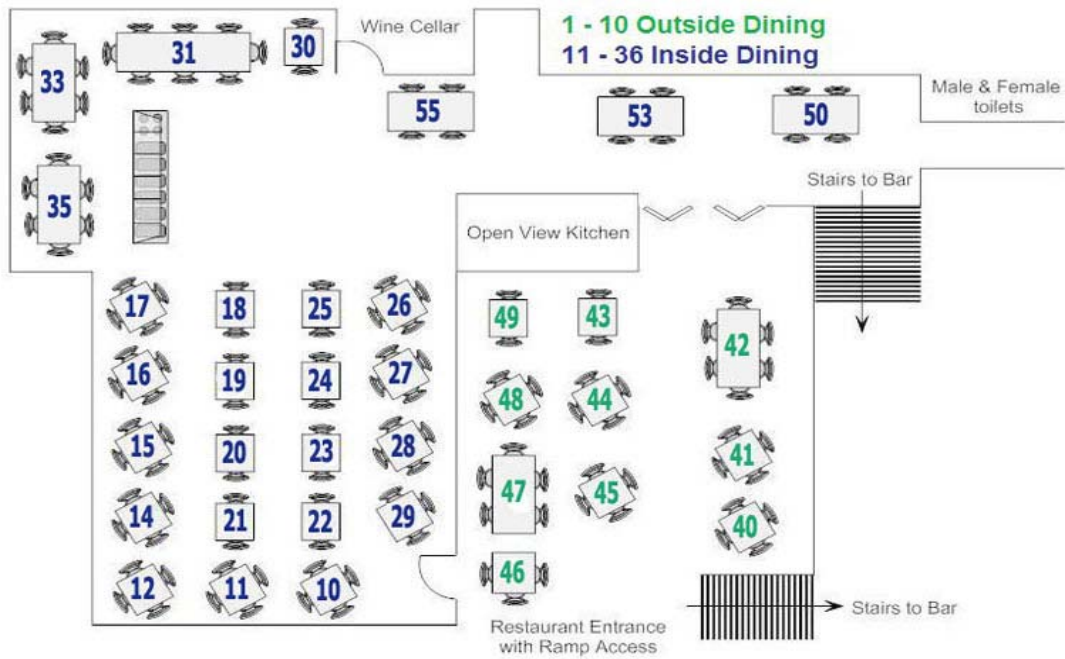


Figure 4.15 Sample of restaurant layout – floor plan



Figure 4.16 Sample of table layout – table size and setting



Figure 4.17 Sample of table layout – table size and setting (recommended)

Restaurant operators should carefully develop an atmosphere based on the results of new research regarding desirable restaurant features. Although less important than quality and price, restaurant decoration and atmosphere can greatly influence customer satisfaction. If the target market indicates that a major restaurant feature is out of date, a more modern ambience should be developed. Advertising targeting the general public should feature a modern layout of furnishings, colors, and logos. In contrast, advertising aimed at senior customers should emphasize the relaxing and convenient features of a restaurant.

Current customers scrutinize price compared to value. Hence, the quality and value of the restaurant experience should live up to customer expectations. Paying attention to value will increase customer enjoyment. Creating an atmosphere of a typical German restaurant will appeal more to the target market. In addition, improving cues such as background music and dining area and restroom cleanliness can increase restaurant patronage.

Management of a group of German restaurants is another alternative. Different restaurant styles and designs can target different markets. German

restaurants in the same area might not compete against each other if they are targeting different markets. This strategy can guide customers to restaurants where the design and atmosphere best suits their interests. Competition between German restaurants might decrease as a result.

Moreover, customers who have ways to give their views of their dining experience can help management make desirable changes quickly. Quick changes will reduce the likelihood of unfavorable recommendations. Customer feedback will improve the overall quality of a restaurant for new customers.



Figure 4.18 Sample of restaurant's exterior design without outdoor dining area



Figure 4.19 Sample of restaurant's exterior design with outdoor dining area (recommended)



Figure 4.20 Sample of restaurant's interior design – bar counter area



Figure 4.21 Sample of restaurant's interior design – bar counter area (recommended)



Figure 4.22 Sample of table layout – interior design



Figure 4.23 Sample of table layout – interior design (recommended)

6.4 Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows:

1. Research conducted in Pattaya – Thailand

The study only focused on restaurants in Pattaya, Thailand, which means that study findings might not apply to other parts of Thailand or other countries. The study chose Pattaya as the site of this study because statistics show that Pattaya has a high concentration of German and Thai tourists, as well as many popular German restaurants. This study focused only on German à la Carte restaurants that were highly recommended to tourists. For these reasons, study findings might not apply to other types of restaurants in locations outside Pattaya. Findings from this study, therefore, might not apply to previous studies related to The FAMM model, since most of those studies were conducted in the context of restaurants in Western countries.

2. The number of samples

For this study, the researcher initially expected to collect data from 400 surveys and 20 interviews. The researcher could only get 141 survey responses and 5

interviews, however. Also, the research was conducted in the low-season period in Pattaya and surveys and interviews covered a limited time period. Moreover, data was gathered from only ten restaurants. A larger number of restaurants might provide responses from customers with more diverse backgrounds. Because of these limitations, this study cannot exclude the possibility of bias in the samples. These limitations mean that forecasting future trends is not possible from the study data. Future studies could try to collect time series data with a higher number of samples so that researchers could predict further dining trends and tourist behaviors.

3. Variables in questioning

This study used the concepts of a meal experience model to investigate restaurant customer behavior. The questions in the surveys and interviews were developed in the framework of The FAMM model and relevant studies. Another aspect of FAMM, management control system, was excluded in the present study. Future studies may need to include this aspect to determine how customers are influenced by the attributes of a management control system.

Questions regarding preferences of cultural and age groups are insufficient. During the process of analysis and discussion, the researcher discovered that people from different generations and cultures might behave differently due to their upbringing, values, and training.

6.5 Future research

The author of this study is a Thai native speaker. Accordingly, the author's cultural background might have affected the findings and conclusions of this study. Future studies by a native German speaker might produce different results. A German native speaker might get more details about each aspect and might better interpret data from German customers.

In addition, much of the data for this study came from German rather than Thai customers. The limited numbers of Thai customers was interviewed. Hence, future study may need to prioritize whether German or Thai customers are the main target of the restaurant in that research.

The present study produced certain findings relative to a dining experience in a tourist destination. A similar study of other ethnic restaurants in smaller towns or larger cities in Thailand might permit greater generalizations about FAMM aspects. A study might also reveal more about the relative importance of FAMM aspects. Finally, surveys and interviews of customers from different cultures should focus on whether a holistic view helps restaurant operators make money and satisfy customers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“MEAL EXPERIENCES AT GERMAN RESTAURANTS IN PATTAYA – THAILAND”

PLEASE NOTE

- You are not required to identify yourself and your response can not lead to your identification.
- Apart from taking up some of your time, answering these interview questions presents no risk whatsoever.
- Feel free to seek any clarification and ask any question regarding this project from the researcher.
- All responses will be treated in strict confidentiality and will be used for academic research purposes only.
- Your individual opinion is highly valued, therefore, if possible, do not confer with others during the completion of the interview questions.

Please note that there is no right or wrong answers for all those questions.

Please respond to the questions where your answer lies by ticking (X) in the boxes provided for statements, and

PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS

Researcher: Darin Dararuja

**Research done for a Master of Management degree in Tourism and
Hospitality Management – Mahidol University International College**

SECTION 1

1. Are you tourist?

Yes

No

2. What is your nationality?

Thai

German

3. What gender are you?

Male

Female

4. To which one of the following age groups do you belong?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65 >

SECTION 2

1. What is your overall comment in dining at German restaurant?

2. How do you feel about the facilities and decoration of German restaurant? Please explain.

3. How do you feel about staffs in serving your meal at German restaurant? Please explain.

4. How do you feel about the interactions with other customers during your dining at German restaurant? Please explain.

5. How do you feel about food and beverage at German restaurant? Please explain.

6. Which part of the restaurant atmosphere do you feel most important in your dining at German restaurant? Please explain.

7. What aspect impressed you the most during dining at German restaurant? Please explain.

8. Do you have any aspect which disappointed you the most during dining at German restaurant?

If **YES**, please explain.

9. Is there anything you would like to add? Any other important aspects for your dining not mentioned yet?

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview of “meal experiences at German restaurants in Pattaya – Thailand”.

Your participation and time are greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY OF MEAL EXPERIENCES
AT GERMAN RESTAURANTS IN PATTAYA – THAILAND
PLEASE NOTE

- You are not required to identify yourself and your response cannot lead to your identification.
- Apart from taking up some of your time, answering this questionnaire presents no risk whatsoever.
- Feel free to seek any clarification and ask any question regarding this project from the researcher.
- All responses will be treated in strict confidentiality and will be used for academic research purposes only.
- Your individual opinion is highly valued, therefore, if possible, do not confer with others during the completion of the questionnaire.

Thank you very much for your participation and assistance.
Your participation and time are greatly appreciated.

Please note that there is no right or wrong answers for all those questions.

Please respond to the questions by indicating on a scale where your meal experience lies by circle **ONE** number provided for each statements, and

PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS

Researcher: Darin Dararuja

**Research done for a Master of Management degree in Tourism and
Hospitality Management – Mahidol University International College**

SECTION 1

Please review the following definition of a meal experience used in this study:

A meal experience begins when you enter to the restaurant and ends when you leave the restaurant. Typical activities that occur during this period include being greeted by your server; the ordering and delivery of drinks, delivery and clearing of appetizers/desert and coffee; and the request, delivery and return of the check.

Now please continue to answer the questions below.

1. Are you a tourist?

Yes	1
No	2

2. What is your nationality?

Thailand	1
Germany	2

3. What gender are you?

Male	1
Female	2

4. To which one of the following age groups do you belong?

18-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	3
45-54	4
55-64	5
65 >	6

SECTION 2

5. Please rate the level of importance of your dining experience at this German restaurant in the following; on the response scale of 1 to 5 with

5 being **HIGH IMPORTANCE** and

1 being **LOW IMPORTANCE**

ASPECTS	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE				
	LOW				HIGH
1. The restaurant location is conveniently accessible	1	2	3	4	5
2. The interior design and decoration match with the theme of restaurant (e.g. furniture, color, decoration items, music)	1	2	3	4	5
3. The exterior design is displayed appropriately (e.g. outdoor- surrounding area, restaurant's name sign)	1	2	3	4	5
4. The table layout is spacious and well-organized	1	2	3	4	5
5. The tableware (e.g. cutlery, glassware, additional spices) is functionally and conveniently set to the guests	1	2	3	4	5
6. The staff are attentive and respond to the request of guests	1	2	3	4	5
7. The attitude and behavior of staff are good	1	2	3	4	5
8. The outlook of staff is tidy, clean and neat	1	2	3	4	5
9. The knowledge of the staff of the menu is good and staff are able to recommend the menu to guests	1	2	3	4	5
10. The staff have sympathetic mind to handling complaints	1	2	3	4	5
11. The guests have the feeling of comfort and privacy with other guests	1	2	3	4	5
12. The overall presentation of food (e.g. temperature, aroma, appearance)	1	2	3	4	5
13. The taste of food	1	2	3	4	5
14. The variety of menu items	1	2	3	4	5
15. The menu rotation of the dish of the day	1	2	3	4	5
16. The food is value for money	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 3

6. Which of the above numbers (1-16 aspects) **impressed** you the most in your dining experience at this German restaurant?

Please specify **ONE** number _____

7. Which of the above numbers (1-16 aspects) is the main factor for you to return to visit this restaurant?

Please specify **ONE** number _____

8. What is your overall impression of dining experience at a German restaurant?

Very good	1
Good	2
Poor	3
Very Poor	4

9. What is your suggestion of overall dining experience at a German restaurant?

END OF SURVEY

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH ETHICS PROTOCOL



COA.No.2012/161.0105

Documentary Proof of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences)

Title of Project: Exploring Thai and German Customers' Meal Experiences at German Restaurants in Pattaya – Thailand
(Thesis of Master Degree)

Principal Investigator: Miss Darin Dararuja

Name of Institution: International College, Mahidol University

Approval Includes:

- 1) MU-SSIRB Submission form version received date 11 April 2012
- 2) Participant Information sheet version date 11 April 2012
- 3) Informed Consent form version date 11 April 2012
- 4) Interview Questions version received date 11 April 2012
- 5) Survey Questionnaire version received date 11 April 2012

The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences) is in full compliance with International Guidelines of Human Research Protection such as Declaration of Helsinki, The Belmont Report, CIOMS Guidelines and the International Conference on Harmonization in Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP)

Date of Approval: 1 May 2012
Date of Expiration: 30 April 2013

Signature of Chairman:.....

(Signature)
(Emeritus Professor Santhai Serm Sri)

Signature of Head of the Institute:.....

(Signature)
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wariya Chinwornq)
Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

Office of The Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Mahidol University, Phuttamonthon 4 Rd., Salaya, Phuttamonthon District, Nakhon Pathom 73170. Tel:(662) 441 9080 Fax:(662) 441 9081

APPENDIX D
RESTAURANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Region of location	Name of selected restaurants	Contact information
North Pattaya – Pattaya Naklua	Anton	668/30-33 M.5, Pattaya-Naklua Rd, Naklua, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150
	Bei Gerhard	Soi 31 Pattaya-Naklua Rd, Naklua, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20260
	Hirschgarten	Soi 33 Pattaya-Naklua Rd, Naklua, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20260
	Klein Heidelberg	500/33-35 Moo 5, Soi 18 Wongamat, Naklua, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20260
	Zum Bazi	179/139 Soi 33 Moo 5, Pattaya-Naklua Rd, Naklua, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20260
Central Pattaya	Brauhaus	Pattaya 2 nd Rd., Central Pattaya, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150
	Curry Up	Soi 13 Chalerm Phrakiat Rd., Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150

Region of location	Name of selected restaurants	Contact information
Central Pattaya (cont.)	Schnitzel Hans	Drinking Street, 68/5 Pattaya 2 nd Rd., Central Pattaya, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150
South Pattaya	Das Berliner Bistro	482/9-10 Soi 13 Pattaya Beach Condo Pattaya Beach Rd., South Pattaya, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150
	Deustches Haus	Moo 9 Pattaya Beach Road, Banglamung, Chonburi 20150

BIOGRAPHY

NAME	Darin Dararuja
DATE OF BIRTH	3 August 1983
PLACE OF BIRTH	Songkhla, Thailand
INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED	Chulalongkorn University, 2001-2005 Bachelor of Arts (Chinese) Mahidol University, 2010-2013 Master of Management (Tourism and Hospitality Management)
HOME ADDRESS	259/132-133 PKCP Condominium Moo 9 Pattaya 3rd Road, Nongprue, Banglamung, Chonburi, 20150 Thailand Tel. +66-86622-0092 E-mail: dararuja@gmail.com
EMPLOYMENT ADDRESS	The Continuing Education Chulalongkorn University, 2005-2008 (Instructor) Anantara Golden Triangle Resort & Spa Hotel, 2008-2009 (Guest Service Agent)
PUBLICATION / PRESENTATION	World Conference on Hospitality, Tourism and Event Research & International Convention & Expo Summit 2013, Bangkok, Thailand