INFLUENCE OF BUFFET RESTAURANT CHARACTERISTICS ON CUSTOMER ATTRACTION, AND RETENTION IN THE EMERGENCE OF HEALTHY TREND WITHIN BANGKOK AND PROVINCIAL AREA

BY

MR. CHOKCHAI KLA-AIM

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
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OF MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2019
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INDEPENDENT STUDY

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ENTITLED

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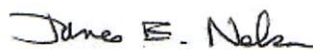the degree of Master of Science Program in Marketing (International Program)

on .... 18 MAY 2020

Chairman   _____

(Professor Malcolm C. Smith, Ph.D.)

Member and Advisor   _____

(Associate Professor James E. Nelson, Ph.D.)

Dean   _____

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Independent Study Title	INFLUENCE OF BUFFET RESTAURANT CHARACTERISTICS ON CUSTOMER ATTRACTION, AND RETENTION IN THE EMERGENCE OF HEALTHY TREND WITHIN BANGKOK AND PROVINCIAL AREA
Author	Mr. Chokchai Kla-aim
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Independent Study Advisor	Associate Professor James E. Nelson, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

This contemporary research is related to one of major food trends, buffet restaurants, food business which has become more popular these days, especially among working age people. The first objective is to determine the effect of the healthy trend on customer buying decisions, attraction and retention toward buffet restaurants. The second objective is to determine the influence of buffet restaurants characteristics on customer attraction and retention toward buffet restaurants. The third objective is to summarize consumer behavior with respect to healthy trends and buffet restaurant behavior. Qualitative and quantitative research will be conducted to obtain the primary and the secondary data. The qualitative research will be conducted by in-depth interviews to obtain respondents' beliefs, values, understanding, feelings, experiences and perspectives of a topic will be analyzed to gain insight of the buffet restaurant customers. The generated insight data will be used in questionnaire design for quantitative research. Once the data from quantitative research are obtained by questionnaires, the SPSS program will be used in order to gain statistical information by correlation, regression and cluster analysis. the obtained data will be used in order to provide the summary and recommendations.

This research aims to study the relations between customer attraction, retention and buying decisions towards buffet restaurants and their concern about their health upon the emergence of the healthy trends in order to provide the information which helps the buffet restaurant industry optimize their business model under the emergence of the healthy trend.

Keywords: Buffet restaurant, healthy trend, working age

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Mr. Chokchai Kla-aim

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Buffet restaurant industry and healthy trends seem to be the parallel line. Whiles as buffet restaurants offer the maximum financial value e.g. value to money, the power of unlimited dishes under the controlled budget. Healthy trend tells people to be more concerned about their health value by limiting their calories intake and be intense on their dining selection both qualitatively and quantitatively. The impact of the healthy trend on the buffet restaurants business is inevitable. Therefore, this research aims to study the potential connections between these two industries.

According to *Businessbiz* (2019), buffet restaurant business in Thailand is reported as the biggest in Southeast Asia with more than 50 billions THB worth and continues growing with Compounded Annual Rate of Growth (CAGR) of 5%. On the other hand, the healthy trend seems to become popular among the working ages in Thailand. Regarding *SmartSME* (2019), the healthy food market in Thailand is now 170 billions THB worth and a CAGR of 9%.

From economical data, the CAGR of healthy food is 3 times larger than buffet restaurants and almost 1.4 times more in CAGR. This means that the strategy on how the buffet restaurant deals with the healthy trend must be essential for the industry in order to gain benefits or to defend their businesses from the emergence of the healthy trend.

This research aims to determine the level of impact of the healthy trend towards customer buying decision, attraction and retention to buffet restaurants along with the traditional parameters such as product and service quality to make the comparison of the significance between non-health-related factors and health-related factors.

1.1 The emergence of healthy trend

Buffet restaurant is a popular dining place in all occasions for a majority of Thai people. This popularity attracts both big and small scale enterprises to seize

and get into this big opportunity. The ideas that make buffet restaurants become popular among many Thai people; no matter ages, occupations or lifestyle they have, are composed of 3 things:

First of all, buffet restaurants normally offer the budget-controlling power to their customers once they step inside the restaurant. Customers do not need to calculate or to be worried about the total bill since the customers are able to choose the package showing prices of the menu they prefer and enjoy their meals.

Second, some experts said the emergence of buffet restaurants started back in the 'Tom Yum Kung' crisis (1997). Due to the great economic depression, Thai people were seeking 'Value to money' meals and buffet restaurants could exactly fulfil their needs. Even though Thailand's economy is likely to be stronger these days, the 'value to money and the power to control the budget' mindset has been implanted into them since that notorious economic crisis.

The last one is the modern perspective. According to the Capitalism ideology which lies deeply into Thai society, some idioms are commonly popular among the working ages such as 'work hard, play harder', or 'this is a must (have, try, eat, etc.)'. These popular idioms can indicate that this society is worshipping a rewarding system. Most people in this type of society like to overspend on what they have a passion about in order to compensate for their hard work. In this case, having meals at buffet restaurants consequently become a type of considerable reward for hard workers or even cheat meals for people who have strict diets.

With these three major factors, buffet restaurants can serve this society's needs perfectly and this trend has been growing. However, there is one inevitable factor that potentially affects the all-you-can-eat business which is called the emergence of the healthy trend. According to the research from 1500 urban-lifestyle Thais (Brandinside.asia, 2018), 79% of the participants of this research would like to have better nutrition balance on their meals and 49% of them intend to change their eating behavior to reach their health goals. This can either be a great opportunity or a devastating threat to buffet restaurant business.

1.2   Purpose of the study

This research aims to determine the level of impact of the healthy trend towards customer buying decision, attraction, and retention to buffet restaurants along with the traditional parameters such as product and service quality to make the comparison of the significance between non-health-related factors and health-related factors.

1.3   Definitions used in this research

1.3.1 Buffet restaurant: restaurants which offer the maximum financial value such as value to money, the power of unlimited dishes under the controlled budget.

1.3.2 Healthy trend: the trend that people need to be more concerned about their health value by limiting their calories intake and be intense on their dining selection both qualitatively and quantitatively.

1.4   Research Objectives

This research aims to study the relations between customer attraction, retention and buying decisions towards buffet restaurants and their concern about their health upon the emergence of the healthy trends in order to provide the information which helps the buffet restaurant industry optimize their business model under the emergence of the healthy trend.

The major objectives of this study are as follow:

1) To determine the effect of the healthy trend on customer buying decisions, attraction and retention toward buffet restaurants;

2) To determine the influence of buffet restaurants characteristics on customer buying decisions attraction and retention towards buffet restaurants; and

3) To summarize consumer behavior with respect to healthy trends and buffet restaurant behavior.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer value proposition

Customer value proposition (CVP) is a perceived value when customers purchase any products or services. There are five variables in CVP which consist of 1) functional value, the ability to solve customers' problems about the products or services; 2) emotional value, a feeling-involved value which is created by personal reasons; 3) economic value, a value that originally comes from the comparison between received benefits and spending cost; 4) symbolic value, the value that provides customers a perceived status of products or services such as branding; and 5) end value, the matching between previously-mentioned values and products or services. (Mulder, 2012).

Buffet restaurants obviously offer highly economic value to customers since the customers can eat as much as they want under fixed price. This makes the customers perceive that they gain more benefits when they compare the unlimited amount of food with the limited amount of their meal budget. This may be because of the fact that they assume their buffet food consumption costs much higher than the money they pay for the buffet meal. Nonetheless, other CVP variables are also needed to be emphasized for the purpose of optimizing the end value which is also delivered to the customers after experiencing any products or services. Under limited budget, however, enterprises who manage buffet restaurant business need to trade off some of the CVP values in order to enhance the most concerned value for their specific target customers.

2.2 The Importance of Customer Satisfaction in Relation to Customer Loyalty and Retention

To build a sustainable competitive advantage, a brand needs to create customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is driven by consistency and satisfaction of customers. (Khadka & Maharjan 2017) In order to create customer satisfaction, the

company needs to provide enough value to reach customer's expectations and satisfaction as well. Once a customer is loyal to a brand, it makes a huge benefit to the brand for now and further circumstances. It is because customers seemingly tend to continue buying the products or services from the same company and lessen their intention to switch to the other brands. This also reduces the customer acquisition cost.

Buffet restaurants need to provide needed values to the customers in order to gain the increasing number of loyal customers. Business sustainability will be generated with respect to budget optimization. Customers' needs have to be researched for the purpose of providing resourceful data which will be the resourceful tools in the management's strategies.

2.3 Factors that drive buffet restaurants' popularity Value-to-money customers' mindset progress

From the experiences in the recessive economic crisis in 1997, the value to money mindset has been deeply planted into Thai people's perspective since that time. Even though the country's economy is now recovered into a steady condition, the budget optimization is still able to dominate money spending behaviors of Thai people (Foodstory, 2019). They are always seeking for the best price-to-benefit ratio.

With this mindset, buffet restaurants model consequently become popular because of the fact that they offer customers unlimited dishes under the fixed budget. When customers would like to buy a meal, they usually calculate the money they need to spend on whether or not the price is reasonable. For a buffet meal, some customers might think that they have a variety of food to consume while having a la carte or a specific food costs more highly.

According to the customer value proposition, the economic value that buffet restaurants provide to the customer is superior. Most Thai people usually enjoy this benefit and this causes Thailand as the biggest buffet restaurants industry in Southeast Asia.

2.4 The value trade off

From the buffet restaurant owners' interviews, this market has already become a big, red ocean. While the buffet restaurants offer the budget-controlling power to their customers, the buffet restaurants have been controlled by budget as well. This means that buffet restaurants cannot be the superior all-rounders, but they need to sell and promote their unique strong points such as high quality meats, or convenience in transportation access (Amarin Academy, 2017).

This research which identifies what their target markets top-most concerns will be a game changer for those who manage buffet restaurants businesses especially smaller chained buffet restaurants. This will make the mentioned entrepreneurs be able to serve what customers demand under a limited budget.

2.5 Buying Decision Process

The Five stage models of the buying decision process (Kotler & Keller, 2016) is composed of Problem recognition, information search, Evaluation of alternatives, Purchase decision and Post-purchase behavior. These models are widely accepted as the general buying process. The first stage, in this study, occurs once the customers are triggered by internal stimuli (e.g. want to eat a lot, but have limited budget) or external stimuli (e.g. the advertisement on online social media platforms, or the influencers' promotion). Then, customers will search and compare the choices they have collected. Once the customers can finalize the alternative selection, the customers will make a decision to buy a product or service. It is also the restaurants' task to keep customers satisfied by offering some loyalty programmes or promotional campaigns in order to enhance customers buying experience, and keep the good relationship between customers and the business as well (Appendix 1).

2.6 Thailand health and wellness report

In regard to the emergence of the healthy trend, the awareness of health issue causes behavioral changes among Thai society. With this concern, food and

beverages are the products which are the most affected. The top five factors in meal selection include high nutritional value, great taste, easy availability, no/low certain ingredients, convenient consumption, with 69%, 40%, 35%, 27% and 12% accordingly. The respondents chose high nutritional value and great taste as the top 1st and 2nd factors in the ranking scale (Thansettakij, 2018). The research indicates that Thai people not only select their meals by just the taste or the convenience. The healthy concern has greatly influenced their buying decision on what they eat.

This is considered a significant challenge to the buffet restaurants business to deal with the changes of buying selection and eating behaviors among Thai people. The emergence of the healthy trend could become their greatest obstacle or could be a newly-found factor that they can gain benefits and use them as an essential tool in their business strategy.

2.7 Randomized Controlled Trial Examining the Ripple Effect of a Nationally Available Weight Management Program on Untreated Spouses

According to Gorin et al. (2018), 2 groups of married couples are tested to verify the Ripple Effect of the healthy lifestyle by informing the couples with weight loss and health related information. For the first group, both of the couples were equally informed with the data. Meanwhile, only one of the spouses was informed in the second group. After 6 months, there are no significant differences. This means that once one of the couple adopts the healthy lifestyle, their couple is influenced to change their lifestyle too. The research significantly proves that healthy lifestyle can be spread within couples, or those who are in a closed relationship.

Buffet restaurants business should prioritize this health-oriented lifestyle as the buffet restaurants generally bombard their customers with abundant choices of food. The healthy people seem to be more selective and lessen the value of an economic value. The buffet restaurants, however, which serve healthy food would be able to encourage both customers who usually emphasize on the quantity and quality of food. Therefore, buffet restaurants have to be prepared for the situation that there is a chance that healthy food concerns will be a part of Thai people's mind when making

a decision to purchase food. Business models also need to be adapted in order to serve the current trends of customer needs.

2.8 Top 12 food trends

According to the swiftness of communication in the 21st century, people tend to adopt the information in real time and have a high tendency to adapt their lifestyle which they believe that would offer them a better life. Nowadays, people's expectation towards food is much more complex. The functional value which is only to relieve hunger and appetite seems to be not enough. There are 12 food trends that are expected to be popular among the Thai society (Department of Industrial Promotion, 2018). Meanwhile, 4 of the trends serve the urban lifestyle with social and time value. It is interesting that 8 of them are related to a healthy lifestyle.

For health-related trends, the first one is called ' Artificial public enemy.' People tend to prefer less-processed food such as whole wheat bread, meals that are made from fresh meats, and MSG-free food. This causes many food manufacturers to rework on their food recipe to extract non-natural ingredients from their products since the artificial food additives are now the top enemy among customers.

The second trend is 'Eco is the new reality'. People are likely to not only be selective on what they eat, but also the ecosystem. People prefer the eco-friendly planting, growing and farming environment in order to ensure that their food is good for their health.

The third trend is 'Alternatives everywhere.' Customers are always seeking for alternative sources of food. For example, people tend to be impressed with the non-meat protein such as soy protein, plant protein, or even the synthetic meat which is made from plants. This would be a challenge for the buffet restaurant business to find alternative sources of the ingredients to attract customers.

The fourth trend is 'Fat sheds stigma.' Customers are now informed with a new set of information about the long-time health enemy, fats. They know that there is no angelically good or the demonically bad. The key word is to balance the amount of fat intake. This is because of the fact that every type of fats is essential to human's body in order to enhance their health under the certain dose. Meanwhile,

overconsumption of fats would cause health-related consequences in negative ways. This would be a hard task for the buffet restaurant business. They should be more concerned about how they could inform their customers about the benefits of the ingredients they use, especially the benefits of fats.

The fifth trend is 'Diet by DNA.' Some customers now believe that foods which are produced from natural and organic sources can strengthen their immune system in a DNA level which can prolong their life-longevity. The buffet restaurants could use this information as a storytelling, which can be a strong business sale point, in order to attract the customers to buy their products and services.

The sixth trend is 'From the inside out.' Customers are now believing in the well-known phrase 'you are what you eat.' People these days can improve their physical beauty and health not only by using skincare products on their external appearance, but also by eating the right food to let them enhance their body from within. This would be another story telling for the buffet restaurants to persuade their customers with fancy ingredients which are claimed to cure or enhance their health from within.

The seventh trend is 'For everybody.' People are now focusing on exercising, and believe that eating healthy food helps optimize their workout effort. Buffet restaurant businesses can use this source to provide a promotion or create storytelling which can attract customers.

The last health-related trend is 'Based on a true story.' The sources of food are now emphasized by customers. Many customers would like to eat foods which they know where they are from. There are some buffet restaurants in Thailand that have already adapted this method and promote the well-known sources of the ingredients such as Wagyu beef (Japanese beef), Angus beef (American beef), or even the Doi kam vegetables (King Rama IX's royal project Vegetables). This type of trend has become widely applied to many kinds of food industries because of the fact that it is able to create a selling point to a business for the purpose of making it more outstanding and unique than other business competitors. Yet, there are still a lot of business opportunities for other buffet restaurants to involve in this topic in order to increase their revenue with this business strategy.

For non-health related topics, the first trend is 'Table for one.' People seemingly tend to live alone along with the rush-urban lifestyle. The single dish of food seems to be their solution to solve their hunger with the convenient and budget optimization. Buffet restaurant business then can discover that this change in consumption behaviors among people these days would be their business chance to develop a new business model for an individual customer or even as a threat which causes a disaster to reduce the number of customers.

The second non-health related food trend is 'Eat with your eyes.' The sense of customers has been enhanced. Delicious food does not mean that they are good enough for customers. The dish's decoration which also includes the restaurant atmosphere will serve the customer's sense of taste as well. Generally, most of the buffet restaurants are involved in this type of food trend; the restaurant's overall environment has been emphasized including the dish decoration. This can indicate that tastes of food could be sensed with both taste buds and other factors.

The third trend is 'Good enough to tweet.' Some customers seem to make a decision to eat with the factor of dish decoration. If the dishes are well decorated, then the customers have a high tendency to choose that restaurant. One of the factors for buying food, therefore, is the chance that customers can take photos of food or restaurants atmosphere for the purpose of sharing their eating lifestyle on online social media platforms.

The last non-health related food trend is 'E-revolution from carts to clicks.' Customers tend to use more food delivery services as a matter of the fact that it is more convenient than going to eat out at a restaurant. Some buffet dining restaurants such as Sizzler have adapted their business strategy to this delivery service trend. They offer a box of various buffet food and deliver it with delivery services. They attempt to keep the selling point of buffet meals which is the variety of food, but they still cannot maintain another significant selling point of buffet meals - the amount of unlimited portions of food. Yet, this is one of the biggest threats of the buffet restaurants since their business model is based on dine-in only. It is a big challenge for this buffet restaurant industry.

Even though the twelve food trends as mentioned above is crucial to the profitability and survivability of the business, the verification and measurement of the data are needed. Since buffet restaurant business is a highly budget controlled business, they cannot be an excellent all-rounder to perfectly serve every need of the customers.

2.9 The will of Thai people to change to healthy lifestyle

According to the research, 48% of Thai people expect to change their eating behaviors to healthy ways within the next 12 months (BLT Bangkok, 2018). Moreover, 90% of them will consume more vegetables; 53% of them will reduce meat consumption; and 45% of them will change their diet into a vegan or balanced one.

From this data, this is a huge challenge for the buffet business. Before the emergence of the healthy trend, most of the buffet restaurants generally offer meats as their main products and vegetables are rarely mentioned. Since their core competency of this business is to offer a value to money, the buffet restaurant entrepreneurs use the perception of customers - meats are a lot more expensive than vegetables - to encourage customers' consumption demands.

This would be the undefeated value if customers are not into a healthy trend. Buffet business, however, must realize that their current business model is capturing a drastically-smaller market. Thus, the data to support the new strategy is crucial in order to deal with this unavoidable threat.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by using two types of research methods consisting of exploratory research method and descriptive research method.

3.1 Exploratory Research Method

Exploratory research was conducted by secondary data and in-depth interviews for the purpose of obtaining the information that can achieve the objectives of the research. Followings are the details of the secondary data and in-depth interview:

3.1.1 Secondary Data

The secondary sources of data were mainly obtained from published sources and websites such as online newspapers, as well as other related academic journals. The objectives of secondary research are 1) to understand the driving factors that cause the increasing popularity of buffet restaurants among Thai society; 2) to understand and analyze consumers regarding attitude, perception, and behaviors towards their attraction and retention on buffet restaurants; and 3)to understand the consumers' behaviors with respect to healthy trends and buffet restaurants.

3.1.2 In-depth Interview

The in-depth interviews had an involvement in the discussion in order to collect consumers' opinions and explore general perceptions and behaviors towards using social media to search for buffet restaurants before designing the questionnaire. The in-depth interviews were conducted on January 5-7, 2020 with the total of 6 respondents, 3 females and 3 males, having a residence in Bangkok and provincial areas. These respondents, meeting the criteria of this study, had dined at a buffet restaurant in the past three months.

3.2   Descriptive Research Method

The objective of the descriptive research method was to describe consumers' behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes towards attraction and retention on buffet restaurants.The questionnaire was employed under the descriptive research method.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

Before launching the official questionnaires, the pre-tests were sent to 6 respondents to obtain the results and feedback. Revisions were made according to the feedback. Then, the official questionnaires were distributed to 171 online respondents. The data was then input into SPSS for data analysis.

<u>The objective for Questionnaire</u>

1. To determine the effect of the healthy trend on customer**s'** attraction and retention towards buffet restaurants

- To determine the healthy factors that enhance consumer intention to visit the buffet restaurant

- To determine the healthy factors that enhance consumer intention to re-visit the buffet restaurant

2. To determine the influence of buffet restaurants characteristics on customer retention, and attraction

- To determine the general factors that enhance consumer intention to visit the buffet restaurant

- To determine the general factors that enhance consumer intention to re-visit the buffet restaurant

3. To summarize consumer behavior with respect to healthy trend and buffet restaurant behavior.

- To compare driving factors between the healthy-related factors and general factors on buffet restaurant attraction and retention.

3.3   Sampling Method

3.3.1   Target population

Population of interest for this study were people living in Bangkok and provincial areas, who have dined at buffet restaurants in the past three months.

3.3.2   Sampling process for in-depth interview

Respondents were recruited through a convenience sampling method which was non-probability sampling. In order to ensure that the respondents were a population of interest, several screening questions were asked at the beginning whether they had dined at buffet restaurants in the past three months, and lived in Bangkok or provincial areas. The respondents' profiles were different from each other in certain aspects of age, occupation, and attitudes to create a variance of backgrounds. All respondents were given short descriptions about the objectives of the study and the definition of social media and external sources of information before the discussion. The length of discussion lasted approximately 20 minutes (see Appendix A: Sample questions of in-depth interview).

3.3.3   Sampling process for questionnaire

Due to the limitation of budget and time constraint, the sampling method of questionnaire survey was a non-probability sampling method using convenience sampling technique. The 171 questionnaire surveys were distributed online. At the beginning of online questionnaires, the screening questions were asked to ensure that all questionnaire respondents are members of the population of interest. Examples of screening questions were to ensure whether they had dined at buffet restaurants in the past three months, and lived in Bangkok or provincial areas. (see Appendix B: example of questionnaire).

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Key findings from in-depth interview

The insight data gathered from the in-depth interview are as followed:

4.1.1 Respondents informed that they are attracted to the new buffet restaurant via restaurant ambient, online ads and promotion. They perceived that attending a new restaurant was like an exploration.

4.1.2 Respondents revisit the same buffet that is closeby, convenient to transport, good taste and value price.

4.1.3 Respondents stated buffet restaurants were a good source of protein which they could afford at a reasonable price.

4.1.4 Respondents had a healthy knowledge that the human body needs a cheat meal in order to maintain the metabolism. A buffet restaurant is the most suitable choice for this.

4.1.5 Respondents rarely attended buffet restaurants alone, they always went with friends or family.

4.2 Key finding from questionnaires

4.2.1 Respondents Demographic

Out of 195 respondents, 24 respondents did not pass screening questions. The total number of samples of this study, as a result, was 171 (n=171). From 171 respondents, 53.2% was female and 46.8% was male. There are 33.4% of the respondents who were aged between 18-25 years old, 52% aged 26-30 years old, 14.6% aged 31 and above. 7% of all respondents were high school students or below, 60.8% hold Bachelor's Degree, and 31.5% are above the Bachelor's Degree. 42.7% of respondents have income of THB equal or less than 25000, 35.7% have income of THB 25001-50000, and 21.6% have income of 50001 and above. All of the respondents with different types of occupations consisted of 25.7% student, 50.9% employee, 10.5% business owner, 7.6% bureaucrat, 5.3% freelancer or jobless. For

the health-related demographic with the specific activities in the past three months, 82.5% were non-smoker, 43.3% did not drink alcohol, 54.4% drank twice or lower per week, 22.2% did not exercise, and 60.9% exercised twice or lower per week.

4.2.2 Customers' attitudes towards buffet restaurants

Respondents were asked to score with the Likert 1-5 scale for each factor that good buffet restaurants should have or should be in order to reflect the attributes of good buffet restaurants. Please see Table 4.1 for the perception among the buffet customers towards good buffet restaurants.

From the Table 4.1, the top five of factors that the respondents perceived that a good buffet restaurant should have are Cleanliness of the restaurant (mean = 4.71), Value price comparing to quality (mean = 4.68), Service mind of the staffs (mean = 4.56), Fast serving (mean = 4.51), and Clarity of price structure (mean = 4.48).And bottom last 5 are Availability of healthy menu (mean = 3.32), Traceability of food (mean = 3.32), Organic sources of ingredients (mean = 3.41), Online update (mean = 3.71), Advertisement (mean = 3.73).

Table 4.1

Perception among the buffet customers towards the attributes of good buffet restaurants

Good buffet restaurants should have/ should be...	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cleanliness of the restaurant	4.71	0.581
Value price comparing to quality	4.68	0.528
Service mind of the staffs	4.56	0.678
Fast serving	4.51	0.681
Clarity of price structure	4.48	0.792
Easy to reach via public transportation	4.43	0.651
Staffs' ability to solve customer problems	4.42	0.684

Table 4.1

Perception among the buffet customers towards the attributes of good buffet restaurants (cont.)

Good buffet restaurants should have/ should be...	Mean	Std. Deviation
Staffs' knowledge in food/service	4.3	0.798
Appropriate temp and lighting	4.3	0.744
Appropriate seat layout	4.17	0.782
Convenient payment	4.16	0.866
Car parking available	4.09	1.073
Variety of payment	4.08	0.961
Eco friendly equipment	3.99	0.997
Cheap food price	3.82	1.115
Price plan availability	3.78	1.182
Promotion available	3.75	1.03
Online queuing system	3.75	1.121
Advertisement	3.73	1.096
Online update	3.71	1.151
Organic sources of ingredients	3.41	1.061
Traceability of food	3.32	1.043
Availability of healthy menu	3.32	1.22

From table 4.2 The significant factors($p<0.05$) that correlate with Customer re-purchasing behavior are shown. The top five variables are buffet is a reward/cheat day, easy to reach via public transportation, staff's knowledge in food/service, online queuing system, appropriate seat layout.

Table 4.2

Pearson correlation between customer behaviors/ preferences and customer retention toward buffet restaurant

Customer behaviors/ Preferences	I always revisit the favorite buffet restaurants (Pearson Correlation)
buffet is a reward/cheat day	0.258
easy to reach via public transportation	0.226
staffs' knowledge in food/service	0.216
online queuing system	0.206
appropriate seat layout	0.188
chose food from organic sources	0.182
fast serving	0.180
traceability of food	0.171
always take vitamins or supplements	0.169

From table 4.3 The significant factors($p<0.05$) that correlate with Customer attraction behavior are shown. The top five variables are buffet is appropriate seat layout, promotion available, online update, variety of payment, and online queuing system.

Table 4.3

Pearson correlation between customer behaviors/ preferences and customer attraction toward buffet restaurant

Customer behaviors/ Preferences	I always try new interesting buffet restaurants (Pearson Correlation)
appropriate seat layout	0.284
promotion available	0.277
online update	0.262
variety of payment	0.259
online queuing system	0.251
chose food from organic sources	0.234
staffs' knowledge in food/service	0.232
cheap	0.217
eco friendly equipment	0.199
always take vitamins or supplements	0.186
buffet is a reward/cheat day	0.183
always read healthy articles	0.182
prefer high protein	0.174
advertisement	0.173
appropriate temp and lighting	0.173
fast serving	0.171
traceability of food	0.167
price plan availability	0.162
convenient payment	0.159

4.2.2 Exploratory factor analysis

From table 4.4, 35 Variables were classified via Exploratory factor analysis. Nine factors were obtained and named as follows. Factor 1-Healthy concern, Factor 2-promotion attracted, Factor 3-Ambient oriented, Factor 4-value seekers, Factor 5-service oriented, Factor 6-real foodie, Factor 7-Fast food, Factor 8- budget control, and Factor 9- buffet is a protein.

Table 4.4

Exploratory factor analysis

Pattern Matrix									
	Factor								
	Factor 1-Healthy concern	Factor 2-promotion attracted	Factor 3-Ambient oriented	Factor 4-value seekers	factor 5-service oriented	Factor 6-real foodie	Factor 7-Fast food	Factor 8-budget control	Factor 9-buffet is a protein
taste of food				0.532			0.391		
quality and freshness				0.46					
variety of foods						0.339	0.335		
traceability of food						0.591			
Organic sources of ingredients						0.972			
Availability of healthy menu						0.473			
Cheap price								0.807	
Value price comparing to quality				0.72					
Price plan availability		0.387						0.475	
Clarity of price structure				0.482					

Table 4.4

Exploratory factor analysis (cont.)

Pattern Matrix									
	Factor								
	Factor 1- Healthy concern	Factor 2- promotion attracted	Factor 3- Ambient oriented	Factor 4-value seekers	factor 5- service oriented	Factor 6-real foodie	Factor 7-Fast food	Factor 8- budget control	Factor 9- buffet is a protein
Easy to reach via public transportation							0.572		
Car parking available		0.338							
Promotion available		0.645							
advertisement		0.966							
online update		0.633							
service mind of the staffs.				0.455	0.565				
staffs' knowledge in food/service					0.825				
staffs' ability to solve customer problem					0.718				
convenient payment			0.372						
variety of payment					0.383				
fast serving							0.608		
online queuing system					0.322				
cleanliness of the restaurant			0.468	0.381					
appropriate temp and lighting			0.805						
appropriate seat layout			0.789						

Table 4.4

Exploratory factor analysis (cont.)

Pattern Matrix									
	Factor								
	Factor 1-Healthy concern	Factor 2-promotion attracted	Factor 3-Ambient oriented	Factor 4-value seekers	factor 5-service oriented	Factor 6-real foodie	Factor 7-Fast food	Factor 8-budget control	Factor 9-buffet is a protein
eco friendly equipment			0.424						
prefer high protein	0.395								0.532
always read healthy articles	0.677								
prefer low sugar drinks	0.737								
prefer low fat foods	0.638								
buffet is a reward/cheat day	0.475								
always take vitamins or supplements	0.482								
weight and shape concern	0.661								
choose food from organic sources					0.45				
believe in you are what you eat	0.308			0.397					

From table 4.5 factor 3, factor 5, factor 6, factor 7,factor 8,factor 9 has a significant correlation to customer attraction and factor 3, factor 5, factor 6, factor 7 a significant correlation to customer retention.

Table 4.5

Correlations between factors and customer retention and attraction

		Correlations	
		I always revisit the favorite buffet restaurants	I always try new interesting buffet restaurants
REGR factor score 1-Healthy concern for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.109	0.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.156	0.142
REGR factor score 2-promotion attracted for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.115	0.271
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.136	0
REGR factor score 3-Ambient oriented for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.169	0.244
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.027	0.001
REGR factor score 4-value seekers for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.032	0.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.674	0.985
REGR factor score 5-service oriented for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.246	0.29
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0
REGR factor score 6-real foodie for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.187	0.21
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.014	0.006
REGR factor score 7-Fast food for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.193	0.162
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011	0.034
REGR factor score 8- budget control for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.21	0.283
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.006	0
REGR factor score 9- buffet is a protein for analysis	Pearson Correlation	0.062	0.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.419	0.016

4.2.3 Frequency Distribution on healthy-concern factor

Since Factor 1grouped the healthy-related variables together. Frequency distribution on Factor 1 had been conducted to determine the top 25% (Healthy-concern people, Factor score > 0.615, n= 44) and bottom 25% (Non-healthy-concern people, Factor score <-0.541, n= 44) as Table 4.5.

Table 4.6

F1 score on top and bottom 25% of Factor 1

F1SCORE					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bottom 25%	44	25.7	50	50
	Top 25%	44	25.7	50	100
	Total	88	51.5	100	
Missing	System	83	48.5		
Total		171	100		

From Table 4.7, T-test was conducted to compare the mean of given scores by two groups (Bottom 25% of Factor 1 and Top 25% of Factor 1). The result showed that The top 25%(Healthy-concern people) of Factor 1's mean in attraction variable (I always try new interesting buffet restaurants) was 3.59 and mean in retention variable (I always revisit the favorite buffet restaurants) was 3.86. Whereas Bottom 25% (Non-healthy-concern people) of Factor 1's mean in attraction variable (I always try new interesting buffet restaurants) was 3.36 and mean in retention variable (I always revisit the favorite buffet restaurants) was 3.52. This showed that the healthy-concerned people had higher means than Non-healthy-concern people in both attraction and retention towards buffet restaurants.

Table 4.7

T-Test on attraction and retention variables

	F1SCORE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I always revisit the favorite buffet restaurants	Non-healthy-concern people	44	3.36	1.203	0.181
	Healthy-concern people	44	3.59	1.352	0.204
I always try new interesting buffet restaurants	Non-healthy-concern people	44	3.52	1.191	0.18
	Healthy-concern people	44	3.86	1.231	0.186

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Good buffet restaurants in customer perception should have the significant attributes such as cleanliness, value to money, service mind, fast serving, and easy to transport to or from. On the other hand, a healthy trend was related to the attributes rated with almost the lowest scores.

From correlation analysis in terms of customer attraction, people who were concerned about their health (took vitamin,prefer high protein food, read healthy articles, want organic and traceable foods) prefered visiting new buffet restaurants. Regarding retention, people who perceived that buffet was a cheat meal or reward would always revisit their favorite buffet restaurant.

According to factor analysis, only three out of the basic 4Ps - product, place, price - correlated with customer attraction and retention. People prefered good ambience, good food, and good service under a limited budget while promotions correlated only to customer attraction. In terms of healthy-related variables, only protein seeking correlated with customer attraction.

From frequency distribution analysis, the respondents who were concerned with health had a higher correlation with customer attraction and retention compared to people who were not.

5.2 Recommendation

The emergence of Healthy trend does not emerge to negatively affect the buffet restaurants industry, but instead it provides business opportunities for those who seek it. Buffet restaurants should launch promoting campaigns which can attract and retain healthy people by focusing on key messages such as high protein and cheat day.

In addition, integrating healthy trends in all 7Ps will help provide competitive advantages to buffet restaurants by indicating the protein contained per serving in the menu. It can be more effective if the companies run advertisements or publish both online and offline health-related articles about the importance of cheat day on the websites or on the menu.

New buffet restaurants, moreover, should create market differentiation by considering to become a cheat meal buffet restaurant with traceable source of ingredients. This is supported by data that the businesses can be more outstanding.

However, the 7Ps still make a huge contribution in this market. If the entrepreneurs of this business have to trade off, focus on Price, People, Product and Place respectively. It is recommended to provide good taste food with a fast serving & service mind in a clean and comfortable ambience.

5.3 Limitation of Study

1. The sampling method for this study was based on non-probability samplesdue to the definite number of population is not known.

2. Due to time constraint, this research was conducted with 171 respondents,aged between 15 - 60 years old, living in Bangkok and the provincial area, who have dined at the buffet restaurant within the past 3 months. Thus the sample size cannot be a representative of the whole population of users who use social media to search for information on restaurants.

3. This study only focused on the restaurant industry; further research and study need to be done to be able apply to other industries.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE QUESTION OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

1. How often have you dined at buffet restaurant?
2. In your opinion, What a good buffet restaurant should be ?
3. What makes you revisit the same buffet restaurant?
4. What makes you to visit a new buffet restaurant?
5. Do you concern about your weight and shape?
6 . How often do you excercise?
7. Do you smoke?
8. Do you drink? How often do you drink
9. How old are you? What is your job?
10. Who do you eat dinner with?
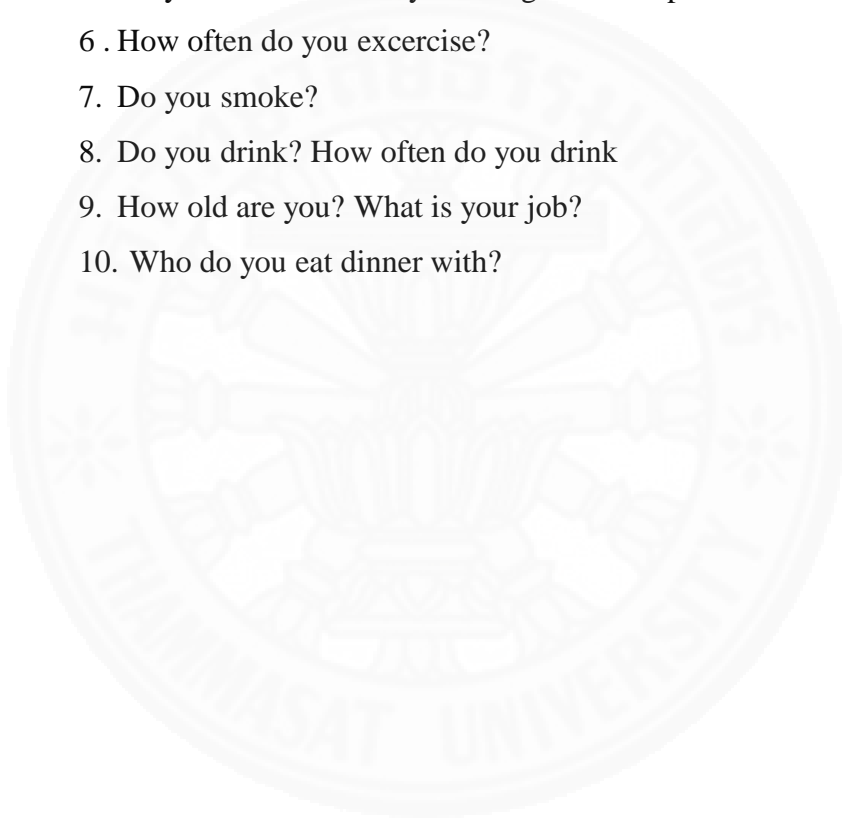
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE QUESTION OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Survey of customer attraction&retention toward buffet restaurants

This questionnaire survey is a part of Individual Study, MIM, Thammasat University. The objective of this research is to study about consumer's behavior and attitude towards using social media to search for information on restaurant in Bangkok. All information provided by respondents is for

the academic purpose only. All

information provided will be kept strictly confidential and would not be used for any commercial purposes.

* Required

survey of opinions toward buffet restaurants

1. Have you dined at the buffet restaurants in the past three months? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ yes

   ◯ no

2. Where do you live? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Bangkok or provincial areas

   ◯ others

   ◯ Other: _____

Product factors

Imagine a good buffet restaurants and indicate the level of importance that they should have/should be/should prioritize

3. Taste of food *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	very important

4. Quality and freshness of the ingredients *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	very important

5. Variety of the menu *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	very important

6. Traceability of the ingredients (e.g. vegetables from the Royal Project, beef from Australia) *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	very important

45. Salary *

Mark only one oval.

- 0-15,000 Baht
- 15,001 - 25,000 Baht
- 25,001 - 35,000 Baht
- 35,001 - 45,000 Baht
- 45,001 - 55,000 Baht
- 55,001 - 65,000 Baht
- Over 65,001 Baht

46. How often do you exercise in the last three months *

Mark only one oval.

- Never
- Less than once a week
- 1-2 times a week
- 3-4 times a week
- 5-6 times a week
- Everyday

47. Do you drink alcohol? *

Mark only one oval.

- No
- Yes, less than once a week
- Yes, 1-2 times a week.
- Yes, 3-4 times a week.
- Yes, 5-6 times a week.
- Yes, Everyday

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