

บุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์ที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความตั้งใจใช้บริการเซ่นร้านอาหารไทยของผู้บริโภคใน  
เขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ประเทศไทย: บทบาทการส่งอิทธิพลผ่านการสื่อสาร  
แบบปากต่อปากออนไลน์

Brand Personality Influencing Customers' Intention to Purchase at Thai  
Restaurant Chains in Bangkok, Thailand: The Mediating Role of Online  
Word-of-Mouth.

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บทคัดย่อ

บุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญของการตลาด บุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์รวมถึงความพยายามเพื่อสร้างความผูกพันทางอารมณ์ระหว่างผู้บริโภคและแบรนด์เพื่อช่วยเพิ่มผลกำไรทางธุรกิจ นอกจากนี้ยังสามารถนำไปใช้เพื่อแยกความแตกต่างของแบรนด์หนึ่งจากแบรนด์ที่คล้ายกันอื่นๆ และช่วยสร้างความโดดเด่นหากไม่มีความเชี่ยวชาญในผลิตภัณฑ์ที่ขาย ธุรกิจก็ต้องใช้การส่งเสริมการขายที่มุ่งเรื่องของราคาเป็นหลักหรือแบรนด์จะซบเซาหรือตายในที่สุด ด้วยเหตุนี้ งานวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อตรวจสอบว่าบุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์และการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากออนไลน์เป็นปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความตั้งใจใช้บริการกลุ่มเซ่นร้านอาหารของผู้บริโภค โดยเฉพาะกลุ่มร้านอาหารไทยหรือไม่ กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักเรียน 360 คน โดยการใช้การสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบง่ายจากประชากรเป้าหมาย รวบรวมข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถาม การศึกษาครั้งนี้ใช้แบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง: SEM เพื่อทดสอบสมมติฐาน ผลการศึกษาพบว่าบุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์และการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากออนไลน์มีผลในเชิงบวกและมีนัยสำคัญต่อผู้บริโภคจะเกิดความตั้งใจที่จะซื้อขึ้น นอกจากนี้ยังมีผลกระทบที่มีนัยสำคัญของการสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปากออนไลน์ระหว่างบุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์และความตั้งใจที่จะซื้อ การศึกษาชี้แนะว่าผู้จัดการร้านอาหารและนักการตลาดจะต้องมุ่งเน้นไปที่บุคลิกภาพของแบรนด์ และช่องทางการสื่อสารออนไลน์ และปรับปรุงกลยุทธ์การตลาดเพื่อดึงดูดลูกค้าสู่แบรนด์เซ่นร้านอาหารไทยให้สามารถนำไปสู่ผู้บริโภคจะเกิดความตั้งใจที่จะซื้อขึ้น

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## ABSTRACT

Brand personality is an important factor in marketing. Brand personality is the attempt to form an emotional bond between customers and the brand in order to help boost profitability. It also can be applied to differentiate one's brand from other similar brands and help it stand out. Without specialization, a commodity that is selling has to use price promotions or the brand is going to stagnate or eventually decline. For this reason, the aim of this study is to investigate if brand personality and online word-of-mouth are factors that influence customers' purchase intention in the restaurant sector, especially Thai restaurant chains. A sample of 360 students was drawn using convenience sampling from the target population. Data was collected using questionnaires. This study used the structural equation modeling: SEM to test hypotheses. The results of the study showed that brand personality and online word-of-mouth have positive and significant effects on customers' purchase intentions. Furthermore, there was a significant mediating effect of online word-of-mouth between brand personality and purchase intention. The study also recommends that restaurant managers and marketers focus on brand personality and online communication channels, and update their marketing strategy to attract more customers for Thai restaurant chain brands that can lead to purchase intention.

**Keywords:** brand personality, online word-of-mouth, purchase intention, Thai restaurant chains.

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### 1. Introduction

Brand personality is defined as attributing human traits or characteristics to a brand name (Aaker, 1997; Keller & Richey, 2006; Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre (2009) mentioned that theories of human psychology and consumer behavior draw the brand personality factor into. According to Freling and Forbes (2005), brand personality differentiates the brand from its competitors and creates a competitive advantage in the minds of customers. Brand personality

also contributes to brand equity (Aaker, 1999) and is able to build up consumer trust in the brand.

The business needs to distinguish the core components of brand personality. The brand encompasses more than simply a symbol and color palette; the brand is an accumulation of experiences that convey the essence of what the business stands for. Developing brand personality is a key approach to create a strong interaction between the consumers and the brand which comprises certain values and characteristics of a lifestyle, providing consumers a means for self-expression (Hameide, 2011). The customers want a brand that is more unique as a representative image and that inspires the customer's passion. When the clients think about the personality, they are hoping to associate certain feelings and images to the brand. Advertisers often link the personality that they want to create as a means of representing and transferring to the product into advertising (i.e. Marlboro cigarettes).

Jennifer Aaker's research has become popular to motivate the brand personality community to think that there are five dimensions of brand personality. Although there has been a great deal of research on dimensions of brand personality, it is still in question because consumers may not perceive brands as humanlike (Avis, 2012). Further research is needed to broaden the understanding of the role of brand in consumers' perceptions of brand personality. Furthermore, numerous brand personality studies dealt with measuring brand personality in the developed world (e.g. Arsenau et al., 2014; Freling et al., 2011). Changing demographics, cultures, societies and lifestyles may vary in results from one country to another (e.g. Aaker et al., 2001; Ferrandi et al., 2000). Different dimensions of brand personality may also display different degrees of influence for different kinds of organizations (e.g. Venable et al., 2002). Limited research has been carried out the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention as well as brand personality and online word of mouth (WOM) in the restaurant sector in a Thai context and the moderating role of online WOM on the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Brand Personality**

There are an infinite number of variables that factor into the decision of a consumer to purchase one brand instead of another. Due to the impact of social media, the relationship between brands and consumers has changed. Social media branding seems to be influencing

customers by influencing them to purchase brands consistent with their own self-image or desired self-image. Brand personality scale (*BPS*) developed by Aaker (1997) has been applied in many studies and is an important element of the theory of brand personality. However, not many researchers applied *BPS* model in their studies on the restaurant industry. For instance, recently, Kim et al. (2011) investigated the effects of brand personality towards customers' perception in casual theme restaurants. while Lee et al. (2009) centered on the relationship between a restaurant brand personality and customer emotions as well as satisfaction and loyalty.

The study by Aaker (1997) has been utilized to investigate brands and their human personalities within different product and service categories across different cultures (e.g. Aaker et al., 2001). It still has arguments towards Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions. For example, Lee et al. (2009) mentioned that there is a difference for the restaurant sector in some components such as sincerity and excitement. In contrast, Siguaw et al. (1999), using a *BPS* model in fine dining restaurants, found that there is no difference.

This study looks at the possibility of Aaker's (1997) scale methodology for brand personality measurement. A main brand character is applied by several brands as a vehicle to convey their brand personality and facilitate their brand storytelling process which helps push that brand. While US fast food chains are present in Thailand, the country also has restaurants that are homegrown (e.g. MK suki, Fuji, Yayoi, S&P, etc.). Hence, this research investigates the implications of brand personality in Thai restaurant chains as a predictor.

## 2.2 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the preference of consumers to purchase the product or service. According to Lee et al. (2016) and Xie et al. (2017), one of the common approaches to understanding consumer behavior is to study purchase intention. There are several factors involved in a customer's purchase intention and having them in the customer's mind could convince the customer to purchase the brand, including brand personality (Aggarwal, 2004) and eWOM (Park & Lee, 2009). Purchase intention in social networking sites has been studied from various perspectives. Wang et al.'s (2012) study seeks to address purchase intention from the perspective of communication among social media users. In addition, Kim et al.'s (2011) study focuses on the customer value perspective. The study by Liao et al. (2012) has been conducted to understand re-purchase intention for online gaming community. Hence, the

purchase intention is the antecedent of the actual purchase behavior of many products and services.

Moreover, recently, researchers have substantiated that there is the significant effect of brand personality on purchase intention (e.g. Kalantar & Khalili, 2017; Toldos-Romero & OrozcoGómez, 2015). As discussed above, the hypothesis is proposed below.

H1: Brand personality has a positive and significant effect on customers' purchase intention

### 2.3 Online WOM

WOM advertising is essential for every commercial business. According to Feick and Price (1987), WOM information is generated and transmitted by a source considered more credible and persuasive than business-generated information. And several consumers base their decisions on it when searching for information about possible purchase decisions. Taghizadeh et al. (2013) and Sandy et al. (2011) pointed out that WOM is particularly important for service providers whose offerings are largely intangible and experience or credence based. Ng et al. (2011) recommend that in service sectors, purchase is often done relying on recommendations provided by others. Because of the nature of the services, people normally look for advice from their relatives, friends and people who have had experiences with the product prior to them and who shared the same social value and follow their recommendations (Behjati & Pandya, 2012).

Furthermore, with *advances in information technology*, the use of the *internet* has brought changes to the way consumers communicate thereby transforming traditional WOM into the new form of online WOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Nowadays, the new form of online WOM communication is called electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM (Yang, 2017). The leading brands recognized that advertising is less influential than WOM and customer recommendation particularly online WOM. With the dramatic rise of social media, consumers don't trust traditional advertising (e.g. television, radio, print advertisements, etc.) and celebrity endorsement to brands (Joyn marketing consultancy, 2012). As a result of *technological advancements*, new methods of establishing communication have changed consumer behavior (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014; Gómez-Suárez et al., 2017).

Several researchers have done online WOM in various contexts. Many studies conducted by Matute et al. (2016) and Ellonen et al. (2013) have presented the motives of

consumers for seeking postings through online WOM. Thus, the hypothesis that will be tested is as follows:

H2: Brand personality has a positive and significant effect on online WOM.

## 2.4 Online WOM affect Purchase Intention

EWOM reviews are electronic versions of traditional WOM reviews (Filiery & McLeay, 2014). Moldovan et al. (2011) suggest that the number of consumer reviews can be measured as the contribution of each consumer to the market. According to Cheung and Thadani (2012), in an online context, consumers' purchasing decisions can be influenced by the quality of information they receive.

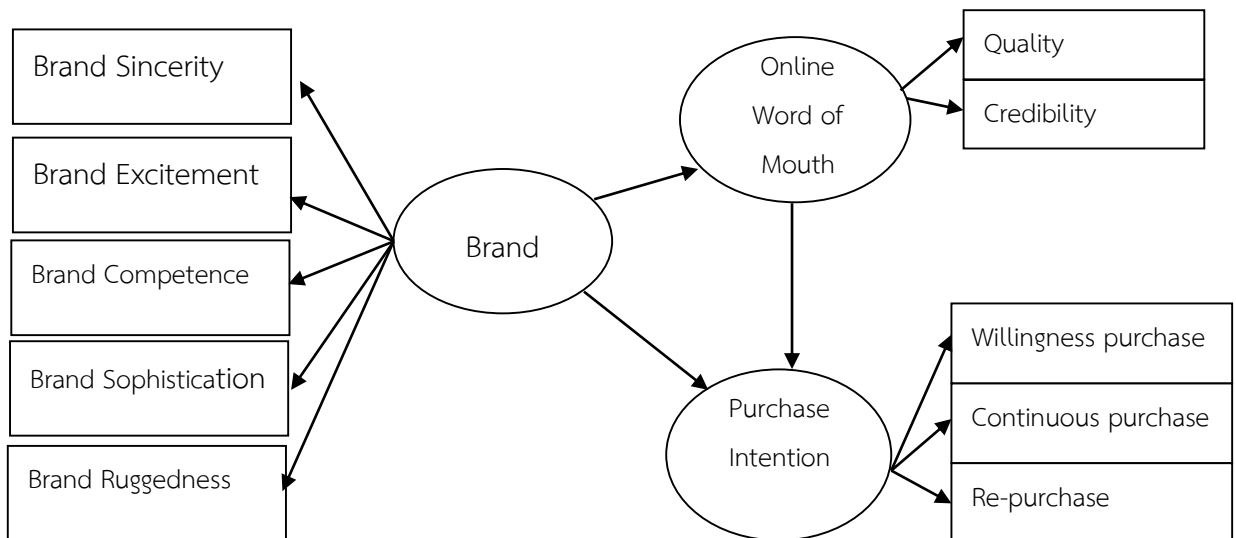
Some empirical studies have examined the impact of eWOM on consumers' online purchase intentions (and consumer decisions to purchase (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Additionally, positive eWOM communications can enhance consumers' attitudes towards a product, service and increase purchase.

Importantly, affirmed that 78% of the customers take into account recommendations through e-WOM in their decision making (Severi et al., 2014). As such, researchers utilized online WOM as a consequence variable for brand personality in social networking sites and impact on purchase intention. For this reason, the study explores the role of online WOM on purchase intention to buy at Thai restaurant chains. The following are the research hypotheses.

H3: Online WOM has a positive and significant effect on customers' purchase intention.

H4: Online WOM mediates the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention.

From the *formulation of hypotheses*, the researcher thus proposes the research model as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Model

### 3. Methodology

Data was collected from primary sources. The researcher collected primary data herself by using questionnaires. The questionnaire was designed based on the literature review. This data was gathered from students at Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-Ok: Chakrabongse Bhuvanarth Campus (RMUTTO CPC). The sample size was calculated to be 354 students using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents. A total of 360 usable responses were received, resulting in a response rate of about 90 percent. Convenience sampling has been applied in order to achieve the required sample size. The research was conducted during January-February 2019. The list of participating students in RMUTTO CPC was obtained from the university database (total = 4,433) as the sampling frame. All variables were questioned on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale developed by Aaker's (1997) five dimensions was utilized to measure brand personality. The researcher adopted the characteristics of online information, such as quantity and quality (Luo et al., 2013) to measure online WOM. And Xie et al.'s (2017) three dimensions was applied to measure purchase intention.

The instrument was presented to a panel of experts in the field of study. Three academic experts were asked to validate the questionnaire. The instrument then was pre-

tested with a small sample size of thirty students during January, 2019 to prove its measurement reliability and validity.

The measurement model was tested by LISREL 8.8. to ensure that the model fits and to analyze the variables, latent constructs and test the hypotheses of the research model for assessing the relationship.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Demographics of Participants in This Study

In this study, the unit of analysis was an individual student. The findings suggested that 23.1% of students were male respondents, while 76.9% were female respondents. The most frequent age group comprised 20 to 40 years old (97.8%), followed by under 20 years old (2.2%). The majority of respondents (90.3%) were students in the Faculty of Business Administration and Information Technology, while 9.7% were in the Faculty of Liberal Arts.

### 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations and correlations of the three variables examined in this study. The results revealed that online WOM ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.813$ ) has the highest mean ranking, followed by purchase intention ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.771$ ), and brand personality ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.563$ ). The correlation coefficient is computed by the Pearson product moment correlation (Saunders et al., 2007). The results of the correlation among all variables ranged from 0.621 to 0.645 are presented in Table 1. Also, alpha coefficients are higher than 0.6 and the correlation is not high (above 0.8). Thus, the data do not appear to cause the problems of severe multicollinearity. The correlation matrix gives initial evidence of the hypotheses that there are significant positive correlations among brand personality, online WOM and purchase intention.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Brand Personality	3.43	0.563	1		
Online WOM	3.47	0.813	0.621**	1	
Purchase Intention	3.46	0.771	0.645**	0.627**	1

Notes: \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



### 4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

For testing validity of each construct, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the construct validity of ten constructs of the exogenous and endogenous variables in the proposed model. CFA was used to examine how well the indicators are grouped into some specific constructs that a researcher specifies (Jöreskog, & Sörbom, 2007). Endogenous variables include purchase intention (purchint) and purchase decision (purchdec). In CFA results, the model fit indices of brand personality, online WOM, and purchase intention are acceptable as follows:  $\chi^2 /df$  (0.27, 0.92, 0.05), CFI (1.00), GFI (1.00), AGFI (1.00), NFI (1.00), RMSEA (0.000) and SRMR (0.0051, 0.012, 0.0026). Further, the completely standardized loading that greater than 0.5 is considered to be included in the model (Hair et al., 2006).

The analysis of the reliability of the factors in this study was performed. The result indicated that the Cronbach's alpha ranged between 0.735 - 0.770 (purchase intention = 0.735, online WOM = 0.761, and brand personality = 0.770). These values are considered acceptable when they have met the acceptance criteria of 0.70

### 4.4 Path Analysis

A Structural Equation Model (SEM) was constructed by the statistical computer program "LISREL 8.8". It used maximum likelihood parameter estimates to test the hypothesized conceptual model of this study. There were ten measurement variables from three constructs: Brand Personality, Online WOM, and Purchase Intention.

In considering the fitness of this SEM, several fit indices were employed. As Jöreskog and Sörbom (2007: 120-121) stated that the initial model doesn't always fit with the computed model. Therefore, the initial model was adjusted according to the model modification indices and the theories and concepts described in the literature review. The result is as portrayed in Figure 2.

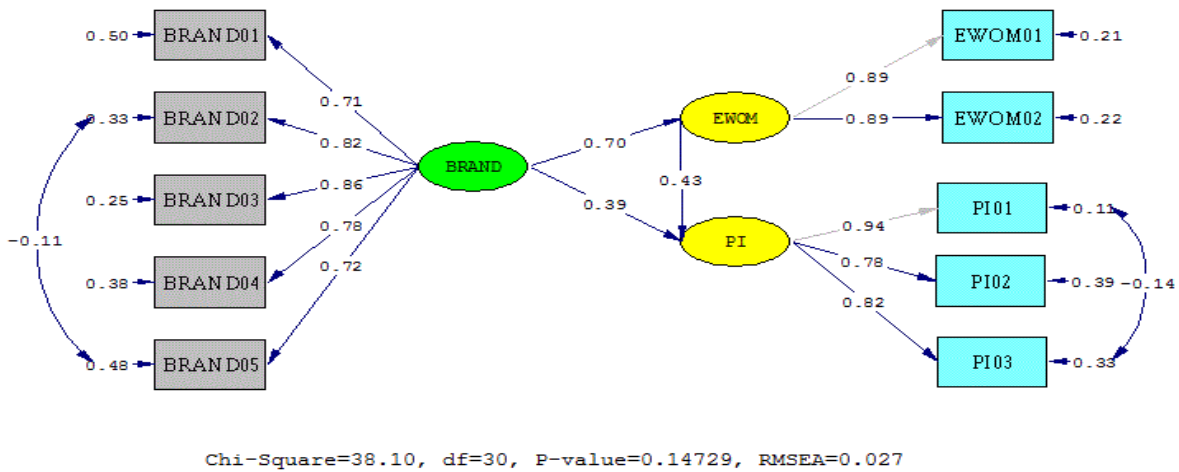


Figure 2 The Adjusted Model

The adjusted model reveals that Chi-square value is not significant at a 0.05 level ( $\chi^2 = 38.10$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.14729$ ) Besides, the Chi-square to degree of freedom ratio is equal to 1.27, which is lower than 2.0. This can be interpreted as the null hypothesis that the covariance matrix of the theoretical model and the empirical model is equal and is not rejected at a level of significance 0.05. Additionally, the values of GFI (0.98), AGFI (0.96), CFI (1.00) and NFI (0.99) are above a cut off value (0.90). RMSEA (0.027) and SRMR (0.022) are lower than 0.5. Based on these results, the finding presents a good fit between the theoretical model and the empirical data.

Further, the direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect among latent variables in the model were also obtained from path analysis as presented in Table 2. The results of path analysis show H1, H2, H3 and H4 are supported.

**Table 2** Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis Path	Path Standard			t- value	p-value	Result
	Coefficients					
	Direct	Indirect	Total			
H <sub>1</sub> : BP → PI	0.39	-	0.39	13.73	p-value<0.05	Accept
H <sub>2</sub> : BP → EWOM	0.70	-	0.70	12.79	p-value<0.05	Accept
H <sub>3</sub> : EWOM → PI	0.43	-	0.43	6.81	p-value<0.05	Accept
H <sub>4</sub> : BP → EWOM → PI	0.39	0.30	0.69	6.27	p-value<0.05	Accept

## 5. Conclusion, Discussion and Implications

### 5.1 Conclusion and Discussion

Findings from this study demonstrate that brand personality has a significant positive effect on customers' purchase intention. This is consistent with findings by Bouhleb et al., 2011; Heding et al., 2009; Toldos-Romero and Orozco-Gómez, 2015; Vahdati and Mousavi Nejad, 2016 that brand personality is connected to an emotional response that can shape consumer behavior. From Standardized loading, three dimensions of brand personality: competence, excitement and sincerity have more influence on purchase intention. When the client evaluates the brand sincerity, he estimates in a rational and cognitive way and believes consciously and durably on its integrity (Gouteron, 2006). Brand personality has a significant positive effect on online WOM, thereby supporting the findings of Ang and Lim's (2006) study presented that brand personality (sincerity and competence) has an impact on WOM.

Online WOM also has a significant positive effect on purchase intention with regard to Thai restaurant chains' consumers. The author concludes that Thai restaurant chains, such as MK suki, Fuji, Yayoi, etc. can be advertised by online WOM of consumers significantly influences purchase intention. In addition, this finding indicates a substantial alignment with the results of previous studies according to Baber et al. (2016), Kazmi and Mehmood (2016), Reham Ibrahim Elseidi and Dina EL-Baz (2016), and Bataineh (2015) which found a significant relationship between online WOM and purchase intention. In contrast, the study by *Torlak* et al. (2014) found that eWOM is not a significant factor affecting purchase intention.

Moreover, online WOM has a positive mediating role in the relationship between brand personality and customers' purchase intention which was investigated. Thus, marketers should

take into account online WOM as an essential marketing tool to focus on it that helps enhance customers' purchase intention.

## 5.2 Implications and Recommendations

The results provide implications for both research or theory and implications for practice to marketers in this present study. The theoretical implication of this study is to contribute new knowledge with its conceptualization of how brand personality influences customers' purchase intention at Thai restaurant chains. The findings provide support for the presentation of brand personality to consumers (Gen Y) in Thailand. The brand personality in *restaurants* indicated that the dimensions of brand personality vary based on the context of brands and the components may differ from Aaker's brand personality. Therefore, it will be carefully examined when applied to different contexts of the brand.

Brand personality plays a fundamental role in establishing the relationship between the brand and the consumer, including online WOM communication because brand personality can provide emotional benefits to consumers. As in the previous research by Fennis and Pruyn (2007), the transfer results from the personality *traits* of the brand reported that are clear to the personality of the consumer. Brand personality also has a positive relationship with online WOM. The results, of course, contribute to the personality of the brand and can be applied to digital marketing principles in social media because social media is a two-way communication between the brand and their users.

Likewise, this present study further clarifies the effect of brand personality that is associated with its influence of online WOM on purchase intention. In other words, the survey findings highlight the power of brand personality to drive online WOM on consumer purchase intention.

The practical implications are that it may be useful to restaurant managers and marketers to understand how ideal consumers perceive their Thai brands in order to develop and tailor effective marketing activities link to the brand. The competence, excitement and sincerity brand personality should be strengthened by managers that can lead the consumer towards brand equity and bring benefits to the organizations. It implies that building brand personality will aid in freshening its identity for customers' minds to distinguish from the big international fast food chains (mainly American), and to increase purchase intention with

regard to Thai restaurant chains. Managers must also employ brand experts to cultivate brand personality traits into Thai restaurant chains in order to influence consumers' buying decisions.

Besides, the national restaurant chains managers and marketers should tailor their marketing efforts by launching websites for their target consumers and advertising by applying endorsements from customers through some kind of social media such as Facebook 'Likes', Line, comments on Pantip.com (Thai-language online discussion forum) as well as using the ideas of the popular staff or managers and conducting the flow of online WOM to intensify the traffic. Online WOM crates brand awareness.

Finally, the personality of the brand can be used as a very powerful marketing strategy to gain a competitive advantage in the fast food restaurant chain by building a differentiation and linking unique brands to consumers.

Further research is required to incorporate other factors (such as non-personality attributes) that are important for a better understanding in the managerial decision regarding the purchase intentions in the field. Also, it should be focused on individual brands in a category rather than category on brand personality.

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