

# **The Influence of Customer Experience in Thai Full-Service Restaurant towards Customer Satisfaction with Consumption Emotion as Mediator: International Tourists' Perspective\***



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## **Abstract**

This research aimed to study (1) the influence of customer experience in Thai full-service restaurants toward customer satisfaction (2) to investigate the mediating effect of customer emotion between customer experience and customer satisfaction. The sample size was 400 international tourists who visited Thai full-service restaurants, the respondents were selected by purposive sampling. The sample group was selected from international tourist who visited Thai full-service restaurant according to the provided list. Analysis the data by the descriptive statistic and the Structural Equation Model use to analyze the causal relationship between customer and experience and have consumption emotion as the mediating factor. The research result was found as follows. 1. The result indicated that customer experience insignificantly influenced on customer satisfaction. 2. The customer experience indirectly influenced customer satisfaction by passing through the consumption emotion as the mediating factor. 3. Thai full-service restaurant operators should pay attention to the design of experience touchpoints that influence the consumption emotion to construct customer satisfaction, leading to competitive advantage and creating sustainable operation in the highly competitive restaurant business.

**Keywords :** Customer experience; Consumption Emotion; Customer Journey; touch point; Customer Satisfaction

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## Introduction

The tourism industry has continued to grow and play an integral part of Thailand economy. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in 2014 was 1,037.3 billion Baht represented 12.3% of the Thai GDP. This income has generated from many interrelated industries that supported the tourism industry, such as hotels, travel agents, and airlines, restaurants, and leisure industries. Each tourist has recorded to spend around 4,924.11 Baht per person per day and spends approximately 50% on accommodation and food and beverage therefore these related industries can denote the most significant part of tourist spending and importance to the whole tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, Department of Tourism, 2016).

Especially the foodservice or the restaurant industry which is not only bring lot money and job creation to the economy, but this industry let the tourists experience the local identity as the cultural activities and entertainment (Cohen, and Avieli, 2014; Hjaager, and Richard, 2002). Food experience has become the important aspect of tourist experience at the destination (Henderson, 2009; Lee, Scott, and Packer, 2014) since tourists can have pleasurable sensory experience and sensual experience (Kivela, and Crotts, 2006). Food experience can enhance the pleasure, attract tourists to the destination (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, and Cambourne, 2004) as well as the main determination of destination choice and influence factor of revisiting the destination (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Ryu, and Han (2010). Therefore, it is essential to study about the tourist experience at the restaurant where is the primary sources of the food experience.

Nemeschansky, and von der Heidt (2013) have studied that the beside food quality and quantity are the core value of the restaurant, beside that customer also emphasized on on the culinary finesse, service and restaurant atmosphere. Tourists do not receive just the food that helps them satisfy their hunger, but tourists engage themselves with the environment and circumstance that augmented with the core product such as food and beverage (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, and Chang, 2012). Researchers have revealed that the experience defined as customers' internal and subjective response to individuals' consumption context when they contact the company, which comprises cognitive, feeling, affective physical and social response (Meyer, and Schwager, 2007, Verhoef et al. 2009). Concept of customer experience as a multi-dimensional structure composed of human or physical components which are generated from a series of interaction between customer and company both of direct and indirect contact (Garg, Rahman, and Kumar, 2011; Grønholdt,

Martensen, Jørgensen, and Jensen, 2015; Schmitt, 2010) from the beginning till after interaction of the customer with the company which leads to the reaction of each customer according to the involvement of customer at a different level. Researchers refer to these situations, events, or activities as “touchpoints” (Meyer, and Schwager, 2007b; Schmitt, 2010; Verhoef et al. 2009). As the company does not create the experience directly but company performs as the provider role in setting the special stages for a customer to experience through different stimuli according to the contact, which will affect to customer’s emotion, absorption and control By providing (Andersson and Mossberg, 2004; Yuan, and Wu, 2008).effective stimuli, the company can create value for both company and the customer (Carù, and Cova, 2003; Schmitt, 2010) Customer experience can generate differentiation, influence customer emotion, lead to customer satisfaction, repeat purchase and customer loyalty as well as being part of the future purchase since the decision to purchase are based mainly on the customer prior experience. (Berry, and Carbone, 2007; Grønholdt, Martensen, Jørgensen, and Jensen, 2015; Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

Generating customer satisfaction be subject to many reasons such as perceived service quality, customer mood, motion, social interaction, and experiences (Churchill, and Surprenant, 1982) . It is designated the performance of the company in providing products and services. Therefore, measuring customer satisfaction can help identify the product element that needs to be improved for more customer satisfaction. Many businesses have put a lot of time and investment to investigate the factor that creates the customer satisfaction since the positive customer satisfaction can generate positive behavioral intentions such as positive word of mouth or the customer loyalty (Andaleeb, and Conway, 2006; Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2012).

Base of the concept and theory of customer experience and customer satisfaction, constructing the customer satisfaction is required many stimuli. Therefore, to understand the concept of managing the customer experience at Thai-full service restaurant, it is essential to understand the casual relationship of all the element among the customer experience, customer satisfaction and the consumption emotion. Hence, this study has proposed the structural equation model of the perception of designed touchpoints along the 6 stages of the customer journey in Thai full-service restaurant that can explain the pattern of customer experience, leading to the consumption emotion and customer satisfaction.



## Objective of the research

1. To purpose the influence of customer experience towards customer satisfaction
2. To investigate the mediating effect of customer emotion between customer experience and customer satisfaction

## Research Methodology

### 1<sup>st</sup> Step: Sample size

The sample size appropriate for the structural equation model is at least 10 – 20 times of parameter or the path that shows the relationship of a factor in conceptual research framework or at least 200 cases to apply the structural equation model (Kline, 2011). This study has 13 parameters and set the sample size at 20 times of parameter. Therefore, the sample size is 260 cases. For the appropriateness and relevance of a large population, this study has set the sample size at 400 cases (n=400).

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Step: Sampling method

This study is quantitative research that surveyed by the purposive sampling based on the judgement of the researcher to reduce the generalization (Sharma, 2017). The sample selected the international tourist who had been visiting a Thai full-service restaurant in Bangkok. The criterion for selecting the restaurant was the restaurant should be authentic Thai style, giving the full-service and serve at least 20 tables which are referred to the medium size restaurant. For convenience, the researcher provided a list of the restaurants for tourists to check on.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Step: Research Instrument

This study used the questionnaire as the research instrument to collect the data. The questionnaire consisted of 80 questions in 4 parts: personal information, tourist foodservice consumption behavior, customer experience touchpoints performance at Thai full-service restaurant, and the customer consumption emotion. 5 level Likert scales was used to measure customer perception, customer satisfaction, and consumption emotion. These 5 levels of rating scales ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

This perception measurement covered customers' perception toward the touchpoints along six stages of the customer journey at Thai full-service restaurants: 1. Pre-arriving stage (6 items) 2. Arriving stage to the restaurant (5 items) 3. Entering the dining room stage to the dining area (9 items) 4. Menu presenting and meal order (8 items) 5. Customer enjoying food and beverage (7 items) 6—Billing and leaving the restaurant (5 items) and 1 item for overall

customer satisfaction. The consumption emotion measurement comprised 4 dimensions: 7 items of comfort, 4 items of Annoy, 3 items of Romance, and 6 items of Simulative.

The questionnaires were translated into English for ease of international tourists. The content validity of research instrument was evaluate by applying the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) of three experts; the result showed the acceptable range between 0.88 and 1.000 (Turner and Carlson, 2003). In addition, the pilot study was applied to investigate the reliability, questionnaires were distributed to 30 international tourists. Cronbach's alpha value, the reliability measurement, showed a value of 0.916, which reliability of the instrument was acceptable. In conclusion, the research instrument was admissible, with reliability and validity measurement, to collect the data.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Step:** Data collection

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed to international tourists who were traveling around Bangkok during January – May 2019 and had been visiting Thai full-service restaurants. The distribution questionnaire was nearby Grand Palace, Temple of dawn, Tha Tien, and Sukhumvit. Researcher and assistance screened the respondents by asking whether tourist has visited the restaurants as listed.

#### **Data Analysis**

According to the research hypothesis, this study presented the statistical analysis—the structural equation model for testing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and descriptive statistics for presenting percentage, frequency and mean. The researcher analyzed the data with a statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and with AMOS (version 22) to examine the hypothesis. This statistical software is an appropriate method for research questions proposed and structural equation modeling (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). The confirmatory factor analysis is examined to confirm the relationship between a set of variables and supports the theoretical concept under the area of study. The stage of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of each variable is established for this study, which is divided into two sets of variables; 1. Perception of customer experience touchpoints along the six stages of customer journey 2. Consumption emotion of customer after they have experienced the foodservice consumption in their customer journey

### **Research Result**

The research finding reveals the international tourist's perspective on each stage's performance during the customer journey. Tourists perceived the experience touchpoints

along six-stage of the customer journey that all stages are at a high-performance level. The highest score the performance falls at the period during customer enjoying food and beverage ( $\bar{x} = 3.98$ ). Followed by the menu presenting and food ordering ( $\bar{x} = 3.92$ ), during the billing and customer leaving ( $\bar{x} = 3.87$ ), entering the restaurant ( $\bar{x} = 3.77$ ), pre-arriving at the restaurant ( $\bar{x} = 3.75$ ) and the least score is arriving at the restaurant ( $\bar{x} = 3.70$ ).

**Table 1** Mean and Standard deviation of perception of the customer experience touchpoint along the 6 stages of customer journey at Thai full-service restaurant

Performance of experience touchpoint at each stage of the customer journey	Level of opinion			
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Evaluation	Rank
Pre-Arriving at the restaurant	3.75	.627	Efficient	5
Arriving at the restaurant	3.70	.594	Efficient	6
Entering the restaurant	3.77	.551	Efficient	4
Menu presenting and food ordering	3.92	.584	Efficient	2
Enjoying food and beverage	3.98	.517	Efficient	1
Billing and customer leaving	3.87	.546	Efficient	3

According to the research objective, the study reveals as the follow

**Objective 1** To purpose the influence of customer experience towards customer satisfaction

The study resulted of each confirmed factor analyses need to match the overall model fit and the criteria for construct validity. The model fit of a confirmatory factor of perception of touchpoint at six stages along the customer journey. The goodness of fit measures showed a good result of each chi-square/df criteria at 2.223, which was acceptable. The other criteria are Goodness of Fit Statistic (GFI) at 0.989, Adjust Goodness of Fit Statistic (AGFI) at 0.916, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) at 0.994, Normed-Fit Index (NFI) 0.990, and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) at 0.009. This meant that the measurement model customer experience touchpoint is fit and can use for a structural model evaluation.

The second measurement model shows the consumption emotions. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out following a multi-dimensionality construct of four consumption emotion components: comfort, annoy, stimulated, and romance. The model fit the confirmatory factor of consumption emotions. The goodness of fit measures shows a good result of each chi-square/df criteria at 1.139, which is acceptable. The other criteria are as Goodness of Fit Statistic (GFI) at 0.999, Goodness of Fit Statistic (AGFI) 0.989 Comparative Fit

Index (CFI) at 0.999, Normed-Fit Index (NFI) 0.995, and Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) at 0.013. This means the measurement model consumption emotion is fit and can use for a structural model evaluation.

After checking, the model fit to the model criteria of goodness fit statistic of each variable. Then, the structural equation model can be tested. This structural model assessment was constructed using four hundred sets of data (N=400) as the dependent variable. The proposed model was tested using the Amos 22 software package and its presented in the figure below. This structural equation appeared in figure 1. The model aimed to assess the hypothesized theoretical relationship between customer experience and consumption emotion that influences customer satisfaction.

**Table 2** Fit statistics of the initial model

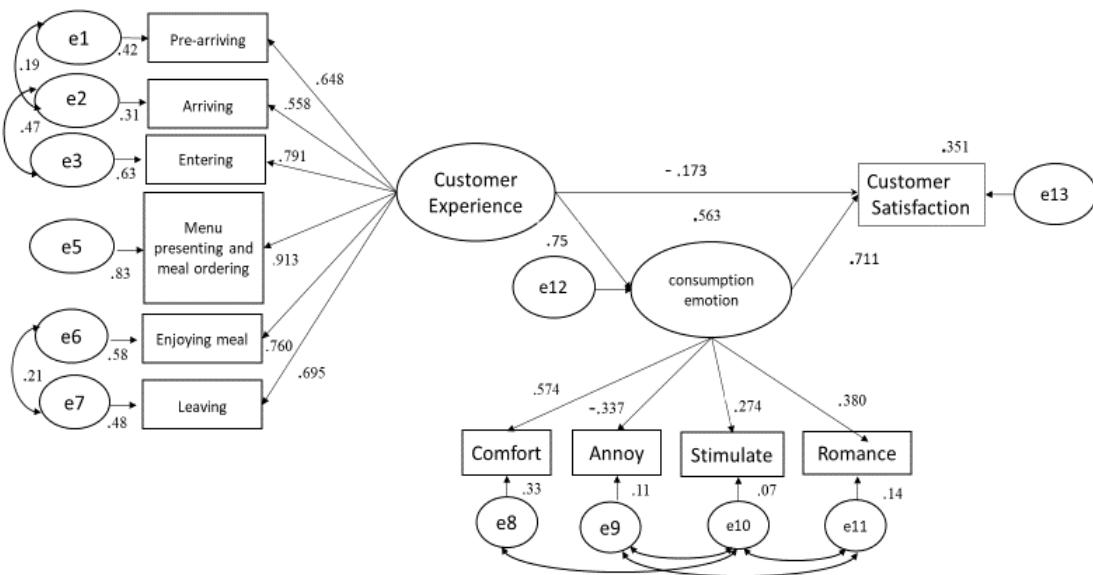
Model	N	Npar	CMIN/DF	RMR	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Theoretical Model	400	33	2.9659	0.018	0.916	0.952	0.966	0.065	0.018

R-Sqr: Customer Emotion =0.563, Customer Satisfaction = 0.351

Note: R-Sqr is the proportion of the variance for each endogenous variable explained by the causes.

According to table 2, the model fit of the confirmatory factor of customer experience shows the goodness of fit measures showed the good result of each criterion of chi-square/df at 2.965, which is the acceptable level. Goodness of Fit Statistic (GFI) at 0.916, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Statistic (AGFI) at 0.950, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) at 0.966, Normed-Fit Index (NFI) 0.950 and Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR) at 0.018. Therefore, the model of customer experience has a relationship with customer satisfaction in Thai full-service restaurants.

According to objective 1, the study showed the result in figure 1 and table 3. The structural equation model has concluded from the study's hypothesis that the customer experience insignificantly influence customer satisfaction. Still, customer experience has a significant indirect influence on customer satisfaction by passing through the consumption emotion.



**Figure 1** The result of conceptual framework: the influence of customer experience

**Table 3** The result of the customer experience effect on customer emotion and customer satisfaction towards customer satisfaction

Effect	Unstandardized	Standardized	Statistical
	Estimate of	Estimate of	Significance
	Effect	Effect	Level
Customer experience → Customer consumption emotion	.511	.750	***
Customer consumption emotion → Customer satisfaction	1.514	.711	.002**
Customer experience → Customer satisfaction	-.252	-.173	.309

Note: \*\* and \*\*\* represent statistical significance at the level of 0.05 and 0.001, respectively.

**Objective 2** To investigate the mediating effect of customer emotion between customer experience and customer satisfaction

According to objective 2, the result in Table 4 revealed that consumption emotion played the integral role between customer experience and customer satisfaction since the standard coefficient value between customer experience and customer satisfaction showed the negative influence of  $-.173$  while customer experience significantly influence to the consumption emotion at  $.711$  and customer emotion to the customer satisfaction at  $.750$ . Furthermore, when considering customer experience's influenced on customer satisfaction, the result showed that the indirect influence  $(.530)$  of consumption emotion as the mediator has more value than the total influence  $(.360)$ . Therefore, consumption emotion of customer as the mediating factor is very important factor between Customer experience and customer satisfaction.

**Table 4** The influence among customer experience, consumption emotion and customer satisfaction

Factor Effect	Consumption Emotion			Customer Satisfaction		
	Total effect	Indirect effect	Direct effect	Total Effect	Indirect effect	Direct effect
Customer experience	.750	.00	.750	.360	.530	-.173
Consumption emotion	-	-	-	.711	.00	.711

### New Body Knowledge

The previous studies indicated that customer experience directly influences customer satisfaction but the result of this study has revealed differently. The result from the study reveals that the customer experience at Thai full-service restaurants has shown an indirect influence to customer satisfaction but indirectly on customer satisfaction through the customer's consumption emotion. Therefore, to generate the customer experience at the Thai full-service restaurant to get the ultimate result of customer satisfaction, the restauranters may emphasize the experience touchpoint that creates the positive consumption emotions. Finally, customers will have customer satisfaction with Thai full-service restaurants.

Moreover, the model in Figure 1 has revealed that consumption emotion is mainly derived from the feeling of comfort (.574) and romance (.380). Hence the restaurant may design the experience touchpoint carefully based on the component that makes the customer feel comfortable. For example, the restaurant's ambiance should relax, which may be regarding the restaurant's lighting, decoration, and furniture. Furthermore, the communication between the menu and service provider should be clear and make the customer understand that food taste should be suitable to the customer's expectations.

### Discussion of research result

From the research result of 1<sup>st</sup> objective, it was found that customer experience insignificantly influences to customer satisfaction but show the significantly indirectly influence customer satisfaction bypass through customer emotion. In contrast, customer experience showed the significantly influence to customer consumption emotion directly. This is because to construct customer satisfaction are many required factors such as perceived service quality, customer mood, motion, social interaction, and experiences, which is similar to the study of

the Churchill, and Surprenant (1982). Therefore, the restaurateur may not just simply provide a product or service. Still, it may require and seek more for the interaction that generates the personal consumption (Walls, Okumus, Wang, and Kwun, 2011), Especially the tourist who seem to look for the extraordinary experience (Carù and Cova, 2003).

From the research result of 2<sup>nd</sup> objective, it was found that customer emotion is another factor that the researcher must focus on since it determines customer satisfaction stronger than customer experience itself. Therefore, the company should be more precisely focus on the development of customer experience touchpoints. This is because the restaurant operation component or the customer experience touchpoint is the antecedence of the customer emotional consumption which will lead to customer satisfaction which is consistent with the research work of Han, Back, and Barrett (2010), who indicated that understanding the multi-dimension of the customer emotional function can help the restaurateur to be able design and develop more sophisticated product and service that lead to the positive behavioral intention of a customer such as revisit to a restaurant. Thus, to enhance customer experiences and satisfaction, the restaurateur should design more sophisticated touchpoints along the customer journey while consuming at the restaurant. For example, a restaurateur can enhance the restaurant operation such as food taste, variety of choice, the freshness of material, service staff attitude, service staff ability, ambiance, and furniture (Han et al. 2010).

## Conclusion

Hence, the result of the right customer experience can reveal the influence of customer satisfaction, which can create the competitive advantage and lead to other positive behavior intention such as positive word of mouth and revisit the restaurant, which can help the restaurant to be sustainable growth in the highly competitive business.

## Suggestions

From the results of research, the research has suggested the suggestion as follow.

### 1. The suggestions from the research

From the research result of the 1<sup>st</sup> objective, it was found that customer experience is not influence the customer satisfaction directly but indirectly influence through the consumption emotion. Therefore, the other restaurant and the restaurant business incubator, can apply this model to investigate how the customer experience in their restaurant can affect

the customer emotion under the assumption that the positive consumption emotion can enhance the customer satisfaction.

From the research result of the 2<sup>nd</sup> objective, it was found that the customer emotion as the mediating factor has play the important role among customer experience, consumption emotions and customer satisfaction. Customer experience indirectly influence the customer satisfaction through the consumption emotion. Therefore, the other restaurant or the restaurant business consultant can apply this model and be more emphasized on the factors that influence the consumption emotion. Hence force, the restaurant can have the better design of the touch point that helps to elevate the consumption emotion.

## 2. The suggestions for the future research

The future research should involve the following issues

2.1 This model should be applied in a specific restaurant to reveal the best result of the customer experience and consumption emotion from the specific restaurant. Each restaurant has a different pattern of designed touchpoints along the customer journey.

2.2 The study should focus on a specific group of customers since the customer from different demographic profiles and other behaviors might perceive the restaurant's touchpoint differently, therefore the next research can add the mediator such as the demographic profile of tourist such as nationality or age group to be more specific on the result of each target market.

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