



Antecedents to Thai health food restaurant guest loyalty: A SEM analysis

Sommanasak Phadungjit *

Faculty of Administration and Management
King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL)
Thailand

E-mail: 56611241@kmitl.ac.th

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-9586-2081

Assist. Prof. Dr. Puris Sornsaruht

Faculty of Administration and Management
King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL)
Thailand

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-6054-3953

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Paitoon Pimdee

Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology
King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL)
Thailand

Orcid ID: 0000-0002-3724-2885

Corresponding author*

Abstract

Globally, major shifts are occurring in dietary patterns with numerous studies suggesting that eating healthy food is an ever-growing consumer trend. This study, therefore, investigates the interrelationships and effects of marketing communications (MAR), recognition of value (RV), guest trust (GT), and guest satisfaction (GS) on health food restaurant guest loyalty (GL) in Thailand. LISREL 9.1 was used to conduct both a CFA and SEM analysis of the nine hypotheses from a sample of 484 health food restaurants' guests. Results revealed that the factors affecting GL from highest to lowest, were MAR, GT, GS, and RV, with a total effect (TE) value of 0.92, 0.43, 0.22 and 0.17, respectively. Additionally, the amount of variance that GL shared with the others in the analysis was 84% (R^2). Furthermore, the authors suggest that MAR is now playing an essential role in the eyes of today's digitally enabled consumer, and that restaurant entrepreneurs need to embrace and understand new social media platforms. Restaurant entrepreneurs must also be aware of quick technological change and the reinvention of the traditional dining experience, which is now forcing change on how the restaurant sector operates. Finally, guest loyalty is of critical importance as numerous studies have concluded that the desired outcome of the marketing process is guest loyalty.

Keywords: Guest satisfaction, guest trust, hospitality, marketing communications, recognition of value.

Introduction

Factors contributing to today's consumer desire for healthy food and beverages includes aging Asian and Western societies, urbanization, rising incomes and trade liberalization (Kearney, 2010), a fast-paced lifestyle, food safety problems (Cerini, 2016), and the rise in obesity, diabetics, heart disease, and other potentially harmful health problems (International Bottled Water Association, 2018; Peters, 2017, Saleh, 2019; World Health Organisation, 2003). Moreover, diet and lifestyle-related diseases are also projected to reach epidemic proportions across the ASEAN community

(Association of Southeast Asian Nations) by 2030 (KMPG, 2018). Furthermore, from the 2018 survey of American consumers by Greenwald & Associates (Foodinsight, 2018), cardiovascular health was chosen as the number one reason for healthy food selection (Figure 1), followed by the need for weight loss and weight management.

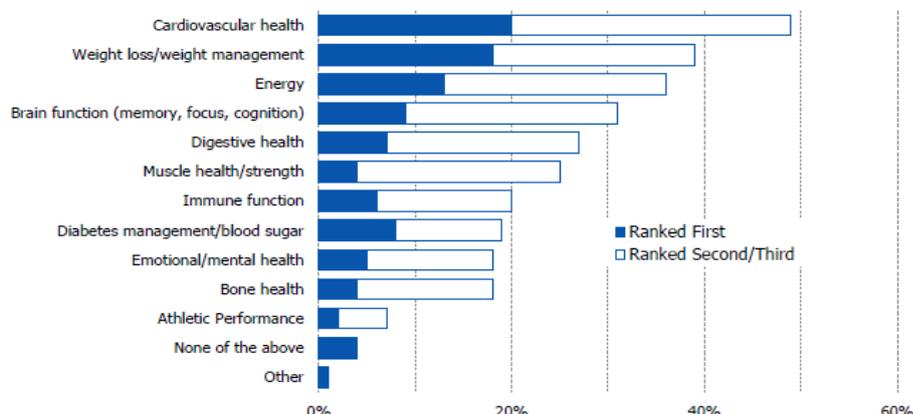


Figure 1: American consumer healthy food interest reasons
 Source: Foodinsight (2018).

Also, according to Cerini (2016), Chinese health & wellness Millennials are leading the way as new lifestyle status symbols, with the Chinese health and wellness market in 2020 projected to reach \$70 billion (Wu, Xia, Kuo & Liao, 2014). Moreover, KPMG (2016) has reported that consumers now expect healthier food options and have higher expectations. Restaurant entrepreneurs must also be aware of quick technological change and the reinvention of the traditional dining experience, which is now forcing change on how the restaurant sector operates. Also, according to Shah, Sanghvi, and Brahmabhatt (2017), because of changes within the society, better education, better developed culinary cultures, healthier food awareness, and cultural influences, dining expectations have evolved.

Thailand has also been identified as an H&W market to watch, with wellness tourism projected to be valued at over \$10.6 billion (Pitigraisorn, 2018), making Thailand the 13th largest H&W market in the world. Other studies have stated that there is also a strong demand for healthy food and innovative local brands (Sirikeratikul, 2016; W&S Market Research, 2015). However, eating healthy is not just a trend and not just limited to Bangkok urbanites as in a recent healthy food study, over 45% of the Thai respondents indicated they often to usually purchased healthy food items (Figure 2). In Vietnam, 48.2% of the respondents said they wanted to purchase healthy food items, while in Indonesia, the number was 28.8%.

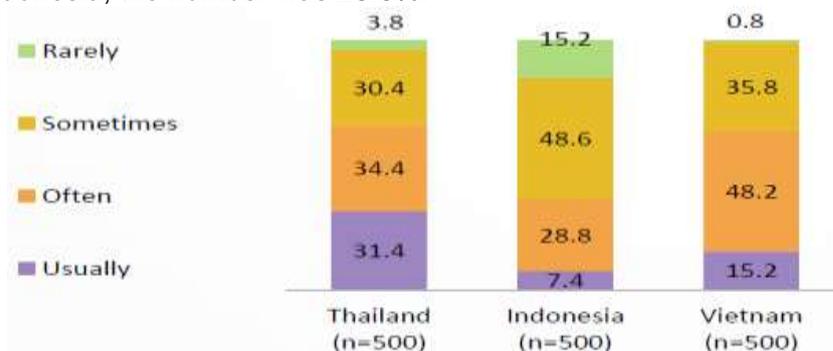


Figure 2: Southeast Asian consumer healthy eating purchasing frequency
 Source: W&S Market Research (2015).



Furthermore, Roman and Reichel (2019) have stated that restaurant entrepreneurs who improve the nutritional profile of their menu make good business sense. Moreover, the presentation of the food, its freshness, taste, and the number of healthy options have been suggested as essential to a restaurant's service capability (Namkung and Jang 2008). Also, in Thailand's recent past, finding restaurants that served up health-conscious consumer dishes was challenging. However, today, numerous restaurants catering to health-conscious diners have sprung up in Bangkok and elsewhere around Thailand. Many are vegetarian restaurants that specialize in vegan cooking or the use of pure organic products. Other Bangkok chefs pride themselves in using bio diversified local products while working closely with local farmers (Constable, 2019). Some have also advertised achieving a zero carbon footprint and giving back to their local communities.

As we can see, 'healthy' is in the eye of the beholder, with diners looking far beyond their waste lines when they seek out 'health food restaurants'. As such, the authors had to broaden the scope of their investigation into other aspects on the trail to establishing *guest loyalty* (GL) within the health food restaurant sector. Across the globe, fast-food has become the rage, but with expanding waistlines, how healthy the dish is has become more and more essential. Consumers who use social media and the Internet for product research and ordering have thus become a critical aspect for restaurant entrepreneurs to understand as they market their brands. Thus, social media has become a two-way communications channel between the restaurant customer and the restaurant's staff/owners, where orders can be placed, and delivery instructions are given (Blut, Chowdhry, Mittal & Brock, 2015; Zemblyté, 2015)

As such, *marketing communications* (MAR) has become a reoccurring theme throughout the literature as part of a restaurant's required capabilities, which with the advent of social media, has had its meaning and forms expanded with the advent of new technological innovations (Ivkov et al., 2016). Usually, MAR has included advertising, promotion and news, sales staff support, and public relations and direct marketing (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). Wu and Liang (2009) have also added that a staff's professional skills and their interaction with the diners were also crucial for a restaurant's service capability. Canny (2013) and Dulen (1999) also added that the quality of the food, the physical environment, and staff service were the most important aspects of the quality of service in a restaurant's capability.

However, with the change in consumers' lifestyles and behaviors, there has been a need for the creation of entrepreneurial innovation within the restaurant business, which can include the opening of online sales and marketing channels (Ivkov et al., 2016). Customer relationship management (CRM) technology can also be applied to increase sales while bringing in new brands to give customers more choices (Sirikeratikul, 2016).

Park (2009) has stated that for restaurants to obtain clear brand *recognition of value* (RV), restaurant entrepreneurs must provide convenience, value, and healthy alternatives to their patrons over their competition. Consumers are also looking for healthy foods and authentic brands (KPMG, 2016), with ASEAN emerging as an international growth hub for premium foods and the H&W industry (KPMG, 2018) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. ASEAN food for health drivers.
Source: Study from KPMG (2018).

Guest trust (GT) within the hospitality sector has also been stated to directly influence a hotel employee's effectiveness and the loyalty of its guest (Skogland & Siguaw, 2004). Delgado-Ballester (2004) also stated that GT in a brand is dependent on the expectation of brand reliability and the vendor's good intentions. Furthermore, Na Thalang and Sornsarut (2019) identified GT in a brand as also involving value recognition and the brand's reliability. Figueiras (2017) has also added that young Chinese consumers don't trust the ability of their regulatory officials to ensure their food's safety, with younger, digitally-enabled consumers wanting quality brands with verified supply chains (Peters, 2017).

Guest satisfaction (GS) has been investigated by a multitude of scholars and has been often used for a firm's performance indication as well as an indicator in Balanced Scorecard (BSC) studies (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Also, according to Silk (1998), 60% of the *Fortune 1000* companies have made efforts to use the BSC. As such, there can be no doubt as to the importance of GS, but for this study, the authors wanted to highlight what elements from an Asian health food restaurant customer and restaurant entrepreneur's perspective were essential for GS.

Oliver (1999) has suggested that consumer loyalty and customer satisfaction are linked inextricably and that GS will lead to a brand's loyalty, which then leads to a firm's higher profits. Also, Saad Andaleeb and Conway (2006) have reported that restaurant GS comes from frontline staff, pricing, and the quality of the food. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) also added their 'price' to the four P marketing mix discussion. In small Jordanian restaurants, food and service quality positively affected GS as well (Al-Tit, 2015). In Korean small, fast food-food restaurants, Ahn (2015) reported that food quality was also a significant factor in a restaurant's GS.

Also, maintaining *guest loyalty* (GL) in a highly competitive restaurant industry has become a critical issue for an entrepreneur's success and survivability. Challenges are coming from a variety of directions including lifestyle changes, economic status, heightened competitive awareness, and rising disposable income. Hellier, Geursen, Carr, and Rickard (2003) examined repurchase intention and determined it was influenced by the quality of the service, how satisfied the customer was, their past loyalty, the expected switching cost and their brand preference. Furthermore,

Reichheld and Schefter (2000) reported that service quality, guest satisfaction, and guest trust are essential factors in establishing customer loyalty and that a reduction in the defection rate by just 5% generates from 25% to 85% more profits, depending on the industry involved (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Additionally, firms potentially can increase their profits by nearly 100% by retaining just 5% more of their customers.

Therefore, from the introduction's overview and literature synopsis, the following objectives, conceptualized model and hypotheses were created:

Objectives

1. To study the determining factors influencing Thai health-food restaurant guest loyalty (GL).
2. To use initial confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) to confirm the aspects of the variables used in the subsequent SEM to determine the interrelationships and final effects on Thai health-food restaurant GL.

Conceptual Model

The authors, therefore, determined that guest loyalty (GL) was affected by a variety of variables, including marketing communications (MAR), recognition of value (RV), guest trust (GT), and guest satisfaction (GS). From this, the authors conceptualized the nine hypotheses and framework shown (Figure 4).

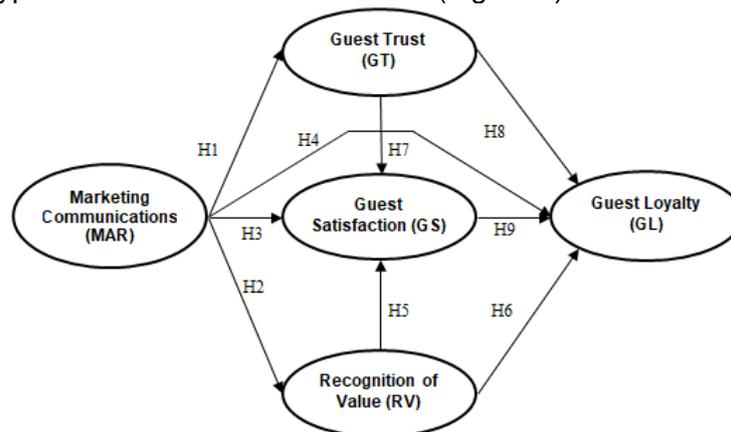


Figure 4. Conceptual Model
Source: The authors' theory and literature review.

- H1: MAR affects directly GT.*
- H2: MAR affects directly RV.*
- H3: MAR affects directly GS*
- H4: MAR affects directly GL.*
- H5: RV affects directly GS.*
- H6: RV affects directly GL.*
- H7: GT affects directly GS.*
- H8: GT affects directly GL.*
- H9: GS affects directly GL.*



Methodology

Population and Sample Size Determination

The population for the study consisted of 165 health food restaurants in three regional provinces in Thailand in 2019 (Table 1). Initially, a target of 500 customers was established, which was taken from sample size theory and non-response sampling error discussions (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2013; Schumacker and Lomax, 2010).

Research Tools

The questionnaire consisted of five parts, in which part 1 contained eight items about the diner's personal information, including their sex, age, relationship status, occupation, income, the day most frequently used to visit a health food restaurant and frequency of visits (Table 2).

The survey questionnaire from parts 2 through 5 made use of a 5-level scale to access the restaurant patron's opinions about each of the questionnaire items, with '5' indicating a *'strong agreement'*, '3' indicating *'moderate agreement'*, and '1' indicating *'least agreement.'* Additionally, from the experts' feedback and the pre-test of 30 questionnaires, Cronbach's α was determined to be from 0.72 – 0.94 (Tables 3 & 4), which was ranked as *'good to excellent'* (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). Finally, in part 2 there were five questionnaire items for MAR which had $\alpha = 0.72$, while part 3 contained four questionnaire items for RV which had an $\alpha = 0.92$. In part 4 there were four items concerning GL which had with $\alpha = 0.94$), and finally, part 5 had four items on GT with $\alpha = 0.88$.

Data Collection

After consultation with the university's faculty doctoral advisory committee, permission was granted for the authors to contact a pre-identified list of health food restaurant owners in each of three regions in Thailand. The authors initiated contact with the proprietors of each identified health-food restaurant mostly by use of e-mail and Line social media. After permission was granted to the authors to conduct their survey, times were arranged for graduate assistant teams to collect data from an initial target of 500 Thai health food restaurant customers from August 2019 to September 2019. This team was sent to 66 health food restaurants during three service periods throughout the day. Every fifth diner was selected and asked to answer the questionnaire, of which a 96.80% response rate was obtained. From the initial 500 questionnaires collected, 484 questionnaires were found to be free of response error and suitable for data analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Thai health-food restaurant sample target ($n=484$).

Thai Region	Province/Area	Identified Health Food Restaurants		Sample (persons)	
		Total	Sample	Planned	Collected
Northern	Chiang Mai	50	20	152	147
Central	Bangkok	88	36	272	266
Northeast (Isan)	Khon Kaen	27	10	76	71
Totals	-	165	66	500	484

Source: Authors' questionnaire sample collection analysis



Data Analysis

The initial CFA and final SEM were conducted with LISREL 9.1 between the variables influencing a Thai health food restaurant's GL. Interpretation of the accuracy of the SEM on GL made use of goodness-of-fit (GoF) criteria detailed in Table 3. If the calculated statistic passed the established GoF criteria, it supported the model is consistent with the empirical data.

Results

Health Food Restaurant Customer's Characteristics

Table 2 shows part 1's questionnaire results. From it, we can see that 51.03% of the surveyed restaurant's diners were female. Also, only 8.68% were between 31-40 years of age, while younger and older customers were significantly higher. Additionally, 67.77% indicated they were single, while 45.66% indicated they had an undergraduate degree. Also, 39.88% reported they were still studying, which would support the statistic that 36.36% made less than 10,000 baht per month (\$330). Also, as might be expected due to being students with low incomes, 55.58% reported that they only ate at health food restaurants one or fewer times per week.

Table 2. Thai health-food restaurant diner analysis ($n=484$).

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
• Male	237	48.97
• Female	247	51.03
Total	484	100
Age		
• 20 or younger	110	22.73
• 21-30	121	25.00
• 31-40	42	8.68
• 41-50	73	15.08
• Over 50	138	28.51
Total	484	100
Relationship status		
• Single	328	67.77
• Married	134	27.69
• Other	22	4.55
Total	484	100
Education level		
• Primary school	16	3.31
• Secondary / Vocational	94	19.42
• Diploma (High school/vocational)	34	7.02
• Bachelor	221	45.66
• Postgraduate	119	24.59
Total	484	100
Profession		
• Student	193	39.88
• Employee	60	12.40
• Civil servant/state enterprise	75	15.50
• Personal business/self-employed/trader	89	18.39
• Domestic/housekeeper	43	8.88
• Other	24	4.96
Total	484	100
Monthly Income in Thai baht		
• Less than 10,000 (\$330)	176	36.36
• 10,001-20,000	53	10.95
• 20,001-30,000	72	14.88



	Frequency	Percent
• 30,001-40,000	46	9.50
• 40,001-50,000	52	10.74
• More than 50,000	85	17.56
Total	484	100

Which day of the week are you most likely to eat at a health food restaurant?

• Saturday - Sunday and public holidays	301	62.19
• Monday - Friday	122	25.21
• Other. Such as convenient religious holiday	61	12.60
Total	484	100

How frequently do you eat at a health food restaurant?

• No more than one day	269	55.58
• Between 2-3 days	169	34.92
• Between 4-6 days	29	5.99
• Every day	17	3.51
Total	484	100

Source: Authors' survey

Results from the CFA

In Table 3 we can see the analysis results of the GoF conducted prior to the SEM.

Table 3. GoF analysis.

Indices Criteria	Criteria	Supporting theory	Study Values
χ^2	$p \geq 0.05$	Rasch (1980).	0.84
χ^2/df – degrees of freedom	≤ 2.00	Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén (1989)	0.84
RMSEA - Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	≤ 0.05 (very good)	Steiger (2000)	0.00
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	≥ 0.90	Jöreskog, Olsson, and Fan (2016)	0.98
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	≥ 0.90	Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008)	0.96
Root Means Square Residual (RMR)	≤ 0.05	Byrne (2010)	0.02
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	≤ 0.05	Byrne (2010)	0.02
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	≥ 0.90	Schumacker and Lomax (2010)	0.99
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	≥ 0.90	Bentler (1990)	1.00
Cronbach's alpha (α)	≥ 0.70	Schumacker and Lomax (2010)	0.72-0.94

Source: Authors' CFA testing and literature review

Tables 4 and 5 show the LISREL 9.1 CFA analysis results.

Table 4. External latent variable results for MAR.

Construct	α	AVE	CR	Observed variables	loading	R ²
Marketing communications (MAR)	0.72	0.48	0.70	Advertising (x1)	0.28	.18
				Personal communications (x2)	0.71	.50
				Sales promotion (x3)	0.92	.84

Source: Authors' final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing



Table 5. Internal latent variables CFA results for GL, GS, CT and RV.

Constructs	α	AVE	CR	Observed variables	loading	R ²
Guest Loyalty (GL)	0.84	0.52	0.81	Repurchase intention (y1)	0.82	.67
				Customer trust (y2)	0.91	.82
				Brand (y3)	0.58	.34
				Word-of-Mouth (WoM) (y4)	0.51	.25
Guest Satisfaction (GS)	0.94	0.74	0.92	Service location (y5)	0.87	.75
				Customer service (y6)	0.91	.83
				Quality of products/services (y7)	0.81	.66
				Value of goods and services (y8)	0.86	.74
Guest Trust (CT)	0.88	0.60	0.81	Service reputation (y9)	0.72	.52
				Quality products (y10)	0.77	.60
				Reliable (y11)	0.82	.67
Recognition of Value (RV)	0.92	0.55	0.78	Products (y12)	0.71	.50
				Image (y13)	0.76	.57
				Psychology (y14)	0.75	.56

Source: Authors' final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing

In Table 6 we find the correlation matrix of the latent variable analysis, with the diagonal numbers, are **bold** and set to 1.00 by convention, while the off-diagonal entries beneath the bold entries are the correlation coefficients (*r*) of the variable pairs. From Table 6's relationships, we see the strongest correlations between RV and GS (.87) and GT and GS (.81) and the weakest correlations between GT and MAR (.60) and GT and GL (.67). Finally, the results from the analysis for the average variance extracted (AVE) and the \sqrt{AVE} are also detailed (Hyde and Grieve, 2018). Good internal consistency was also established as construct reliability (CR) was from 0.65 to 0.92 (Ratner, 2009).

Table 6. Correlation matrix of the construct analysis.

Constructs	MAR	GL	GS	CT	RV
MAR	1.00				
GL	.73**	1.00			
GS	.70**	.76**	1.00		
GT	.60**	.67**	.81**	1.00	
RV	.76**	.78**	.87**	.74**	1.00
AVE	0.40	0.48	0.74	0.64	0.60
CR	0.65	0.78	0.92	0.84	0.82
\sqrt{AVE}	0.63	0.69	0.86	0.80	0.77

Source: Authors' final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing, **Sig. \leq .01

Correlation Decomposition

Table 7 shows the values from the correlation decomposition (Bollen, 1987; Xue, 2007), and verifies that all the constructs positively influenced a Thai health-food restaurant guest loyalty (GL). Furthermore, in Table 7 we can see the amount of variance one variance shares with other variables in the analysis, which in this case for GL (R²) was 84% (Kim & Mueller, 1978). Furthermore, the influence of the four latent variables on GL was shown to most affected by MAR (TE = 0.92), GT (TE = 0.43), GS (TE = 0.22), and RV (TE = 0.17). Finally, Figure 5 shows the final SEM testing, while Table 8 shows the results from the nine hypotheses testing.

Table 7. Correlation decomposition of the latent variable effects

Dependent variables	R ²	Effect	Independent variables			
			MAR	RV	GT	GS



Guest Loyalty (GL)	.84	DE	0.31**	0.13	0.33**	0.22*
		IE	0.61**	0.04	0.10	-
		TE	0.92**	0.17*	0.43**	0.22*
Guest Satisfaction (GS)	.78	DE	0.30**	0.19*	0.44**	
		IE	0.58**	-	-	
		TE	0.88**	0.19*	0.44**	
Guest Trust (GT)	.63	DE	0.80**			
		IE	-			
		TE	0.80**			
Recognition of Value (RV)	1.00	DE	1.00**			
		IE	-			
		TE	1.00**			

*Sig. ≤ .05, **Sig. ≤ .01

Source: Authors' final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing

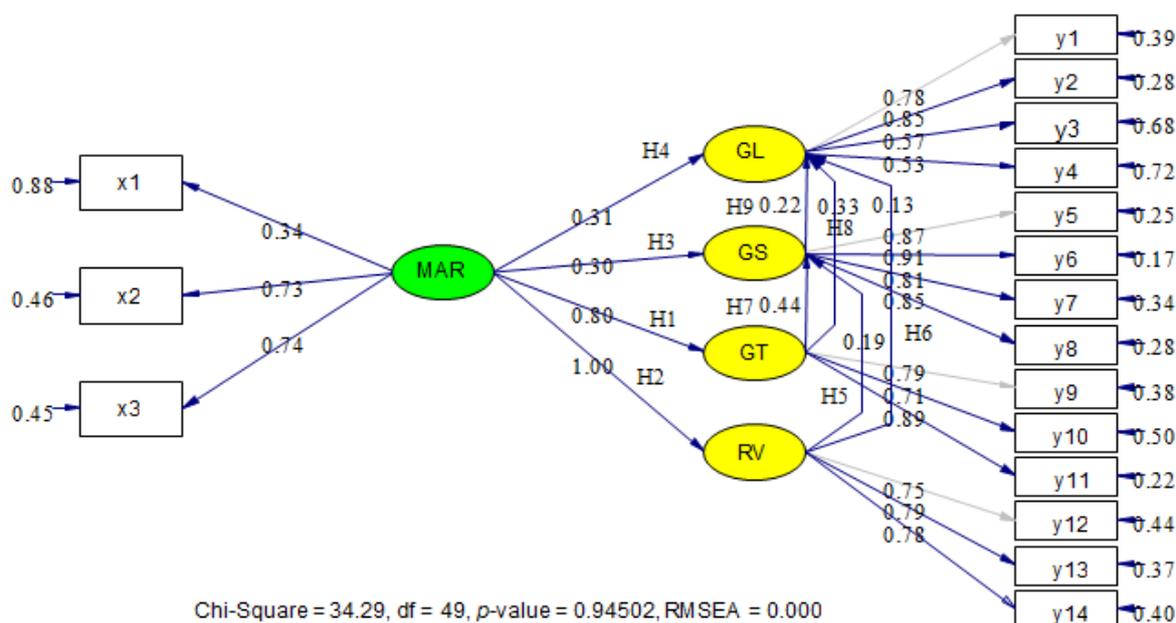


Figure 5. SEM of Variables that Influence GL.
 Source: Authors' final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing

Table 8. Final hypotheses testing results.

Hypothesis statement	Correlation coefficients	t-test values	Confirmation
H1: MAR affects directly GT	0.80	15.31**	Confirmed
H2: MAR affects directly RV	1.00	21.28**	Confirmed
H3: MAR affects directly GS	0.30	3.60**	Confirmed
H4: MAR affects directly GL	0.31	4.84**	Confirmed
H5: RV affects directly GS	0.19	2.49*	Confirmed
H6: RV affects directly GL	0.13	1.47	Unconfirmed
H7: GT affects directly GS	0.44	5.34**	Confirmed
H8: GT affects directly GL	0.33	3.51**	Confirmed
H9: GS affects directly GL	0.22	2.22*	Confirmed

*p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Source: Final LISREL 9.1 SEM testing



Discussion

Confirmation of a consumer's health food restaurant guest loyalty (GL) came from the study's SEM analysis, with the TE values revealing that the factors affecting GL from highest to lowest, were MAR, GT, GS and RV, with a TE value of 0.92, 0.43, 0.22 and 0.17, respectively. Additionally, the GoF assessment for common variance was calculated at 84% (R^2) for GL, with eight of the nine hypotheses found to be supported from the LISREL 9.1 SEM results shown in Table 8.

Marketing Communications (MAR)

Hypothesis H1 testing results showed that there was a direct and very strong positive influence in the relationship from MAR to GT with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.80$, the t-test value = 15.31, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$ (Moore, Notz and Flinger, 2013).

From the data analysis, sales promotion (x3) and the staff's communications (x2) for MAR were shown to be important variables to the study's health food restaurant customers with $\bar{x} = 0.92$ and $\bar{x} = 0.71$, respectively. Other restaurant studies have confirmed these findings which reported that staff and price influenced a diner's RV (Kara, Kaynak & Kucukemiroglu, 1995; Saad Andaleeb & Conway, 2006).

Furthermore, Hypothesis H2 testing results also showed that there was a direct and extremely strong relationship from MAR to RV with the correlation coefficient $r = 1.00$, the t-test value = 21.28, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$. However, H3's relationship between MAR and GS was weak but positive as the correlation coefficient $r = 0.30$, the t-test value = 3.60, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$. Furthermore, the study's results are consistent with another study on Thai fast-food restaurants in which it was reported that the restaurant's staff marketing communication skills played the most significant role in GL (Tanctatswas, Sornsaruht, and Pimdee, 2019). Moreover, Hypothesis H4 testing results showed that there was a direct but weak positive relationship from MAR to GL with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.31$, the t-test value = 4.84, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$.

This is supported by a study from three European countries in which restaurant management agreed that their patrons demand more information on a restaurant's dishes (e.g. ingredients and its healthiness) for their money and are less tolerant when this information is lacking (Ivkov et al., 2016). Solutions that were suggested by the study's authors included Quick Response Codes (QRs) in the menus and on restaurant websites.

Recognition of Value (RV)

However, Hypothesis H5 testing results indicated that the relationship between RV to GA was weak but positive with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.19$, the t-test value = 2.49, and the significance was $p \leq 0.05$. However, H6's relationship from RV to GL failed to reach the study's criteria and was therefore unsupported with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.13$ and the t-test value = 1.47, with no significant value.

However, there is support with the hospitality and restaurant sector for RV as in Hong, Choi and Chu (2000) and Torres and Kline (2006) determined that travelers from Asia



place the most importance on value, while Western guests valued room quality most in GL.

Once again, from the Foodinsight (2018) survey of American consumers, the taste was ranked number one in purchasing decisions for food and beverages, the price was second, whereas, familiarity was third. This is consistent with Clarke (1998) who also indicated that a food's flavor and taste are essential in the food selection process. The fortunate thing for Thai health food restaurants, Thai ingredients have always been renowned for their savory taste and healthy ingredients, reasonable prices, and more recently in Western cultures, familiarity (Cheung, 2017).

Guest Trust (GT)

Additionally, Hypothesis H7 testing results showed that there was a direct and moderate positive effect from GT to GS with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.44$, the t-test value = 5.34, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$. However, Hypothesis H8 testing results indicated that the relationship between GT to GL was weak but positive with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.33$, the t-test value = 3.51, and the significance was $p \leq 0.01$.

Guest Satisfaction (GS)

Finally, Hypothesis H9 testing results indicated that the relationship between GS to GL was weak but positive with the correlation coefficient $r = 0.22$, the t-test value = 2.22, and the significance was $p \leq 0.05$.

Guest Loyalty (GL)

Finally, the study's observed variables for guest loyalty (GL) showed the importance of *customer trust* (y2) was of very significant importance to the health food restaurant respondents with $\bar{x} = 0.91$. Significantly behind this was the brand's importance ($\bar{x} = 0.58$) and guest's WoM (y4) with ($\bar{x} = 0.51$).

The overwhelming significance of customer trust is supported by research from Morgan and Hunt (1994), who stated that trust plays a critical role in determining commitment between organizations and customers. Also, trust is the foundation of communication relationships in providing customer service, with GT directly affecting GL (Yap, Ramayah and Shahidan, 2012). Finally, numerous studies have concluded that the desired outcome of the marketing process is a loyal customer (Otengei, Changha, Kaskende & Ntayi, 2014; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012).

Conclusion and Implications

The authors set out to determine the importance of the underlying factors concerning a Thai health food restaurant's customer satisfaction (GL). After the initial identification from the theory of four related latent variables (MAR, RV, GS, and GT), both a CFA and SEM were used to find both the interrelationships and the variables affecting GL. Results showed a significant and positive influence of marketing communications (MAR) on a Thai health food restaurant's GL. Furthermore, the variance of the factors influencing GL (R^2) was 100%, with the factors influencing GL being MAR, GT, GS, and RV, with a TE value of 0.92, 0.43, 0.22 and 0.17, respectively.

Although research confirms that personal contact with staff and the management entrepreneur(s) is extremely influential in GL, the methods of 'personal contact' have expanded into the technological realm and now include social media platforms and the



never-ending use of smartphones. It seems now having an aversion for these technological marvels is a sure death-wise for a restaurant entrepreneur in modern, Asian society. Furthermore, research has estimated that there are over 150,000 restaurants in Thailand, and competition is fierce. As such, many new establishments fail within a short period from their start-up; therefore, great attention to GL is of critical importance as numerous studies have concluded that the desired outcome of the marketing process is a loyal customer.

Limitations

The small geographical sample could potentially be a limiting factor in the study. There is no doubt that Asian and Western diners view the physical facility and their staff interactions differently, so this could also be a limiting factor. Social media has also become an area within the restaurant sector which requires more research. Also, as society's age and health food customers retire, is 'delivery speed' still of significant importance? However, this study is original and timely as it identified the growing importance of Thai health food restaurants, whose sector is expected to grow significantly.

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