

# THAI SERVICE DESIGN INFLUENCING CUSTOMERS, EXPERTS, AND ENTREPRENEURS USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THAI FOOD TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

**Aim:** This study aims to assess the Thai service design affect the social media adoption of customers, entrepreneurs, and experts in Thai food tourism. **Materials and Methods:** The mixed method was administered in this study. The qualitative was first conducted by focus group to assess DINESERV and DINESCAPE from food expertise and entrepreneurs. Then, the quantitative performed by multiple regression to examine the customers' perspectives. **Results and discussions:** The qualitative results indicate that the reliability in DINESERV is highly vital. Paradoxically, the DINESCAPE from the expert view point highlights on facility and aesthetic, while the restaurant entrepreneurs focus on products and services. As the customers' aspect the variables are differed relating to the independent variable tested. **Conclusions:** The combination of DINESERV and DINESCAPE are crucial to social media adoption in Thai food tourism. The Thainess service design has various angles to implement both practically and theoretically. The findings could, further, deliver in hospitality and tourism courses in university and college.

**Key words:** Service design, Thainess, Thai Food Tourism, DINESERV, DINSCAPE, social media self-efficacy

## INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, distinctively, the restaurant business is one of the vital values in the service sector and obviously having a great deal to its economic. The turnover amount of fortune accounted for 4.7 percent of the country's total service sector and gross domestic product (GDP). It derived from the investment and business expansion of the incumbents and new entrants to the restaurant business. Despite the fact of business expansion, still the challenges occurred as such the contraction of same store sales shrink more than a million Thai baht, and the operating costs are getting higher. Meanwhile, the customer behavior swiftly changes overtime. Therefore, the entrepreneurs must consider the cost controlling, maintain good quality of food, and elevate the services to meet customers' expectation. In addition, the advancement of technology, it is required for entrepreneurs to adopt and associate to the trends of a complex restaurant business chain (Kasikorn Research Center, 2020). Conceptually, to deviate the loss and the changes of external environment is integrating the food to tourism. Since, tourists travel with an appetite to try local recipes at original source of food production. Many of tourists adore exploring

various restaurants locally, appreciating the customs and uniqueness lifestyle at touristic destination. As refer to UNWTO research indicated more than third of the total number of tourists devoted to food. That is consistent to (Mari, 2021) stressed the food tourism has become one of the primary reasons for travelling. Likewise, (Nithiprapa, 2020) cited the most popular food and beverage website in Thailand namely “Wongnai” revealed the increase number of restaurants opened 8.50 percent in 2020. Where, the majority of new entrant restaurants are Thai restaurants. As stated by the Tourism Authority of Thailand-TAT (2017) forecasted the food tourism trends are growing, specifically, to visitors who sought for uniqueness of local identity through the food consumption. They like to relish and embrace new experiences on identity, culture, and local way of life. The Thainess was blended and used representing uniquely of Thai restaurants, which result to competitive edge (Nangklaphivat, 2017). Yet, another issue is the customers’ behaviors that have immense impact on restaurant entrepreneurs. Therefore, scholars have created the tools DINESERV (Bougoure and Neu, 2010) and DINESCAPE (Ryu, 2005) to assess restaurant service quality serving the needs of customer. On the account of modern technology and trends, the new generation prioritized on internet connection and employ social media searching for information (Kankaew et al., 2021), sharing and referral to others. The restaurants’ customers gaze upon the picture of food presented, and read the restaurant reviews through application or websites prior decision made. Thence, the presentation of restaurant physical evidence, food, and quality of services objectively would be a value added. Furthermore, it is considerably for the competitive advantages. Thence, it is important for restaurant entrepreneurs implement social media adoption effectively.

Literally, the restaurant service quality was often assessed through the physical presentation of food and service staff. These two components were primary key attributes creating customer’s experiences (Chow et al, 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Gagić et al., 2013). Howbeit, the physical presentation of restaurant is not only dealing with the food presentation instead it includes other attributes as (Booms and Bitner, 1982) stated the effective managing physical environment enriches the restaurant brand image, reposition customer’s perception, and increase satisfaction. Evidently, scholars (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Raajpoot, 2002) shed the light on the restaurant service quality in term of environment from customer’s perspective in three areas that are the atmosphere, the facility design, and social factors. In view of this, DINESCAPE tool (Ryu, 2005) was introduced for assessing six factors of dining area environment including; the beauty of the place, the lighting, the atmosphere, the layout, the table setting and service workforces. Further confirmation by (Ryu et al., 2012) of restaurant’s image affecting the customer perceived quality comprising of physical environment, food and service. Addedly, two key predictors of perceived value were physical environment and the food itself. Whereas, the facility aesthetics, lighting, ambience, layout, table setting, and service staff were crucial in restaurant services (Ryu and Jang, 2005). Comparatively, Mahalingam et al. (2016) revealed significant factors influencing customer revisiting restaurant were lighting, ambience, and table setting. The lighting generates comfort and warm welcome feeling. The ambience concerned with the non-visual factors, such as music, aroma, noise, and temperature. Whilst, the study of Isci et al (2018) found four factors of DINESCAPE creating customer

satisfaction namely; light and ambience, aesthetics, table layout, and service workforce. Howbeit, the scholars have further analyzed by using inferential statistic found only two attributes that are service staff and aesthetics influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty. On the study of Hongyu and Sevilla (2021) promulgated the restaurant DINESCAPE dimension creating customer special experience and entertainment in term of service quality were layout, lighting, aesthetics, social factor, and ambience. They, supplementary, explained the social factor components relating to employee's personality and grooming (Kankaew et al, 2022), attractiveness, and adequate number of employees to assist and cater customer. Lately, Ryu et al (2021) uncovered the intangible and tangible factors impact on customer's pleasure and arousal satisfaction in dining. Concisely, the intangible is employee service and tangible is physical environment. It is worth noticing that employee behavior has high impact on customer pleasure.

The DINESERV tool was extended from SERVQUAL with the purpose to measure restaurant service quality while omitting the food quality. The model was generated by Bougoure and Neu (2010), there exists five aspects involving (1) reliability of service, (2) providing confidence to customer, (3) responding to customer, (4) the concreteness of the service/ place, and (5) empathy. In sum, it can be referred to SERVQUAL as reliability, assurance, responsiveness, tangibles, and empathy. Noticeably the study of Abukhalifeh et al (2015) discovered DINSERV is worth for reliability and cost effectiveness, easy to employ and respond to customer's needs, as well as it is useful for competitiveness. The DINESERV (Choi et al., 2021) was used to investigate young college student in the USA perception toward dining area in the campus. The results revealed the assurance is highly important, in contrast the tangible ranked in last factor. The scholars explained that the assurance concerning with knowledgeable and courtesy of service workforces. They are able to deliver confidence and trust. On the flipside, tangible ranked last because it's exterior and interior dining facilities, cleanliness and neat of staffs, menu attraction and design etc., those were not properly design and outdated. In the sequel, it is worth for the restaurant owner to consider all aspects of DINESCAPE and DINESERV. Logically, the well-organized and design of DINESERV and DINESCAPE impacted on customer satisfaction and loyalty, moreover it pronounced a positive word of mouth (Abukhalifeh et al., 2015), and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Mahalingam et al., 2016).

**The Service design** was emerged along with the advancement of technology, the innovation of new products and services, along with the changing of market structure from product-oriented to experiences economy. The design defined as a goal-oriented process to solve the problem, improve situation, and innovate something new and meeting needs (Edman, 2011). Harry (2011) described necessitate for all products and services are supposed to expand the role of service design blending with cultural artifacts. The service design, then, is a process of revive the subjective idea turn into reality. Inasmuch as, Lee et al (2021) cited the service design having emotional bond between service provider and service receiver. Actually, it is rather difficult to bond since there are other variables involved, such as communication, customer's experiences and perception, and actual services. The service design, henceforth, incorporate with people, object, spaces, and communication to cope with its complexity. The well-planned

service design flourish customer satisfaction and firm performance sustainably. Morelli et al (2021) summarized two camps of service design that covers with the problem-solving activity and differentiate the products or creating value. Additionally, the design for value creation was linked to the economic who means both qualitative and quantitative are counted. In the modern world, the value creation might require the interaction of infrastructure condition like physical, functional, and institution condition alike cultural, social and economic. In this regard, the alignment of Thainess into DINESERV and DINESCAPE in Thai restaurant service design could augment and create new value for Thai food tourism. The Thainess (Suksutdhi and Boonyanmethaporn, 2022) is the artifacts, culture, belief, and way of life. In Thailand, the TAT promoted Thainess into tourism related business for value-added and offering Thainess experience-centric services. In view of the fact that, it will render positive attitude and satisfaction through the perception of Thai etiquette, values, norms, culture, and artifacts.

**The eWOM** is one of the most comprehensive and informal internet communications among consumers relating to the use of goods, services, or sellers (Litvin et al., 2008). The advantage of this tool is customer can use the online platform to share their opinions and reviews with others globally. It was, also, an easy tool to find out the products or services information. Whenever, the customers trust WOM, they look further for online feedbacks from social media (eWOM) (Nieto et al., 2014). The eWOM provides entrepreneurs an advantage over traditional WOM, both driving customers to post their opinions online and to examine the comments from others (Cantalops and Salvi, 2014). Nevertheless, Yang (2017) argued that customer opinions regarding products or services on eWOM might be periled to companies, since it is uncontrollable. Therefore, businesses are creating virtual spaces on their websites allowing customers to express and share their opinions about products and services. This is aiming to mitigate the burden might occur (Vallejo et al., 2015). In tourism, companies are becoming aware and understand how ICT-based media influences the purchasing behavior of tourists (Sotiriadis and Van Zyl, 2013). Somehow, it is confirmed that eWOM has a positive impact to travel intention, destination trust and revisit intention rather than negative impact (Abubakar, 2016; Harahap and Dwita, 2020; Kesumayuda et al., 2020). As described on the previous page, it is obviously that people exploit the technology in particular social media for sharing, promoting, complaining, gathering data, and grasping for opportunity. For these reasons, individual and entrepreneurs who are technology savvy would aware of the immense technology impact on recommendation and referrals. To date, it is barely finding the study of eWOM in either restaurant business or food tourism. This can be illustrated briefly that people accustom the usage of internet finding food and restaurant in their daily life.

Accurately, the recommendation and referrals are considerably influential in the digitalized economic. According to Hajli (2015) stated recommendation and referrals are the kind of suggestions and referring products to social media. Besides, Senecal and Nantel (2004) added that it depends on the past experiences of people who recommending and referring to others whom never used or familiar with the products or services. Kumar et al (2005) suggested that in large cities, it is more difficult to collect data from people who experienced the usage of products or services as it takes longer time to complete. However, there are some difficulties in searching information that there are many various references to recommended products or

services on social media. As a result, the competence in navigating the internet or social media self-efficacy is essential. The social media self-efficacy is the belief of in one's capability to organize and execute a particular course of action in social media (Bright et al., 2015). It is the fact that people with low social media self-efficacy tend to utilize and engage fewer in social media related behaviors. In contrast, social media self-efficacy people are more engage and self-reliance online purchasing. After all, this study highlights the Thai service design, physical evidence, and restaurant service quality affect the use of social media of stakeholders. Its ultimate result aims to improve Thai restaurant serving the needs of customers, the reputation of restaurant in digitalization society, as well as for using as the guidelines to increase the value of food tourism.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

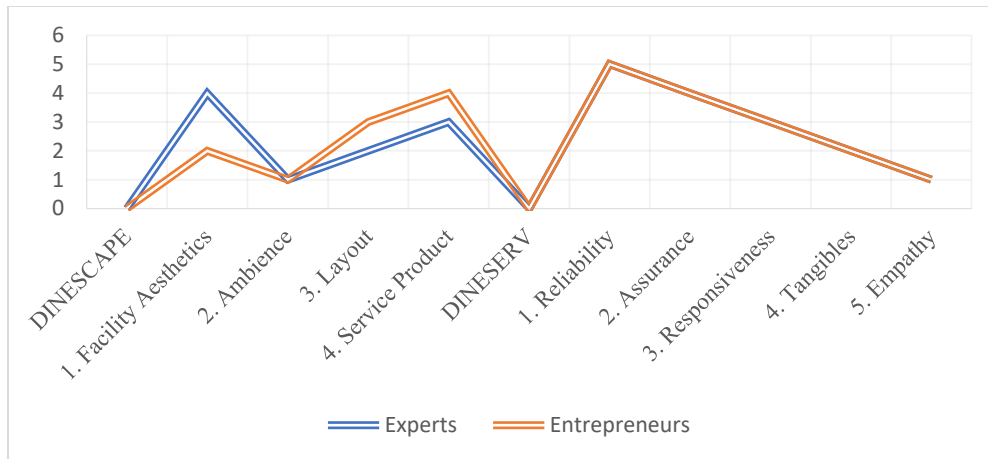
A mixed method research was applied in this study. The qualitative data collected by focus group from 10 participants including; 5 experts in Thai food tourism from Chiang Mai Restaurant Club, and 5 Thai restaurant entrepreneurs. The content analysis was conducted to investigate the integration of Thai service design in term of DINESCAPE, DINESERV, and social media adoption. The questionnaires were administered for quantitative data collection. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient was tested in DINESCAPE, DINESERV, and social media adoption with the value of 0.98, 0.97, and 0.96 respectively. There were 400 samplings with 200 Thais and 200 foreigners. The multiple regressions was calculated on Thai service design symbiosis in DINESCAPE, DINESERV attributes to examine which factors affecting recommendation and referrals, eWOM, and social media self-efficacy of customers in Thai food tourism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the qualitative results, the five experts compose of 3 food professors and 2 tourism professors. These participants have 30-40 years of experiences related to food and services in Thai restaurants. As for 5 entrepreneurs, there were 4 males and 1 female, aged between 43-74 years old. Most of them graduated with a bachelor's degree with experiences in the field at least 4 years to 40 years. Firstly, they were asked to rank the integration of Thai service design in DINESCAPE, DINESERV, and social media usage elements as shown in figure 1. It is clearly can be seen that the experts and entrepreneurs have the same perspective toward Thainess design aligning in DINESERV, specifically reliability has highest influence on social media used. In sum, the reliability in this sense refers to the truthful and providing the food quality as advertised. Whereas DINESCAPE is paradoxically among them, the experts stressed on facility aesthetic. Conversely, the entrepreneurs emphasized on products and services.

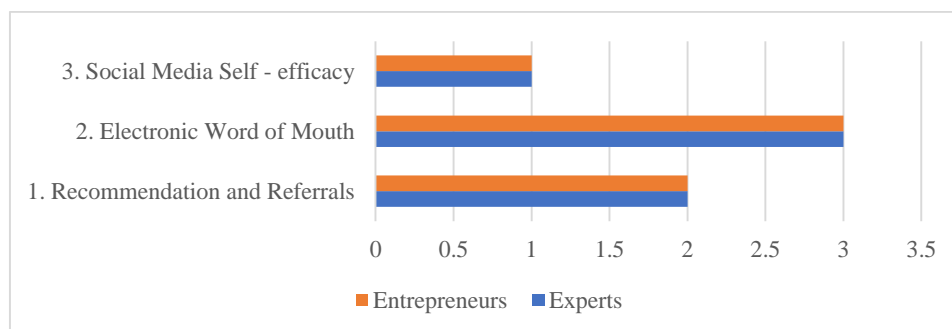


**Figure 1: Thainess Blended in DINESCAPE and DINESERV**



Meanwhile, most of participants expressed the same idea that if the Thai restaurants applied Thai service design the eWOM would generate greatest impact in social media. Even though, the customer has less self-efficacy in technology, but they can find information from Facebook and other information can be requested further.

**Figure 2: Thainess Service Design influencing Social Media Usage**



As the scripted evidence from participants mentioned that on DINESCAPE, DINESERV, and social media usage.

“The exterior architectures, ceilings, wall decorations and paintings in Thai styles are the first impression for customer making decision to use the services. It enhances them to take a photo and share to social media too.” [Expert one]

“Yes, I agreed but the Thainess of food decoration and taste is also important.” [Expert two] Albeit, the entrepreneurs focus on the menu design rather than decoration of the restaurant as one of them mentioned that;

“The menu design catches the eyes of customer, especially foreigners to taste Thai food. And the tableware is also should be in Lanna (Northern part of Thailand) style that suits for the local menu.”

According to the eWOM, one of the entrepreneurs stated that “some customers have learned from social media that our restaurant served delicious and clean food. The pictures are shared in the website were awesome.”

Still and all, the quantitative results exhibited that the over half of respondents were female with 57 percent of Thais and 56 percent of foreigners. The majority of them were around 40-49 years old, and 30-39 years old. All of them have experienced dine in Thai restaurants once a month of Thai customers, and once a year of foreigners when visiting Thailand. The multiple regressions, firstly, applied to investigate the Thai service design effects on recommendation and referrals of customers toward Thai restaurants. The findings are summarized in table 1. The results, serially, presented from highest significant variable to lowest namely, empathy, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, and tangibles with  $\beta$  values 0.32, 0.16, 0.14, - 0.13, and 0.10 accordingly. Enclosing of these all variables can predict the effect of Thai service design to recommendation and referrals 61 percent. To tackle Thai food tourism through social media recommendation and referrals of customers, the restaurants should emphasize on the components of five variables in table 1 that are the courtesy staff willing to help and listen to customers, the restaurant assure the standard of food and services, the decoration and raw materials in food production, and fast and effective services that immediate response to customers.

The only exception to the variable was that “The restaurant gives fast and friendly service to a customer”, Recommendation and Referrals with a negative coefficient meaning it had a negative influence.

Therefore, most of the customers who come to Thai restaurants want to come in to soak up the atmosphere and spend time eating Thai food for relaxation and socializing, not focusing on fast service. And there is no need for a lot of friendliness as they need privacy to spend time dining in restaurants with family, friends, and acquaintances. Fast service like a fast-food restaurant or being too friendly to customers can annoy customers and interfere the privacy of customers who come to use the service, thus affecting Recommendation and Referrals in a negative way.

**Table 1: Overall Thai service design affect recommendation and referrals**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.56	0.24		2.32	0.021*
Empathy	0.28	0.04	0.32	6.25	0.000***
Assurance	0.14	0.05	0.16	2.96	0.003**
Responsiveness	0.12	0.05	0.14	2.69	0.007**
Reliability	- 0.10	0.04	- 0.13	- 2.48	0.014*
Tangibles	0.08	0.04	0.10	2.18	0.030*

\* Dependent Variable: Regression R = 0.78, R-Square = 0.61, Adjusted R-Square = 0.57, Std. Error of the Estimate = 0.59

Conjointly, the analysis of Thai service design was performed to assess the effect of DINESERV and DINESCAPE variables toward eWOM. The results in table 2, the assurance was most significant, follow by responsiveness, empathy, layout and tangibles with  $\beta$  values 0.19, - 0.16, 0.15, 0.14 and 0.12 respectively. Totally, these variables affect eWOM 41 percent. To highlight the activities on four variables creating eWOM including; assurance of using high-quality of organic raw materials in food and beverages present to customers, service-minded employees approaching and recommending the menu to customers, open for feedback and availability of WIFI. The exception was the variable with a negative coefficient, which was “Staff has a service – minded approach to recommend a menu of a restaurant” with a coefficient of - 0.16, meaning that there was a negative influence on Electronic Word of Mouth in overall 16%. This is because most of the customers have studied the basic information from online media to the level that they have decided to use the restaurant services. When customers come to use the restaurant services, they do not want the staff to recommend the restaurant's menu much more. If too many menus are introduced to customers, they may not be able to remember the entire menus and unable to recommend to others. In addition, some customers come to use the services as regular customers, if the staff tries too hard to recommend, it may annoy the customers. Therefore, staff's over-compliance with restaurant menu recommendations can negatively affect the use of Electronic Word of Mouth.

**Table 2: Overall Thai service design affects eWOM**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.32	0.30		4.39	0.000***
Assurance	0.16	0.06	0.19	2.79	0.006**
Responsiveness	- 0.14	0.06	- 0.16	- 2.35	0.019*
Empathy	0.13	0.06	0.15	2.41	0.017*
Layout	0.11	0.06	0.14	1.98	0.048*
Tangibles	0.10	0.04	0.12	2.40	0.017*

\* Dependent Variable: Regression R = 0.64, R-Square = 0.41, Adjusted R-Square = 0.37, Std. Error of the Estimate = 0.72

Accelerating, the Thai service design relating to social media self-efficacy was examined. The result in table 3 revealed the tangibles ranked highest with loading  $\beta$  equal to 24 percent; follow by responsiveness 19 percent, assurance 18 percent and reliability 16 percent. Altogether, having influence on the customer social media self-efficacy toward Thai food tourism 31 percent. The profound details of the results incorporated with the facilitation of infrastructure on availability of WIFI enhancing the comfort and convenience use of social media in restaurants, the competence of service staff in handling chaotic situation, organic and high quality of raw material for food production and presentation, and accurate information provided to the customers.



**Table 3: Overall Thai service designs affect social media self-efficacy**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.89	0.31		6.01	0.000***
Tangibles	0.19	0.04	0.24	4.35	0.000***
Responsiveness	0.16	0.06	0.19	2.77	0.006*
Assurance	0.15	0.06	0.18	2.49	0.013*
Reliability	0.13	0.06	0.16	2.32	0.021*

\* Dependent Variable: Regression R = 0.56, R-Square = 0.31, Adjusted R-Square = 0.25, Std. Error of the Estimate = 0.76

## CONCLUSION

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state form the qualitative results shed the lights on reliability which means truthful and food quality. It is, as certainty, to the customers always receiving good food quality according to the advertisement. Even though, the DINESCAPE from the experts and entrepreneurs are paradox, we recommend the restaurants business owner consider performing both facility aesthetic in Thainess decoration, and foods and services. At the end, the positive impact would ameliorate Thai food tourism as a whole when people share through social media.

The quantitative results, secondly, as this study set out to critically examine the ways in which Thai service design based on DINESERV; DINESCAPE influencing the customer employ social media in Thai food tourism. Taken together, these results suggested that courtesy staff willing to help and listen to customers, the restaurant assure the standard of food and services, the decoration and raw materials in food production, and fast and effective services that immediate response to customers. These activities would cherish the recommendation and referrals to other customers via social media. Another aspect, the assurance of using high-quality of organic raw materials in food and beverages present to customers, service-minded employees approaching and recommending the menu to customers, open for feedback and availability of WIFI will endorse the eWOM spread wider. What is more, the availability of WIFI enhancing the comfort and convenience use of social media in restaurants, the competence of service staff in handling chaotic situation, organic and high quality of raw material for food production and presentation, and accurate information provided to the customers strengthen the social media self-efficacy.

In general, therefore, it sounds that the combination of DINESERV and DINESCAPE in Thai service design on facility aesthetic, the products and services, the reliability, the empathy, the assurance, and the tangibility are affected to the use of social media for the sake of Thai food tourism promotion. Practically, the entrepreneurs should implement the training and development continuously in Thainess service design. That is including both soft skills and hard skills. For instance, Thai hospitality, service-minded, language and communication,

gestures and grooming as since the image has its value attracting the customers (Worasuwannarak and Kankaew, 2022). The consistency of food quality from raw materials, food production to final food products is essential. In theorem, there should embrace the findings into hospitality and tourism curriculum, such as English for services, restaurant service techniques, how to symbiosis Thainess in food tourism.

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