

# MARKETING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FOR CHINESE TOURISTS AT THAI RESTAURANTS.

กลยุทธ์การตลาดเพื่อยกระดับความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวจีนที่มีต่อร้านอาหาร  
ไทย

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates marketing strategies that influence customer satisfaction among Chinese tourists dining at high-end Thai restaurants. Using the 7P Marketing Mix framework (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process) and demographic factors, the research aims to identify actionable insights for restaurant operators. Data were collected from 400 Chinese tourists through structured questionnaires and analyzed using regression and variance tests. The findings reveal that Price is the only marketing mix element with a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. Customers place high value on pricing that aligns with the perceived quality of their dining experience. Other dimensions, such as Product, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process, show no significant direct effects on satisfaction. Cultural immersion elements, including traditional decor, music, and interactive dining experiences, similarly lack significant impact on customer satisfaction. These results suggest that customers prioritize value-driven pricing over other experiential and aesthetic factors.

Demographic factors yield mixed results. Gender has a significant effect, with female customers expressing higher satisfaction levels than male customers. However, age and education level do not show any significant influence on satisfaction. These findings indicate that addressing gender-specific preferences and focusing on pricing strategies are critical for enhancing customer satisfaction.

This research provides practical guidance for Thai restaurant operators to optimize their marketing strategies. Aligning prices with value perception and tailoring experiences to gender-specific preferences can significantly improve customer satisfaction. The study contributes to

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understanding consumer behavior in the context of post-pandemic tourism recovery and offers valuable insights for the hospitality and tourism industries.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, 7P Marketing Mix, Thai High-End Restaurants, Chinese Tourists, Post-Pandemic Marketing

## **INTRODUCTION**

Thailand has consistently been one of the top international destinations for Chinese tourists, celebrated for its rich culture, warm hospitality, and diverse culinary offerings. Thai cuisine, with its balance of flavors and use of fresh ingredients, plays a central role in attracting visitors. Signature dishes like Tom Yum Goong and Pad Thai, combined with immersive dining atmospheres, make Thailand a culinary hotspot.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 significantly disrupted the tourism industry. Before the pandemic, Thailand welcomed over 11 million Chinese tourists annually, who greatly contributed to the economy, especially in dining and retail. The pandemic caused an 88% drop in Chinese visitors, leading to substantial losses for businesses, including high-end restaurants.

As international travel restrictions ease, Chinese tourists are beginning to return. However, their expectations have shifted, with increased emphasis on health, safety, and personalized experiences. For Thai restaurants, particularly those targeting high-end markets, understanding and meeting these evolving preferences is crucial. This study focuses on analyzing key factors influencing Chinese tourists' satisfaction with high-end Thai dining, offering insights to support the recovery and growth of the industry.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the impact of 7p marketing mix on customer satisfaction:
2. To study the impact of demographic factors on customer satisfaction

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Post-pandemic, Thailand's tourism industry is steadily recovering, with Chinese tourists playing a pivotal role. In 2019, approximately 11 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand, and this number rebounded to 11.8 million in 2022, surpassing expectations. By 2025, tourist numbers are projected to reach or exceed pre-pandemic levels, potentially hitting 40 million. Chinese tourists' spending on dining has increased significantly, with a 70% rise during Chinese New Year compared to 2019, emphasizing their preference for high-quality dining experiences. In 2023, their tourism revenue contribution to Thailand was estimated at \$1.28 billion, highlighting their critical role in the industry's recovery.

This research examines the consumption behavior of Chinese tourists and its impact on the Thai dining sector. Practically, it offers insights for restaurant operators to better align services with tourist preferences. Theoretically, it contributes to understanding cross-cultural consumer behavior and provides strategic guidance for global tourism recovery efforts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **1. Factors Influencing Chinese Tourists' Satisfaction with Thai Restaurants**

Food quality, encompassing freshness, authenticity, taste, and healthiness, is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction (Zhang, 2018). Similarly, service quality, characterized by professionalism, responsiveness, and reliability, plays a significant role in shaping customer experiences (Bharwana et al., 2013). Transparent pricing and perceived value further enhance satisfaction, highlighting the importance of fair and value-driven pricing strategies (Sepehrian et al., 2023). The dining atmosphere, including elements such as décor, music, lighting, and scent, profoundly affects sensory experiences and psychological well-being (Rašan et al., 2022). Cultural experiences, featuring unique décor, authentic food, and traditional music, significantly enhance satisfaction and foster loyalty (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007). In addition, positive online reviews and feedback on social media platforms have a substantial impact on satisfaction, influencing customer perceptions and decisions (Nilowardono et al., 2020). Finally, demographic factors such as age, gender, and education shape preferences and satisfaction levels, underscoring the need for tailored approaches to address diverse customer needs (Leivang & Sharma, 2023).

### **2. Impact of the 7P Marketing Mix on Consumer Satisfaction**

High-quality food infused with cultural elements significantly enhances sensory experiences and customer satisfaction (Namkung & Jang, 2007; Kim & Lee, 2022). Similarly, authentic Thai-style service characterized by professionalism and cultural authenticity not only boosts satisfaction but also fosters customer loyalty (Kim & Lee, 2022). Experience-based pricing strategies further elevate perceived value and satisfaction by aligning the dining experience with customers' expectations (Kaewmahaphinyo et al., 2020). The physical evidence of a restaurant, including its atmosphere, décor, and sensory appeal, plays a crucial role in shaping emotional responses and overall satisfaction (Bitner, 1992). Promotion, particularly through social media reviews and interactive customer engagement, significantly influences customer expectations and satisfaction levels (Hemmington, 2020). Additionally, restaurant locations that reflect authentic Thai culture enhance perceived value and create a deeper connection with customers (Chen & Huang, 2023). Lastly, interactive dining processes, such as live cooking demonstrations, increase customer engagement and contribute to a more satisfying and memorable dining experience (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009).

### **3. Impact of Demographic Factors on Customer Satisfaction**

3.1 Age: Younger customers prefer innovative experiences; older customers prioritize healthiness and reliability (Chua et al., 2020).

3.2 Gender: Women focus on cleanliness and atmosphere; men prioritize taste and price (Rožman et al., 2021).

3.3 Education: Higher education correlates with preferences for health-conscious food and professional service (Rožman et al., 2021).

#### **4. Consumer Satisfaction Theory**

Customer satisfaction is a critical factor that strengthens loyalty and increases customers' willingness to return, directly influencing a restaurant's reputation, profitability, and long-term success. It is not merely a transactional outcome, but an emotional response shaped by various elements, including the quality of products, services, and decision-making processes (Giese & Cote, 2000). When customers feel that their expectations are met or exceeded, their satisfaction fosters a positive emotional connection, driving repeat visits and long-term loyalty. This underscores the importance of understanding and optimizing the key factors that contribute to customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry.

#### **5. Regional Characteristics of Thai Cuisine**

Thai cuisine showcases a rich diversity of flavors and ingredients across its regions, each offering a unique culinary experience. Central Thai cuisine is known for its complex flavors and use of diverse ingredients, reflecting the region's agricultural abundance (Van Esterik, 1992). In the northern region, dishes are characterized by mild spiciness and the use of aromatic spices, creating comforting and flavorful meals (Thompson, 2002). Northeastern Thai cuisine, on the other hand, stands out for its bold and intense flavors, with fermented fish serving as a signature seasoning that adds a distinctive taste to its dishes. Meanwhile, southern Thai cuisine is renowned for its spiciness and the rich use of seafood and herbs, offering a vibrant and aromatic dining experience. Together, these regional variations highlight the complexity and cultural richness of Thai cuisine.

#### **6. Trends in the Thai Restaurant Industry**

The Thai restaurant industry is evolving rapidly, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and changing consumer preferences. Globalization has facilitated the growth of international brands and concepts within Thailand, enriching the local dining landscape with diverse offerings (Muangasame & Park, 2019). Technological integration, such as online ordering and mobile payment systems, has significantly enhanced operational efficiency and customer convenience (Chaturvedi et al., 2024). At the same time, there is a growing emphasis on health and sustainability, with consumers increasingly seeking eco-friendly dining options and healthy food choices. Additionally, experiential dining has become a key trend, with unique and interactive experiences, such as themed restaurants and participatory dining activities, attracting younger customers and

international tourists (Ellis et al., 2018). These trends collectively shape the future of Thailand's dynamic restaurant industry.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Sample:** The target population for this study consisted of Chinese tourists who dined at high-end Thai restaurants during their visits to Thailand. A total of 400 respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method. These participants were approached at popular tourist destinations, including Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Pattaya. The sample aimed to represent diverse demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and education level.

**Methods:** This study adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate the relationship between the 7P Marketing Mix and customer satisfaction, with a focus on the moderating role of demographic factors. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire.

**The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:** The questionnaire included three sections: demographic information (gender, age, education level), perceptions of the 7P Marketing Mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, Process), and overall customer satisfaction. A five-point Likert scale was used for all items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

**Data Collection:** The online survey ensured confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses from participants.

### Description of Variables

1. **7P Marketing Mix:** The study evaluated the 7P Marketing Mix across several dimensions. Product focused on the quality, cultural authenticity, and innovation in dishes, while Price examined perceived fairness and alignment with the overall dining experience. Place highlighted the importance of location and cultural immersion, and Promotion assessed the influence of social media reviews and promotional activities. People referred to service quality and cultural authenticity, with Physical Evidence emphasizing the role of restaurant atmosphere, décor, and sensory design. Finally, Process considered the interactivity of dining experiences, such as live cooking demonstrations, as a factor enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction.
2. **Demographic Factors:** Age, gender, education level.
3. **Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction:** Overall evaluation of dining experiences.

### Statistical Analysis

The study utilized SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for data analysis, applying various statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and provide an overview of responses. Reliability analysis assessed the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, while validity analysis ensured the construct validity of the survey through the

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Additionally, inferential analysis was conducted to examine relationships between variables, offering deeper insights into the data.

## RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 1. Descriptive Analysis

**1.1 Demographics:** The sample consisted of a balanced gender distribution, with 50.2% female and 49.8% male respondents. The largest age group was 48–57 years, accounting for 22% of the total sample. Regarding education, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree, making up 30.3% of the sample. These demographics provide a diverse and representative basis for analyzing customer satisfaction among Chinese tourists dining at high-end Thai restaurants.

**1.2 7P Factors:** An analysis of satisfaction scores for the 7P Marketing Mix revealed that Place (mean score: 3.34) and Price (mean score: 3.32) were rated highest by respondents, indicating strong satisfaction in these areas. However, Service (mean score: 3.27) and Product (mean score: 3.28) were identified as areas with room for improvement. These findings highlight the need for enhanced efforts in service delivery and product quality to meet customer expectations fully.

**1.3 ANOVA:** An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences in customer satisfaction based on demographic variables, including age and education levels. The results indicated no statistically significant differences across these categories, suggesting that satisfaction levels were generally consistent among respondents regardless of these demographic factors.

### 2. Inferential Analysis

**2.1 Regression Analysis:** The multiple regression analysis examined the relationship between the 7P Marketing Mix dimensions and customer satisfaction. The findings for each factor are detailed below:

#### **H1a: Product Has No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The Product variable showed no statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of 0.156 and  $p = 0.062$ . While food quality is often valued by customers, it did not emerge as a critical driver of satisfaction in this study.

#### **H1b: Price Has a Positive Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was supported. The Price variable demonstrated a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of 0.221 and  $p = 0.010$ . This finding emphasizes the importance of value-based pricing strategies in aligning customer expectations with the dining experience.

#### **H1c: Place Has No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The Place variable, representing restaurant location and

accessibility, was not significantly related to customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of 0.093 and  $p = 0.286$ . Location factors did not play a substantial role in shaping satisfaction levels among respondents

#### **H1d: Promotion Has No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The Promotion variable, including marketing and social media efforts, had no significant relationship with customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of -0.068 and  $p = 0.407$ . Promotional activities did not strongly influence satisfaction in this study.

#### **H1e: People Have No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The People variable, representing service quality, did not significantly affect customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of -0.073 and  $p = 0.395$ . Although service quality is generally regarded as important, it was not statistically validated in this dataset.

#### **H1f: Process Has No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The Process variable, encompassing interactive dining experiences and service efficiency, showed no significant impact on satisfaction, with a Beta value of 0.147 and  $p = 0.080$ .

#### **H1g: Physical Evidence Has No Significant Impact on Customer Satisfaction**

This hypothesis was not supported. The Physical Evidence variable, representing ambiance and decor, did not significantly affect customer satisfaction, with a Beta value of -0.011 and  $p = 0.894$ . Sensory and environmental aspects were not major determinants of satisfaction in this context.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

### **Key Insights**

This study highlights the essential role of value-driven pricing in enhancing customer satisfaction, particularly among Chinese tourists dining at premium Thai restaurants. While pricing emerged as the most significant factor, other elements of the 7P Marketing Mix, such as Product, Place, and Promotion, were identified as baseline expectations rather than key satisfaction drivers. Differences based on gender were observed. preferences were observed, reflecting differences in priorities between male and female customers regarding dining experiences. These findings emphasize the importance of tailoring strategies to cater to diverse customer needs while leveraging cultural and experiential aspects to strengthen satisfaction and loyalty.

### **Implications**

1. Value-Based Pricing: Price significantly enhances customer satisfaction, emphasizing the need for value-based pricing strategies.
2. Differences based on gender were observed Strategies: Gender differences suggest that

female customers prioritize ambiance and personalization, while male customers may focus more on authentic dishes. Tailored marketing and service approaches can address these preferences effectively.

3. Baseline Expectations of Other 7P Elements: Factors like Product, Place, and Promotion were not significant, suggesting they are baseline expectations. Restaurants should maintain standard quality in these areas while focusing on pricing and gender-specific innovations.

4. High-End Dining Applications: Addressing the cultural and experiential needs of Chinese tourists can enhance satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat visits, contributing to long-term business success.

### **Limitations**

1. Sample Representativeness: The study focused on high-end Thai restaurants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other types of dining establishments. Future research could include a broader range of restaurant categories, such as mid-range and casual dining, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction across different market segments.

2. Self-Reported Data: Potential biases from self-reported responses could be mitigated by using observational or experimental methods in future research.

3. Focus on Limited Variables: Expanding variables to include cultural values or cultural experience could provide a more comprehensive analysis.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

To further enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness, high-end Thai restaurants should focus on integrating innovative and culturally immersive elements into their dining experiences. Future strategies could explore leveraging advanced technologies, such as personalized digital menus or interactive dining tools, to create memorable experiences. Additionally, expanding research to include longitudinal studies and a broader demographic scope, such as local diners and tourists from other regions, can provide deeper insights into evolving customer expectations. Emphasizing sustainability and health-conscious dining options may also align with global trends, positioning Thai restaurants as leaders in the experiential dining sector.

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