

## **FOOD STORYTELLING IN CHEFS' TABLE: CREATING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS**

**Piyanart Junkrachang<sup>1</sup>, Tarittawan Chareanporn<sup>2</sup>,  
Pornpimol Chaisanit<sup>3</sup>, Proychai Klakayan<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Hospitality Industry Management Program,  
School of Management, Mae Fah Luang University,  
333 Moo1, Thasud, Muang, Chiang Rai 57100

<sup>1</sup>piyanart.jun@mfu.ac.th, <sup>2</sup>tarittawan.cha@mfu.ac.th, <sup>3</sup>pornpimol.cha@mfu.ac.th,  
<sup>4</sup>proychai.kla@mfu.ac.th

---

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore food storytelling patterns at chef's table restaurants in Thailand. In addition, the paper aims to investigate how chef's table restaurants achieve a competitive business advantage. A food storytelling structure is perceived as the key influencing factor to develop a competitive advantage for such firms. The study adopted a qualitative approach, using documentation research, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation to collect data for a content analysis. The key informants were chefs' table restaurant managers, chefs who cook and deliver food storytelling to the customers, and chefs' table restaurant customers. Interviews were conducted with 30 participants from chefs' table restaurants from Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket. The results of the interviews indicated seven key food storytelling patterns at chefs' table restaurants, including 1) Concept and origin of food 2) Cooking methods 3) composition of food dishes 4) Method of eating 5) Food benefits and nutritional values 6) Cleanliness and safety 7) Social responsibility and environmental concern. Furthermore, the findings found that food storytelling was a business strategy tool that impacted the competitive advantage of chefs' table restaurants. Three competitive advantages were found, namely 1) Cost leadership, 2) Differentiation, and 3) Quick response to guests' special requests. In turn, these competitive advantages led to better organizational performance, in both financial and non-financial terms such as net profit, guest satisfaction, guest loyalty, and word of mouth marketing to others.

---

**Keywords:** restaurant, storytelling, food storytelling, competitive advantage

---



## Introduction

Attractive food and beverage services can generate substantial income for entrepreneurs and attract tourists to a destination. The type and quality of food and beverages available at a destination are key factors for tourists making travel decisions. According to a report from the Department of Business Development in 2019, the restaurant business market in Thailand in 2017 - 2018 was valued at more than 400 billion baht. In addition, the report found that the restaurant industry is displaying strong, continuous growth. Business profitability attracts new entrepreneurs to enter and the cycle of growth continues. In 2018, the restaurant industry generated revenue of 2,007,503 million baht, which is considered one of the country's primary incomes. Yoopetch (2021) and Stettler et al. (2018) stated that restaurants represent an essential part of the hospitality industry in Thailand, and food tourism is also a key driver of Thai tourism.

Furthermore, both Thai and foreign tourists' spending on food and beverages ranks as the third most important tourist expenditure after accommodation and transportation. The food and beverage industry is widely distributed among Thailand's many tourist destinations. However, according to the Department of Business Development (2019), most business operations are located in Bangkok, followed by Chon Buri, Phuket, Surat Thani, and Chiang Mai respectively. This is consistent with the world-class reputation of Thai food and the tangible support provided to primary and secondary cities by the public and private sector. These factors are

expected to drive the continued growth for the restaurant industry in Thailand (Department of Business Development, 2019).

Consumer behavior continues to adapt, as technology influences the decision to use restaurant services together with the shift to food delivery applications. Supporting services have been developed to ensure that food delivery from restaurants to customers is undertaken quickly, such as Line Man (Line Man), Food Panda (Food Panda), and Grab Food (Grab Food), or the emergence of a website or page with food influencers such as Wongnai and Tripadvisor (Department of Business Development, 2019). In addition, being influenced by watching movies or documentaries about food is an important channel that can create awareness and pass on the experience to consumers. For example, Jay Fai (Auntie Fai), a street food restaurant in Bangkok, became famous through exposure in a Netflix documentary of street food. Creating food narratives in various forms through photographs, video clips, and food narratives is widely used to encourage consumers to try a service or taste a particular dish in both offline and online media.

Continuous growth of food and beverage businesses in the tourism industry, changing consumer behavior in the digital age, information technology and fast-changing social media require sophisticated marketing campaigns for food and beverage businesses. The importance of social media towards product and service adoption is highly relevant for today's hospitality businesses, including food and beverage and restaurant businesses (Plidtookpai &



Yoopetch, 2021). Restaurants need to develop a business strategy that can respond quickly to customer needs. Restaurant entrepreneurs have to develop a sustainable competitive business advantage to be able to continue to operate under increased competition. The chefs' table restaurant style is an innovative style of restaurant service. The style has become popular over this past decade and has been a growth trend in Thailand. Many famous chefs in fine dining restaurants or luxury hotel restaurants have introduced this style to attract customers. Most chefs' table restaurants provide food storytelling services. The chefs' table restaurant is a micro restaurant that accepts a limited number of customers. There is an open kitchen where the customer can see what is happening backstage while the chefs cook. At the same time, the story of each dish is verbally explained to customers during the delivery of the meal. This type of restaurant is now prevalent because of the chef's professional cooking skills and quality of raw materials provided. The increasing importance of this new dining experience leads to two research objectives. The first aim is to study the pattern of food storytelling in a chefs' table restaurant. The second objective is to study the competitive advantage generated by using food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chef's table restaurants.

## Literature review

### Types of restaurant concept

There are various classifications that categorize different types of restaurant concept. According to the description of restaurant type by Singawala (2011), the

Ministry of Commerce divides restaurants into four types, mainly classified by design and decoration as follows:

- 1) Fine dining restaurant has an exquisite design, beautiful materials and expensive equipment. In addition, the food garnish is beautifully presented and staff provide excellent service
- 2) Casual dining is a restaurant with a moderately decorated design, that focuses on a casual atmosphere with moderately priced food and service from staff,
- 3) Fast dining is a restaurant with a simple design and convenient service, that emphasizes fast food service with limited food items and allows fast turnover of customers in large quantities, and
- 4) Kiosk is a restaurant with a limited design, emphasizing one-dish food that can be cooked easily and quickly. Basically, it is a small business with shop owners who cook by themselves (Rungsatianputorn, 2016).

Similarly, Chef Duangporn Songvisawa ( Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2015) classified types of restaurants according to the nature of the service into four types. These are presented as follows;

- 1) full-service restaurants (fine dining) serve with international standards and superb service. The food and beverage menu is not limited to the western style, but includes various types of food. In addition, food decoration is great with high-quality products or ingredients,
- 2) Casual dining restaurants are similar to full-service but different in the quality of service and restaurant exclusivity. The



food menu will be a general or well-known menu which has less need to explain its details. The decoration of the restaurant is focused on comfort and a relaxing style. This type of restaurant is easier to reach customers than a full-service style. Restaurants are often located in a mall, a department store or as a standalone restaurant.

3) A quick service restaurant or fast-casual restaurant is decorated in a simple style. Most customers have to walk to order foods and beverages at the front service counter. Food items are easy to understand and ordered at the service area without staff assistance. The menu lists familiar menu items, and the price of food is low. This kind of restaurant is limited in the number of staff. Therefore, quick service restaurants focus on customers to serve themselves, and

4) Mobile restaurant (street vendor) is a food and beverage service facility that is not attached to a permanent building, such as the sidewalk restaurants, boat restaurants serving in a floating market, and food trucks. This restaurant type can be further divided into five categories. Firstly, a general restaurant offers a general food from one nation, such as Thai, Korean, Italian, Japanese, or French cuisine. Secondly, local restaurants (Ethnic cuisine) focus on local or regional food, such as Southern Thai, Northern Thai, Rome Italian or Southern French. In other words, it is a restaurant that is specific to a local area and reflects the unique menu of that region. Thirdly, specialty food restaurants focus on the process of preparation, such as vegetarian food, bio-organic food, and halal food. Fourthly, a further specific type of restaurant focuses on cooking methods, such as Sukiyaki

and BBQ. Furthermore, this type also refers to the restaurants that apply advanced scientific knowledge to molecular gastronomy. Lastly, international restaurants that offer a buffet self-service style and charge a single price ( Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2015) is the fifth category.

A chefs' table restaurant, is a style of restaurant service that has become popular during this current century. The term has no specific definition in the Thai language, and is translated literally from English. According to food timeline magazine, the editor Lynne Oliver explained that chef's Table probably originated in Europe a century ago. At the time, famous chefs were known to have a small table with chairs in their kitchen for friends and relatives to come and talk with them. Sometimes this special table was used to receive special guests who came to visit or see their work in the kitchen. More recently, "chef's Table" hit the spotlight from a 2015 Netflix documentary. The documentary was directed by David Gelb, and reflected the lives of many famous chefs, their cooking concepts, and their attitudes to living in various countries (Sitti-issara, 2020). In the research of the Aesthetics within Architecture of chef's Tables, Sitti-issara (2020) defined the chef's Table as a type of creative restaurant that offers course menus, which are prepared and served by renowned chefs. For most restaurants using the chef's Table style, customers have to reserve a seat or book in advance. The style normally involves a presentation of the food by the executive chef and menus differ from general menus. Furthermore, the menu is characterized by special raw ingredients available for each season or unique to a



destination. The food is made up of small portions so that customers may taste a variety of dishes to demonstrate the chef's skills and abilities. The "chef's table" style was popularized in recent times by contemporary famous chefs, such as Chef Ferran Adrià at El Bulli in Spain and Chef Thomas Keller at French Laundry in USA. The chef's Table style and menus is offered to customers at a very high price (Wayne Gisslen, 2006 cited in Sitti-issara, 2020).

The chef's Table style can be broadly defined by a pattern of services and eating that is served and arranged by chefs in a close, personal context. Often chefs set a long table in front of the kitchen, allowing customers to see the chef cooking all menu items. This style is similar to eating at the front counter, which is called "Omakase" in Japan. The essence of this service is the interaction among the diners, chefs, and cooking process. With this concept, the dining area is placed in the kitchen or very close to the kitchen. This type of service becomes an art form in which the chef becomes the art conductor. The kitchen resembles a small theater in which a pattern of ideas and beliefs are created and presented in the living space that is called a restaurant (Sitti-issara, 2020). Hence, the chefs' Table is a style of serving foods and beverages that reflect the personality of the chef. All menu courses are created by the chef and customers can see the overall food preparation process and steps taken in preparation. Furthermore, at a chefs' table restaurant, chefs always present the freshest ingredients, unique cooking techniques and methods, and background of each dish.

## **Storytelling as a marketing tool**

The research work of Niemchai, Panyaem, Wattanaparb, and Tawatnagul (2019) reported that content marketing now plays an important role in people's lives. This kind of marketing creates content and stories, helping to capture the attention of the target market, and making a strong audience impression such that consumers remember the product and/or service. Content marketing can be conducted in various ways There are articles, images, videos, or other media that can reach the target market. By creating a special story, content marketing can convince readers or consumers to appreciate the value from viewing or reading the content. Content creators have to learn and understand what customers like, what they want to see, and what customers need. This understanding helps content creators develop appropriate content and increase the number of customers in the long run (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Various distribution channels, such as infographics, may be used. Content creators need to gather salient information presented on websites, to create stories that can be delivered through video clips, posts on YouTube or other channels (Koiso-Kanttila & Nina, 2004).

Storytelling is a tool to generate strategic brand recognition. Storytelling creates value by developing a relationship between producers of the story and consumers. Recently, this technique has been found to be one of the most popular marketing tools in the restaurant industry. The content of storytelling can lead to greater business success (Pulizzi, 2012). The technique to describe a food



experience depends on the chef or storyteller. For example, a Japanese restaurant owner often tells the origin of the best ingredients, the use of a delicacy in making soup, and the special cooking process used. Likewise, Korean grilled meat shop owners often tell customers about the process of marinating the meat with special ingredients and the origin of meat which presented challenges in purchase and acquisition. Consequently, customers feel as though they are eating a rare and premium item. In addition, Chipotle restaurant is a Mexican food restaurant that focuses on the use of good ingredients, and creating engaging content about their food. Online advertising for this restaurant is effective because it describes the importance of traditional agriculture and animal production (Niemchai et al., 2019

In addition, storytelling is a tool that can affect customers before purchase or during their decision-making process. Storytelling that provides attractive information is a persuasive approach to convince customers ( Woodside et al. , 2008; Groeppel- Klein, 2005) . For example, Fenger et al. (2015) argues that storytelling overcomes customer reluctance and increases demand when unique information, such as the origin of the food and ingredients, are provided. This unique information helps to arouse the interest of consumers. Furthermore, Evans, McFarland, Dietz, and Jaramillo ( 2012) indicate that storytelling also impacts the retail business in other ways. The authors found that storytelling enhances the relationship between customers and sellers, by the use of first-hand knowledge to impress customers. This study also suggests that the story can be divided into different parts reflecting an overall perspective, different entities,

and even sub-topics that digress from the core. Furthermore, stories may be presented emotionally and rationally to convince customers to buy the services.

More specifically, Fenger et al. (2015) examined the customer response to storytelling through an online survey that collected data from a large sample. The researchers used the storytelling technique to design a story using a short message combined with pictures to describe the food product. This experimental research aimed to compare two groups of respondents. One group was provided with storytelling information while the second group did not receive any storytelling message. The researchers found that the first group was more interested in the products than the second group ( Fenger, Aschemann, Hansen & Grunert, 2015). In addition, Young You Nie et al. (2017) examined consumer responses to organic food storytelling. In a study using 578 respondents in Taiwan, the authors tested four types of storytelling. The authors found that a story reflecting dietary therapy was the most impactful for customers, followed by environment-friendly food stories, price stories, and lastly self-health and disease treatment (Young You Nie, Austin Rong Da Liang & Dun Ji Chen, 2017).

## **Strategic management and competitive advantage**

In fast growing industries, organizations are searching for organizational business excellence and competitive advantage. In this environment, competitor dynamics and changing environmental circumstances become key factors in developing business strategy and





subsequent effectiveness (Nandakumar, Ghobadian & O'Regan, 2010). Likewise, Chareanporn, Mingmalairaks, and Kumsuprom (2020) argue that many factors can drive business effectiveness, such as dynamics, complexity, and business competitiveness. Similarly, Chirapanda and Yoopetch (2008) state that organizational strategic fit among dynamics, complexity, and competitiveness of the firms has an effect on the firm's long-term performance. Furthermore, Mintzberg (1979) states that while organizational performance will vary according to the business strategy adopted, most firms focus on strategic resource management and competitive advantage development. In support, Lin, Tsai and Wu (2014) argue that comprehensive strategic analysis can generate more understanding of business strategies and their likely impact on organizational performance. A large number of empirical studies has led to a consensus among academics that appropriate business strategies will vary considerably according to the business context and environment (Chareanporn et al., 2020). However, scholars have attempted to classify strategic organizational management into key types. For instance, Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1985) define business strategy into four categories; prospector, analyst, defender, and reactor. While all organizational business strategy aims to gain more competitive advantage (Lin, Tsai & Wu, 2014), effective execution depends on the appropriate strategy and business context (Mintzberg, 1979). Thus, companies try to present a unique strategy that can develop competitive advantage (Parnell, 2010; Lin, Tsai & Wu, 2014). However, organizational effectiveness will be influenced by the

degree of success in market access, customer value, and potential of new market segment creation (Chareanporn et al., 2020). According to Porter (1985) competitive business advantage can be achieved by one of three strategies; cost advantage, differentiation, and speed to the market to obtain the highest market share. This categorization is supported empirically by the work of Lenidou et al. (2013), especially in how business responds quickly to changing customers' needs (Anatan, 2014; Koseoglu, et., 2013).

## Research methodology

This qualitative research study used documentary research, participant observation and in-depth interviews to provide three rich sources of data. The study began with data collection from documents related to restaurant type, chef's table restaurant characteristics, storytelling as a marketing tool, and business strategies. The data was collected from both government and private agencies, including academic reports, research, books, academic articles and journals, and online databases. Second, participant observation was undertaken at a particular chef table restaurant. Khongsawatkiat (2013) argues that participant observation techniques are very good for gathering information from an ongoing situation and also help to explore situations where little is known about a phenomenon.

The third data collection approach used semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded by audio recorder and personal notes and later transcribed. As Khongsawatkiat (2013) explained, this



technique is suitable for a small population. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions adopted from past research. According to Neuman (2006), there are several non-probability sampling approaches, such as convenience, quota, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was one of two approaches adopted for this study because the number of chefs' table restaurants is limited and it is difficult to gain access to business information from owners/managers/chefs. Additionally, snowball sampling was also found essential to generate an adequate sample for the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants. Participants included chefs' table restaurant owners or managers, executive chefs, and customers. Data analysis for this study comprised content analysis of interview transcripts, observation file notes and all collected documents. Furthermore, the analysis was based on thematic analysis by using the constant comparative method to identify and refine new categories. The validity of the data was assured by reviews and comments from external experts (Khongsawatkiat, 2013; Havanon, 2009).

## Study results

The results of the study provide a rich summary of the various contexts of Chef's table environments. Findings from interviews reflected the characteristics presented in the literature review. The interviews showed that a chef's table restaurant generally serves a set menu with meals served divided into courses. Each menu is set by the chef (fixed menu), starting with appetizer,

soup, main course, dessert, respectively. The number of courses depends on the chef in each restaurant. In serving food and drink, there is usually a story, especially detailing the journey of the food, beverage and other ingredients prepared for the meals.

## Seven patterns of food storytelling

Seven patterns of storytelling were revealed from the data, as shown in the following details.

**1) Concept and origin of food:** The data from in-depth interviews with service providers, participant observation and analysis of the website or Facebook pages of chefs' table restaurants revealed that the chefs' table style of food service is a small restaurant that accepts a limited number of customers, usually not more than 30 people. There is an open kitchen area where the customers can see what is happening as the chef prepares the food and applies cooking techniques. The staff take customers to sit at a prepared table until all customers come together. The chef introduces himself and the menu of all the dishes that are subsequently served at each meal. An explanation of the concept of food associated with each dish served accompanies each dish serving, e.g., Thai fusion cooking, Northern fusion food, traditional Thai food, or French cuisine. In addition, the source and origin of the ingredients used were provided to customers and most often highlighted their freshness and the element of seasonality. Two respondents highlighted this storytelling concept and origin of food as follows:

*"Today's menu is fusion Thai food. It combines Thai food with the western*





*style of cooking and serving. Today's meal consists of four courses, the first appetizer by Ma Hor Phulae, where we use the local raw materials, Phu Lae pineapple to create today's menu, followed by Boat Noodle Ravioli Soup, Chicken Roulade. Red curry sauce served with local seasonal vegetables and ending with mango sticky rice with lychee sauce..." The 2nd Chef*

*"Food is local, seasonal, and cultural. We use local ingredients but not just from Chiang Mai or the North of Thailand, we tried to use them from everywhere because we don't want to limit ourselves. The purpose is that we want to say that our food in our country is good... all vegetables we get from our own organic vegetable garden." The 4th Chef*

**2) Cooking methods:** a brief description of how to cook each meal was given. The following respondents illustrate this issue as follows:

*"Ab is a traditional Northern food cooked with meat to mix with curry paste then wrapped in banana leaves cooked by roasting or grilled with low heat until the inside is cooked, creating a mesmerizing aroma of banana leaves..." Chef number 1.*

*"We make Boat noodle soup by a method known as consommé, to simmer pork bone soup and seasoning to taste like Thai Boat noodles. Then we filter only the clear water for use..." Said Chef Number 3.*

**3) The composition of each dish** is a description of the food placed on a serving plate consisting of what and why it is served with a particular look or appearance. Two respondents highlighted the composition of each dish as shown:

*"This Wellington Chicken will be a real star and lead the main character of this dish. The chicken is marinated in Ab's curry paste, wrapped in banana leaves and then grilled until the aroma and fragrant of the banana leaves absorb into the whole ingredients. There will be Shiitake mushrooms and fried spinach inside, then wrapped in pie crust. It is served and paired with carbohydrate element and it's a French toasted sesame seeds that's very well-known in Chiang Rai. The dish would be served with a side of vegetable in a dish that helps break down Ab's spicy flavor. The vegetables are carrots and Baby Choy with garlic and oyster sauce. A yellow pumpkin puree will also give this dish more color." Said Chef number 5*

*"Ma Hor is our appetizer. In this dish, it consists of Ma Hor's fillings made from minced pork and peanuts molded into cubes, seasoned similar to those of sago candy. Eat with Phu Lae pineapple with a little sourness. The combination of salty, sweet, and sour flavors makes the customers feel appetize and they want to eat more... This dish is decorated with a sugar dome with pineapple syrup aroma and edible flowers to enhance the color of this dish." Chef number 2*

**4) Method of eating:** This part of the story is about how to properly eat each dish because the appearance of the food is beautifully decorated with the chef's creativity that highlights the various elements of the food. Due to the unfamiliarity customers have with the appearance of many unique styles of food, the chef uses the opportunity to explain appropriate eating methods to enhance the consumption experience. The following respondents illustrate this issue as follows:



*“The way to eat it is to slowly pour the hot soup from the jug over the other ingredients on the plate. For the soup served, we have calculated that it is suitable for this dish. Suitable for one person, just enough to eat.” Chef number 6*

*“The way to eat this dish is to use a fork to knock the sugar dome apart and eat everything together. Having eaten sugar dome peanut and pineapple filling together in one bite will bring combination of tastes of food to your mouth.” Said Chef number 2.*

**5) Food benefits and nutritional value to the consumers:** From the interviews, it was found that descriptions of the properties of the ingredients used in each menu were added to allow diners to see the benefits of that particular dish. The following respondents demonstrate this issue as follows:

*“ This dish contains proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals from organic vegetables, non-toxic, fresh, clean under the concept of “Farm to Table”. The whole dish has a complete nutritional value from 5 essential nutrients... ” Chef number 1 describes the main dish of the meal.*

*“After finishing this menu, drink cold honey Oolong tea to cleanse the palate and release the spicy taste. We added passion fruit jelly to the tea to add freshness before going to the next menu. The Oolong tea itself has antioxidant qualities, reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease...” Restaurant Manager 1*

**6) Cleanliness and safety of kitchen operation and restaurant service.** It was also found to be helpful to provide images of the food production process relating to cleanliness and food hygiene.

Such measures also included images of team members paying attention to the safety aspects of their work. The slogan "cook from the heart" or "like making people at home eat" was featured on the website or Facebook of the restaurants. In addition, websites presented measures to maintain cleanliness and safety in a new normal way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There is a new normal cleaning standard training for employees. Technology is used to make online bookings and online payment to reduce exposure, prevent infection convenient from booking, and access to services. Interview respondents highlighted cleanliness and safety of kitchen operation and restaurant service as follows:

*“ We consider serving fresh food. For example, meat must be at the right temperature. Cleanliness and safety of diners are at the heart of cooking.” Chef number 6*

*“ We also follow TAT's SHA standards for the safety of our customers and employees from the spread of COVID-19.” Restaurant Manager 1-7*

**7) Social responsibility and environmental concerns** are presented through the story of selecting local ingredients to generate income for the community, supporting farmers affected economically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and using organic raw materials from farmers in the community. Moreover, there are systematic waste separation management practices to reduce environmental problems or zero-waste cooking, reducing food waste. These stories were conveyed through the restaurant's social media outlets and from interviews with the service provider. The following



respondents illustrate this issue as follows:

*“ We will also plan menus before purchasing ingredients to prevent leftovers from having to be discarded. For example, for one fish, we try to use all parts from the meat to cook. The bones and heads are boiled in the broth to reduce food waste.” Chef number 7*

*“We choose to use organic vegetables that the villagers grow in the season because they are new, fresh, safe and*

*also promote income for the community. We earn from customers. We support communities like this, our business. People around us can live together for a long time.” Chef number 2*

*“ There is already a systematic waste separation at the store. Organic waste will be picked up as animal feed. Plastic waste will be collected and sold as a small amount of income almost every month,” said the Restaurant Manager number 5*

**Table 1** The table of theme in food storytelling of chef’s table restaurant

| Theme   | Subtheme   |
|---|--|
| 1. Concept and origin of food   | - Nationality of food e.g. Thai food, Western food, Lanna food, Fusion food.<br>- The original place of food and their ingredients where they come from. |
| 2. Cooking methods  | - The way of cooking food e.g. frying, simmering, roasting, grilling, boiling, mixing.   |
| 3. The composition of each dish                                       | - The appearance of food.<br>- The details of each component on a food dish.   |
| 4. Method of eating   | - The sequence how to eat each dish.   |
| 5. Food benefits and nutritional value to the consumers               | - Food nutrition e.g. Proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals.<br>- Health benefit of food to prevent or healing human body.                   |
| 6. Cleanliness and safety of kitchen operation and restaurant service | - Food production process concerning cleanliness and hygiene.<br>- Cleanliness and safety in a new normal way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.         |
| 7. Social responsibility and environmental concerns                   | - Supporting local community.<br>- Preservation of the environment for the future.   |



## Competitive advantage obtained by food storytelling

Thirty informants described the competitive advantages from food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chefs' table restaurant business into three themes: 1) cost leadership, 2) differentiation and 3) responsiveness to guests' special requests.

**1) Cost leadership advantage:** From the result, it was found that the service by using food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chefs' table restaurant business created more attractiveness. Furthermore, it leads to reduce restaurant costs in three aspects; the cost of public relation, the cost of reservation and payment processes, and the cost of raw materials storage and menu printed for presentation. Two respondents highlighted cost leadership advantage that:

*"We present and tell the story of the entire menu through the website. Both in terms of the menu, what are ingredients each dish has and also the price. Additionally, what will customers eat? how is the service they received? All of these have been shared on the website and the restaurant's Facebook page and personal Facebook. This makes people interested in making reservations and fastens the booking."* Store Manager 2.

*"The website that we use is free; there is no cost to create. Using Facebook is also definitely free. We can simply say that we have used no cost from any publicity at all but the result of doing this is quite impressive. The customers perceive and know about our shop, our products, and decide to book with us."* Restaurant Manager 3

The findings from the interviews also indicated that the limit of guest numbers in the booking process helped the restaurant predict the use of raw materials and ingredients. If the restaurant knows the exact number of customers, it can also reduce the cashier's workflow steps. The following respondents illustrate this issue as follows:

*"From the traditional restaurant services where customers may walk in and ask to see the menu, review the menu selections and make a decision whether he/she might eventually make a booking of the restaurant if interested. Eventually, when they finish the meal, the customers would typically pay with the staff to deliver money to the cashier. But by making a website of a restaurant like this, customers can go to menu reviews, read menus, decide to make a booking online. Some customers even completed a booking by making a money transfer before their arrival. It can be considered that the work process of the staff in the restaurant is reduced,"* said the Restaurant Manager 5.

*"Customers can go to review the menu online, visualize the food and ingredients of each dish from the website. They can even decide to book and transfer money to us immediately. We will also know the exact reservation number before the date that we have to go to work. It is also convenient in terms of seating layout for customers. The cashier himself will also know which customers to collect money from, which is not much left after the first payment online as an outstanding balance. By doing this, the cashier staff would be less busy during the actual working shift, making them available and be an extra hand to help serve drinks to*



*customers." Said the Restaurant Manager 7*

Furthermore, the cost of raw materials storage and menu printing also decreased. Two respondents illustrate this issue as follows:

*"The Chef will know the reservation numbers and prepare ingredients and food supplies to fit the number of the guests' bookings. We may order extra food supplies just in case if something went wrong...Our chefs will explain the story of each food that customers are about to eat. We decided together that we don't have to print paper menus for customers. They can even view menus from our website using their Smart mobile phones." Restaurant Manager 7*

*"We can predict food cost because we know the number of dishes we will produce. Making chefs' tables is good in that we can reduce food wastes compared to a typical restaurant service where customers walk in to order food available on the menu. We have to prepare all ingredients available to the menu in the restaurant, making it very difficult to forecast and manage the food cost that way..." Chef Number 2*

**2) Differentiation advantage:** From the results, using food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chefs' table restaurant business can generate the business differentiation. The food delivers to the customer with food story such as the description of originality or special ingredients make more attractiveness. It can make a difference for businesses in three aspects; the food creativity of each menu, the fresh ingredients and the support for local farmers or community, and the knowledgeable staff and chefs about food

story and origins. Three respondents explain this issue as follows:

*"I like food, it's strange that it's a perfect blend of local food and western food. I like that he uses organic ingredients from villagers to cook. For example, this salted egg that uses soil from termite mounds is very cool and quirky, I never knew that Chiang Rai had this product...so creative that you can use salted eggs to make desserts. The chef is very talented and knowledgeable." Customer number 1*

*"I like having the chef describe the food characters. It's like listening to fun and very informative lectures. After listening to all explanations and that makes us want to eat the whole plate. It seems like he's been thinking for a long time and put lots of effort to create one dish...The staff is also very knowledgeable in answering questions about foods." Customer number 3*

*"There hasn't been a lot of restaurants like this so far, having received knowledge about foods from chef and it's inexpensive too. I wish they could do it more often. It is also good that it helped local farmers." Customer number 8.*

**3) Responsiveness to guests' special requests:** The use of food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chefs' table restaurant business can create business competitiveness in terms of a quick response to guests' special requests. The online advertisement on website or social media provided an impactful channel. The customers can access product information and make a reservation via online platform. For example, participants gave a general comment on response to guests' special requests:





*"I saw many people shared it on Facebook. Then I went to have a look at the delicious and unusual menu and decided to book via QR code shown on the website. Then I transferred money for food via LINE...When the day I booked the restaurant comes, I came and eat. The restaurant prepared a table for me and my friends. It's convenient." Customer 3,4,5,6,10,11,12,15 use the same booking method.*

One respondent further asserted that:

*"I have been asked if I'm allergic to any food or not when making a restaurant reservation. I informed the staff that there was a friend who is allergic to honey...When we came to eat in the restaurant, the staff remembered that there was one person at our table who was allergic to honey and informed us that the drink that normally put honey had replaced with syrup to keep the drink sweet." Customer number 7*

## **Conclusions and discussion**

The objectives of this research were to study patterns of food storytelling leading to competitive advantage for chefs' table restaurant businesses in Thailand. This style of business uses two channels to deliver food storytelling: social media and face to face from the chef. The findings are consistent with the work by Youg, Austin, and Dun (2017) that stories related to self- health and disease treatment, being environmentally friendly, highlighting the source of food and production process, and dietary therapy are important sources of topics that can be used in a chef's table style of restaurant. Furthermore, the results are

consistent with the literature that has highlighted the importance of source of raw materials, cooking process, the composition of each dish, method of eating, food nutritional value, social responsibility and environmental concern in previous patterns of food storytelling (Niemchai et al. , 2019; Sharma, Amit, Moon, Joonho, Strohhahn, and Catherine, 2014).

All respondents affirmed that food storytelling is an important tool for creating a strategic competitive advantage for chefs' tables restaurant business. Three strategic competitive advantages were found; cost leadership, differentiation, and responsiveness to guests' special requests. All three competitive advantages led to positive organizational outcomes, such as profitability, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and word of mouth advertising. The findings found that chefs' table restaurants with their unique style of storytelling attracted more customers. The strategy also led to reduced restaurant costs for public relation, reservation and payment processes, raw materials storage and printed menus. These results are consistent with Lenoidou (2013) who reported that competitive advantage can be achieved through a cost advantage over competitors. Furthermore, the results are also consistent with the work of Blanchard (2014) and Wanarat (2020) who argued that creating a competitive advantage can be achieved by producing different products or services that are better than competitors. The results indicate that the use of food storytelling techniques in Thailand's chefs' table restaurant business can generate a clear differentiation from key competitors. Food is delivered to the customer with an



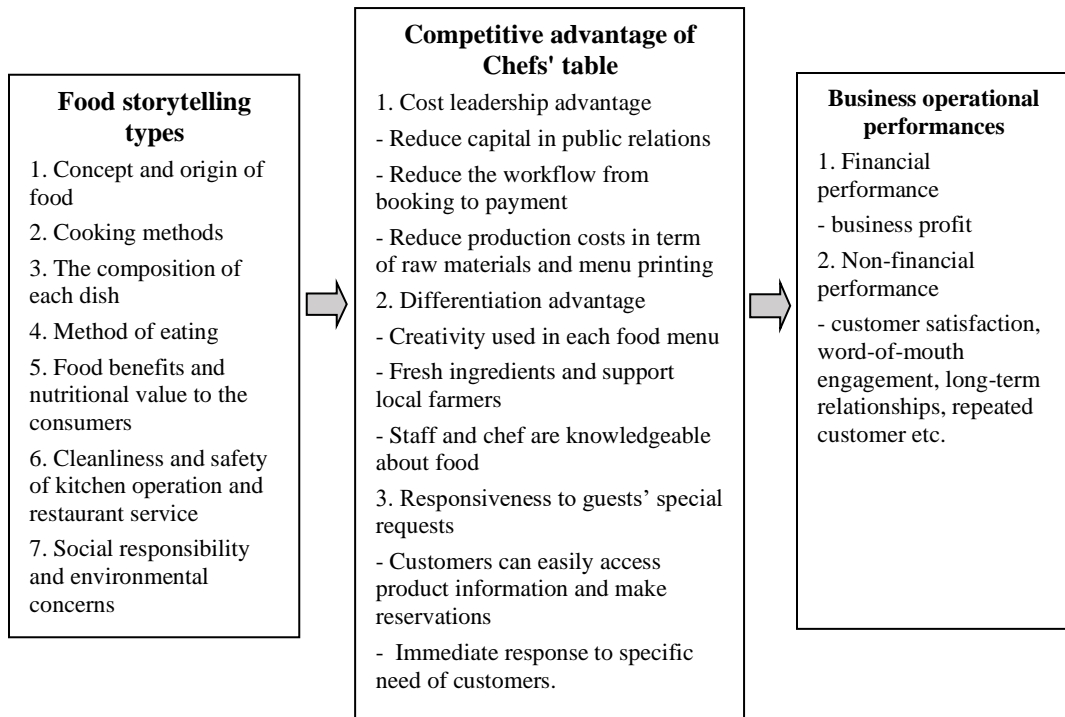


authentic food story, including descriptions of originality and special ingredients, making the food and restaurant more attractive. Three aspects make the story effective: (1) the food creativity of each menu, (2) ingredients are fresh and support local farmers or community, and (3) the staff and chefs are knowledgeable about the food story. In addition, most interviewees affirmed that the use of food storytelling techniques can create business competitiveness in terms of quick response to guests' special requests. Online advertising on the firm's website or through social media is an influential channel. Customers can access product information and make a reservation via the online platform. This finding is supported by Niemchai, Panyaem, Wattanaparb and Tawatnagul (2019) who reported that the story of the origin of the food and the reputation of the chef can attract more customers and increase sales volume. Furthermore, most respondents indicated that food storytelling in chefs' Table restaurant can create a competitive advantage for business performance. Yoopetch (2010)

noted that measuring performance is very important for small and medium sized business in hospitality industry and can help the firms achieve the long-term competitive advantage.

## **Recommendations and future research**

This paper provided an analysis of the crucial patterns of storytelling observed in the Chefs' Table restaurant chain in Thailand, as presented in Figure 1. The restaurant chain should continue to create story types that demonstrate the chain's unique stories, history and original food processes. This storytelling approach develops a strong competitive advantage which leads to better financial performance. In addition, the use of adopting social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, can continuously engage guests. Such word-of-mouth engagement can build long-term relationships with guests, leading to sustainable competitive advantage for Chef's Table restaurants.



**Figure 1** The framework of the study of food storytelling in chefs' table restaurant business

Further research can investigate various types of restaurant businesses, such as fine dining restaurants or ethnic cuisine shops. In addition, quantitative methodologies could be used to increase

the generalizability of the results. Moreover, further study into the relationship between competitive advantage and financial performance should be considered.

## References

- Anatan, L. (2014). Factors Influencing Supply Chain Competitive Advantage and Performance. *International Journal of Business and Information*, 9(3), 311-334.
- Blanchard, D. (2014) Supply chain & logistics: The competitive advantage of a supply chain. *Industry Week*, Retrieved June 17, 2018. from <https://www.industryweek.com/competitive-chain>



- Chareanporn, Tarittawan. Mingmalairaks, Phoommhiphat. and Kumsuprom, Siridech. (2020). The Influencing Context of Organizational Implementation Strategy Toward Accommodation Business in Thailand. *Suthiparithat Journal*, 34(109), 216-229.
- Chirapanda, S. , & Yoopetch, C. (2008). Organizational strategic fit and long-term performance: The sufficiency economy approach. *Proceedings of International Conference on Business and Information 2008, Korea*, 6–10 July Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10527/10603>
- Department of Business Development. (2019). *Restaurant Business Analysis for February 2019*. Retrieved May 20, 2021, from [https://www.dbd.go.th/download/document\\_file/Statistic/2562/T26/T26\\_201902.pdf](https://www.dbd.go.th/download/document_file/Statistic/2562/T26/T26_201902.pdf).
- Groepel-Klein, A. (2005). Arousal and consumer in-store behavior. *Brain Research Bulletin*, 67, 428– 437.
- Evans, K.R., McFarland, R.G., Dietz, B., & Jaramillo, F. (2012). Advancing sales performance research: A focus on five under researched topic areas. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 32(1), 89–106.
- Fenger, M. H. J., Aschemann-Witzel, J., Hansen, F., & Grunert, K. G. (2015). Delicious words – assessing the impact of short storytelling messages on consumer preferences for variations of a new processed meat product. *Food Quality and Preference*, 41, 237–244.
- Havanon, Napaporn. (2009). Narrative approach: the turning point of social science research. *Journal of the Mekong Societies*, 5 (May-August), 1-22.
- Holliman, Geraint, & Rowley, Jennifer. (2014). Business to business digital content marketing: marketers' perceptions of best practice. *Journal of research in interactive marketing*, 8(4), 269-293.
- Khongsawatkiat, Kittiphun. (2013). *Business research methodology: Business research methods*. Bangkok: Pongwarin Printing.
- Koiso-Kanttila, Nina. (2004). Digital content marketing: a literature synthesis. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 20(1-2), 45-65.
- Koseoglu, M. A., & Other (2013). Linkages among business strategy, uncertainty and performance in the hospitality industry: Evidence from an emerging economy. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 34(1), 81-91.
- Leonidou, L. C., Leonidou, C. N., Fotiadis, T. A., & Zerti, A. (2013). Resources and capabilities as drivers of hotel environmental marketing strategy: Implications for competitive advantage and performance. *Tourism Management*, 35, 94-110.
- Lin, C., Tsai, H.L. & Wu, J.C. (2014). Collaboration strategy decision-making using the Miles and Snow typology. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(9), 1979-1990, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.10.013.



- Mintzberg, H. (1979). Patterns in strategy formation. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 9(3), 67-86.
- Nandakumar, M. K., Ghobadian, A. & O'Regan, N. (2010). Business-level strategy and performance The moderating effects of environment and structure, *Management Decision*, 48(6), 907-939.
- Neuman, W.L. (2006). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. (6th ed.), Boston, USA: Pearson Education.
- Niemchai, Saranyaa. Panyaem, Kosin. Wattanaparb, Narathip and Tawatnagul, Thaweedet. (2019). Using Storytelling Marketing Concepts to Promote Thai Cuisine in 4 Regions. *Dusit Thani College Journal*, 13(1), 459-474.
- Parnell A.J. (2010). Strategic clarity, business strategy and performance. *Journal of Strategy and Management*. 3(4). 304-324.
- Plidtookpai, N., & Yoopetch, C. (2021). The electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) trustworthiness, brand image and other determinants of purchase intention of the middle class to luxury hotel services. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 42(1), 61-68.
- Porter, M. E. (1985). *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*. New York: The Free Press
- Pulizzi, Joe. (2012). The rise of storytelling as the new marketing. *Publishing research quarterly*, 28(2), 116-123.
- Rungsatianputorn, Nattawut. (2016). Type of restaurants, Food Quality, Service Quality and Social Network affecting customers' decision to choose restaurants for dinner in Bangkok. Retrieved 25 May, 2021, from [http://dspace.bu.ac.th/bitstream/123456789/2109/1/nattawut\\_rung.pdf](http://dspace.bu.ac.th/bitstream/123456789/2109/1/nattawut_rung.pdf).
- Sharma, Amit, Moon, Joonho, Strohbehn, Catherine. (2014). Restaurant's decision to purchase local foods: Influence of value chain activities. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 39, 130-143.
- Singjawala, Wanida. (2011). Grilled beef-grilled pork restaurant "Nobita". Independent Studies Master's degree, Bangkok University.
- Sitti-issara, Wassana. (2020). Aesthetics within architecture of Chef's Tables. Graduate School, Silpakorn University.
- Stettler, J., Rosenberg-Taufer, B., Huck, L., Hoppler, A. A., Schwarz, J., Yoopetch, C., & Huilla, J. (2018). A Conceptual Framework of Commercial Hospitality: Perception of Tourists in Thailand and Switzerland. In *Contemporary Challenges of Climate Change, Sustainable Tourism Consumption, and Destination Competitiveness*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. (2015). *Food Service Management in Institutions*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Nonthaburi : Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University Press.



- Wanarat, S. (2020). Increasing Competitive Advantage through Supply Chain Management and Information Technology Management. *Journal of the Association of Researchers*, 25(1), 107-122.
- Woodside, A. G., Sood, S., & Miller, K. E. (2008). When consumers and brands talk: Storytelling theory and research in psychology and marketing. *Psychology & Marketing*, 25(2), 97–145.
- Yoopetch, C. (2010). The model of knowledge acquisition: the study of SMEs in the Thai Hospitality Industry, *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology* 42: 351–354
- Yoopetch, C. (2021). Women empowerment, attitude toward risk-taking and entrepreneurial intention in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 15(1), 59–76.
- Young You Nie, Austin Rong Da Liang & Dun Ji Chen. (2017). Assessing the effect of organic-food short storytelling on consumer response. *The Service Industries Journal*. 37, 968-985.

