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Factors Affecting Wedding Banquet Venue Selection of Thai Wedding Couples

Kulkanya Napompech

Administration and Management College, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang, Thailand

Abstract: The wedding day is one of the most important days for couples, so they want their ceremony to be as near to perfect as possible. Finding a venue for the wedding banquet is the first stage of the couple's planning and many factors affect this decision. The objective of this research was to study the factors that affect the selection of wedding banquet venues among Thai wedding couples. This study obtained data via questionnaires and used statistical tests such as the Mann-Whitney U test and one-way analysis of variance. Results showed that among the 30 factors that were assessed by 222 respondents, good service from employees, food quality, the venue's atmosphere, size of the event room and facilities in the wedding room were the five most important factors determining the attractiveness of a wedding banquet venue. The results demonstrated that respondents who organized a wedding banquet at a hotel prioritized the atmosphere. In contrast, respondents who organized a wedding banquet at a restaurant placed highest priority on the facilities of the wedding room. Results showed that significant differences regarding the factors that affect the selection of wedding banquet venues exist across groups with different demographic variables (i.e., age, income, education level).

Key words: Couples, hospitality, wedding, banquet, service, venue

INTRODUCTION

When a loving couple wants to get married, many see their wedding ceremony as one of the most important days of their lives, so they want this day to be as near to perfect as possible. To organize a wedding, the soon-to-be spouses must make numerous preparations, such as finding an auspicious time, choosing their attire, sending out wedding invitations, preparing souvenirs and selecting the banquet venue.

Selecting the banquet venue is one of the first steps in organizing a wedding. Many factors can affect the final decision, including the budget, number of guests, food quality, food prices, beverage prices, persuasiveness of the salesperson and preference of the families. Hotels and restaurants have developed various marketing strategies to entice customers to use their services. Organized events that yield high revenue, such as weddings, greatly increase hotel profit from food and beverage fees (Adler and Chien, 2004). Marsan (2000) showed that, in the United States, almost 50% of a hotel's food and beverage revenue comes from organizing weddings.

Managers of hotel businesses and other wedding banquet venues must recognize and meet the needs and desires of customers (Abdullah and Hamdan, 2012). The success of managers and owners depends on their understanding of customer needs and their ability to fulfill them in ways that exceed customer expectations (Yang *et al.*, 2009). Understanding the reasons why

wedding couples choose hotels or restaurants for wedding banquets allows the managers of hotels and restaurants to greatly improve the quality of their operations. By identifying factors that affect the wedding banquet venue selection of Thai wedding couples, this study can have valuable implications for hospitality managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although numerous articles have examined the factors that affecting wedding banquet venue choices, all of them have appeared in wedding magazines. To date in academia, only Lau and Hui (2010) in Hong Kong has focused on a wedding couple's selection of the banquet venue; however, prior research on the characteristics of restaurants and hotels that attract customers could be adapted to identify the factors that influence couples' decision in selecting a wedding banquet venue.

Past research has discovered that food quality is an important factor in choosing a restaurant for dining (Berry *et al.*, 2002; Caruana, 2002; Chiou *et al.*, 2002; Heung *et al.*, 2002; Fullerton, 2005; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Reich *et al.*, 2005; Gupta *et al.*, 2007; Matzler *et al.*, 2006). Food quality includes the taste, freshness, temperature, presentation and variety (Baek *et al.*, 2006; Bouranta *et al.*, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009b; Kincaid *et al.*, 2010; Abdullah and Hamdan, 2012; Ryu *et al.*, 2012; Oyewole, 2013). Ryu *et al.* (2008) found that food quality

is a significant factor that affects the image of restaurants and customers usually use the food to evaluate the service quality (Namkung and Jang, 2008). Since couples wish to impress honored guests who attend their wedding banquets, food quality can affect their selection of wedding banquet venue. Indeed, Lau and Hui (2010) reported that food quality is the third most important factor in the selection of wedding banquet venues for wedding couples in Hong Kong.

The service quality of employees is also a significant factor affecting restaurant selection (Berry *et al.*, 2002; Caruana, 2002; Chiou *et al.*, 2002; Heung *et al.*, 2002; Fullerton, 2005; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Reich *et al.*, 2005; Matzler *et al.*, 2006; Gupta *et al.*, 2007). Poon and Low (2005) mentioned that the service provided by employees of service businesses determines the satisfaction of customers and is an important factor in the evaluation of restaurants' quality (Chow *et al.*, 2007; Ryu and Jang, 2008). Chu and Choi (2000) found that employee service quality affects the selection of hotels in Hong Kong. This corresponds with the research by Lau and Hui (2010) which found that the attitude of employees is the most influential factor in the selection of wedding banquet venues for wedding couples in Hong Kong.

Good location is another important factor contributing to the success of hotel and restaurant businesses (Tzeng *et al.*, 2002; Chou *et al.*, 2008). Location is a significant factor in the restaurant selection process for dining customers (Austin *et al.*, 2005). A good location grants convenience to customers with respect to relaxation and dining (Chou *et al.*, 2008; Ramanathan and Ramanathan, 2011). Adam and Amuquandoh (2013) stated that a good hotel must be easily accessible by public transportation systems and by car and should be reachable within a short amount of time. Callan and Hoyes (2000) found that a good wedding banquet venue must be convenient for guests.

Price is part of the marketing mix and constitutes an essential tool for marketers to use in attracting customers to buy and use their products and services (Chan and Wong, 2006).

A customer is likely to compare the value and the price of the service and decide to purchase if the value exceeds the price (Charoensettasilp and Wu, 2014). Perceived price fairness is positively related to perceived customer value (Rondan-Cataluna and Martin-Ruiz, 2011). Bhattacharya and Friedman (2001) stated that acknowledgment of fair prices will increase customer satisfaction and business profits, including venue rental costs, food and beverage costs, package prices and equipment rental costs. In the organizing of wedding

banquets at hotels and other banquet venues, a variety of packages from which to choose is often presented to customers.

A good atmosphere also contributes to customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word-of-mouth and ultimately leads to a business's success (Heide *et al.*, 2009). A hotel's atmosphere is part of the hotel's design that affects emotions; the atmosphere has both tangible and intangible characteristics. These include design, convenience and artistic decorations that convey meaning to customers (Liu and Jang, 2009a, b). Previous studies (Berry *et al.*, 2002; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Countryman and Jang, 2006; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Heung and Gu, 2012) have reported that the atmosphere of restaurants greatly influences on the satisfaction of customers who come to dine which in turn affects their intention to revisit, positive word-of-mouth and willingness to pay more. Other research (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009a) found that the environment of a meal can create emotions and affect the feelings of customers. When selecting a wedding banquet venue, couples want to impress their guests attending. Therefore, the atmosphere of the venue plays an important role.

Naturally, products of the hospitality industry are highly intangible (Kotler *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, customers will often gather more information on the organizations' facilities (Bitner, 1992). Facilities include different types of equipment used during the wedding, the bride's dressing room and accommodations. Lau and Hui (2010) recommended that hotels should have a dressing room for the bride to use in preparing for the wedding. Therefore, various wedding packages provided by hotels usually include a bride's dressing room and accommodations (Adler and Chien, 2004). Furthermore, hotels should also offer wedding-related services, including wedding photography and limousine services for the wedding couple (Adler and Chien, 2004). Lau and Hui (2010) found that limousine services for wedding couples influenced the couple's decision about whether to hold the wedding ceremony in the same venue as the wedding banquet.

In searching for information about wedding banquet venues, couples may use their knowledge and past experience. For example, the couple may have experienced the wedding banquets of their friends or relatives. Furthermore, they may get recommendations from their friends, because people who have a positive attitude towards a product influence the attitude of people around them (Pomsanam *et al.*, 2014). They may also get information from visiting a venue; as Lau and Hui (2010) mentioned, the first impression involves the attributes

that influence the selection of a wedding banquet venue. Respondents may also obtain wedding studio information from the Internet which provides new ways for individuals to realize word-of-mouth (Zhong *et al.*, 2014). As mentioned in previous research (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2005; Van Baal and Dach, 2005; Verhoef *et al.*, 2007), customers tend to collect product information using the Internet but make purchases at brick-and-mortar stores. Marketers have employed social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter to create awareness, interest and eventually product purchase (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012; Napompech, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research instrument: After a thorough literature review, a self-administered questionnaire was developed which contained two sections. The first part included questions about participants' demographic profiles. The second included 30 factors that measured the perceptions of wedding couples toward the importance of factors that affect wedding banquet venue selection. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not very important) to 5 (very important) was used to rank the perceived importance of each factor.

Data collection: Data in this study were collected from attendees of the Wedding Fair at the Impact Convention and Meeting Center in Bangkok from June 15 to June 23, 2013 and from couples at wedding studio shops in Bangkok from June 1 to August 31, 2013. In Thailand, couples planning to marry are likely to take pre-wedding photographs several months before the wedding ceremony. The sample size was 222. The collection procedure used a convenience sampling approach. Respondents to the questionnaire were given an Ice Cream Swensen's coupon of THB\$50 as a token of gratitude for answering the questionnaire.

Data analysis: To profile the respondents' demographics, a frequency analysis was conducted. The respondents' perceptions regarding the importance of the 30 wedding banquet factors were assessed by using the mean rating. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether the respondents' perceived importance of factors affecting wedding banquet venue selection varied by demographics.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Respondents' demographics: Most of the sample group consisted of females (58.1%) who had earned a bachelor's degree. Individuals aged 31-35 comprised the bulk of the sample group (37.4%), followed by the group aged 26-30 (32.4%). Most worked as company employees, accounting for 48.8% of the group. Those with a monthly salary lower than THB\$ 20,000 accounted for 42.3% of the group. From the designated sample group of 222 individuals, 57.7% chose to hold their wedding banquets at hotels while 42.3% chose to hold their banquets at restaurants. Most of the sample group planned for less than THB\$ 100,000 in wedding banquet costs, accounting for 46.4% of the group, followed by those who had planned for more than THB\$ 300,000, accounting for 22.1% (Table 1).

Factors affecting wedding banquet venue choice of Thai wedding couples: Table 2 summarizes the mean score for the importance of each of the 30 factors affecting the wedding banquet venue selection of Thai wedding couples. Factors are ranked according to the mean value;

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

| Items | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Gender | |
| Female | 58.1 |
| Male | 41.9 |
| Age (years) | |
| Younger than 20 | 1.8 |
| 21-25 | 17.6 |
| 26-30 | 32.4 |
| 31-35 | 37.4 |
| 36-40 | 8.1 |
| Older than 40 | 2.7 |
| Education level | |
| Less than bachelor's degree | 11.3 |
| Bachelor's degree | 58.6 |
| Graduate degree | 30.2 |
| Occupation | |
| College student | 4.1 |
| Owner of business | 16.7 |
| Company employee | 48.8 |
| State enterprise employee | 14.9 |
| Other | 15.8 |
| Monthly income (THB\$) | |
| Less than 20,000 | 42.3 |
| 20,000-35,000 | 23.4 |
| 35,001-50,000 | 19.4 |
| More than 50,000 | 11.8 |
| Expenses spent in wedding venue (THB\$) | |
| Less than 100,000 | 46.4 |
| 100,001-200,000 | 20.7 |
| 200,001-300,000 | 10.8 |
| More than 300,000 | 22.1 |
| Banquet venue choice | |
| Hotel ballroom | 57.7 |
| Restaurants | 42.3 |
| THB\$33: Approximately US\$1 | |

Table 2: Mean rating for perceived importance of factors affecting wedding banquet venue selection

| Ranking | Item description | Mean | SD |
|---------|--|------|-------|
| 1 | Good service from employees | 4.38 | 0.808 |
| 2 | Food quality | 4.36 | 0.800 |
| 3 | Venue's atmosphere | 4.36 | 0.764 |
| 4 | Size of the event room | 4.36 | 0.771 |
| 5 | Facilities of banquet room | 4.36 | 0.800 |
| 6 | Ability to provide wedding ceremony services | 4.35 | 0.808 |
| 7 | Photography service | 4.35 | 0.863 |
| 8 | Package prices (food and beverages, plus venue rental costs) | 4.32 | 0.743 |
| 9 | Ability to travel to venue conveniently by car | 4.32 | 0.851 |
| 10 | Audio equipment availability | 4.27 | 0.754 |
| 11 | Personal preference | 4.27 | 0.827 |
| 12 | Musical services | 4.26 | 0.908 |
| 13 | First impressions | 4.25 | 0.796 |
| 14 | Food prices | 4.23 | 0.747 |
| 15 | Beverage prices | 4.23 | 0.749 |
| 16 | Rental costs of the venue | 4.23 | 0.766 |
| 17 | Vacancy during desired banquet date | 4.21 | 0.774 |
| 18 | Family's preference | 4.21 | 0.868 |
| 19 | Wedding equipment rental costs | 4.20 | 0.818 |
| 20 | Venue's location | 4.07 | 0.842 |
| 21 | Venue's promotions | 3.93 | 0.846 |
| 22 | Venue's popularity | 3.90 | 0.855 |
| 23 | Accommodations offer | 3.90 | 1.042 |
| 24 | Venue's modernity | 3.87 | 0.849 |
| 25 | Wedding couple dressing room offer | 3.81 | 1.013 |
| 26 | Opinions from online social networks | 3.79 | 0.797 |
| 27 | Salespeople's influence | 3.71 | 0.823 |
| 28 | Bridal limousine services | 3.71 | 1.121 |
| 29 | Wedding couple's experiences with the venue | 3.70 | 0.933 |
| 30 | Suggestions from friends and relatives | 3.64 | 0.799 |

however, if two or more factors have an equal mean value, then these factors will be ranked according to the sum of factor percentages from respondents who perceive the highest importance (gives a score of 5) and high importance (gives a score of 4).

Although, all factors were ranked as important by the respondents, tiers emerged. The total of 30 factors can be broadly categorized into three segments based on their importance scores as assessed by respondents. The first segment included factors that received the highest scores, i.e., factors with mean scores of more than 4.32. These factors include good service from employees, food quality, venue's atmosphere, size of the event room, facilities of the banquet room, ability to provide wedding ceremony services and photography services. The second segment reflected the second-highest group with factors that had mean scores between 4.20 and 4.32. These factors include package prices, ability to travel to the venue conveniently by car, availability of audio equipment, personal preference, musical services, first impressions, food prices, beverage prices, rental costs of the venue, vacancy for the desired banquet date, family's preference and wedding equipment rental costs.

The third segment is the lowest mean score group, i.e., factors with mean scores between 3.64 and 4.07. These factors include the venue's location, the venue's promotions, the venue's popularity, accommodations offer, the venue's modernity, dressing room offer, opinions from online social networks, salespeople's influence, bridal limousine services, wedding couple's experiences regarding the venue and suggestions from friends and relatives.

The results in Table 2 demonstrate that the core factors are good service from employees, food quality and the venue's atmosphere. The results also show that respondents are more concerned with these three factors than wedding banquet costs such as food price (ranked No. 14), beverage price (ranked No. 15), rental, equipment expenses (ranked No. 19) and other factors used in searching for information about wedding banquet venues (e.g., opinions from online social networks (ranked No. 26), salespeople influence (ranked No. 27) and suggestions from friends and relatives (ranked No. 30). In searching for information, respondents gave more importance to personal preference (ranked No. 11) and first impressions at their initial visit (ranked No. 13) than other sources (e.g., suggestions from friends/relatives which ranked No. 30).

The results also show that respondents consider wedding ceremony service (ranked No. 6) and photography service (ranked No. 7) more important than other services (e.g., musical services ranked No. 12), accommodations offer (ranked No. 23), bridal dressing room offer (ranked No. 25) and bridal limousine service (ranked No. 28).

The results showed that groups consider factors involved in information search (i.e., first impression, personal preference, opinions from online social networks, wedding couple's experience with the venue) as less important than factors associated with the venue itself.

Comparison of selection factors between a hotel ballroom and a restaurant:

Table 3 reports the analysis results of the Mann-Whitney U test. The results suggest that couples who chose to organize wedding banquets at hotels regarded 23 of the 30 factors as having higher importance than those who chose to organize their wedding banquets at restaurants. Those who chose to organize wedding banquets at hotels gave importance to (1) The venue's atmosphere, (2) Good employee service, (3) The ability to provide wedding ceremony services, (4) Size of the event room being suitable for the number of guests, (5) Wedding photography services, (6) Food quality and (7) First impression.

Table 3: Comparison of perceived importance of factors of wedding banquet venue choice between a hotel ballroom and a restaurant

| Attributes | Rank | Mean value | Rank | Mean value | Significance |
|--|------|------------|------|------------|--------------|
| Venue's atmosphere | 1 | 4.52 | 9 | 4.14 | 0.000** |
| Good service from employees | 2 | 4.50 | 2 | 4.22 | 0.004** |
| Ability to provide wedding ceremony services | 3 | 4.49 | 8 | 4.15 | 0.002** |
| Size of the event room | 4 | 4.49 | 4 | 4.19 | 0.002** |
| Photography services | 5 | 4.49 | 7 | 4.16 | 0.002** |
| Food quality | 6 | 4.48 | 3 | 4.21 | 0.004** |
| First impression of venue | 7 | 4.45 | 17 | 3.99 | 0.000** |
| Facilities of the banquet room | 8 | 4.45 | 1 | 4.24 | 0.032* |
| Ability to travel to venue conveniently by car | 9 | 4.43 | 6 | 4.16 | 0.015* |
| Package prices (food and beverages, plus venue rental costs) | 10 | 4.42 | 5 | 4.17 | 0.014* |
| Audio equipment availability | 11 | 4.41 | 14 | 4.09 | 0.000** |
| Personal preference | 12 | 4.39 | 13 | 4.1 | 0.008** |
| Wedding equipment rental costs | 13 | 4.38 | 20 | 3.96 | 0.000** |
| Musical services | 14 | 4.35 | 10 | 4.13 | 0.040* |
| Family's preference | 15 | 4.34 | 16 | 4.02 | 0.007** |
| Venue rental costs | 16 | 4.34 | 15 | 4.09 | 0.013* |
| Beverage prices | 17 | 4.32 | 11 | 4.12 | 0.031* |
| Food prices | 18 | 4.31 | 12 | 4.12 | 0.062 |
| Vacancy during the desired banquet date | 19 | 4.21 | 18 | 3.98 | 0.000** |
| Venue's location | 20 | 4.19 | 21 | 3.91 | 0.007** |
| Accommodations offer | 21 | 4.06 | 25 | 3.68 | 0.002** |
| Venue's modernity | 22 | 4.02 | 26 | 3.66 | 0.001** |
| Venue's popularity | 23 | 4.02 | 22 | 3.80 | 0.036* |
| Wedding couple dressing room offer | 24 | 3.93 | 29 | 3.64 | 0.016* |
| Venue's promotions | 25 | 3.9 | 19 | 3.98 | 0.784 |
| Opinions from online social networks | 26 | 3.83 | 24 | 3.74 | 0.283 |
| Wedding couple's experiences with the venue | 27 | 3.77 | 30 | 3.61 | 0.104 |
| Bridal limousine services | 28 | 3.75 | 27 | 3.66 | 0.311 |
| Salespeople's influence | 29 | 3.68 | 23 | 3.76 | 0.523 |
| Suggestions from friends and relatives | 30 | 3.62 | 28 | 3.66 | 0.985 |

**Significant at 5 and 1 %, respectively

Those who chose to organize wedding banquets at restaurants gave importance to (1) Facilities of the banquet room, (2) Good employee service, (3) Food quality, (4) Size of the event room being suitable for the number of guests, (5) Package prices (food and beverages plus venue rental costs) (6) The ability to travel to the venue conveniently by car and (7) photography services.

Variations in perceptions of factors affecting wedding banquet venue selection by demographic groups

Variations by personal income: Table 4 demonstrates the ANOVA results achieved for the relationship of wedding venue attributes to monthly salary. These results reveal that a relationship exists between the respondents' perceptions of the wedding venue and their personal income; those respondents who had an income of THB\$ 20,000 or lower were more concerned than the other income groups about all wedding venue factors except for five attributes-namely,

bridal limousine services, venue's promotions, salespeople's influence, suggestions from friends and relatives and the wedding couple's experiences with the venue.

Variations by age and level of education: Results in Table 5 show no significant age differences across all factors affecting wedding banquet venue selection except musical services. As far as education level is concerned, results in Table 5 also show that the mean ratings given to six factors varied significantly across respondents with different levels of education. Respondents with less than a bachelor's degree ranked three attributes (ability to provide wedding ceremony services, beverage prices and photography service) with a higher mean rating than other age groups; this group ranked salespeople's influence and wedding couple's experiences with the venue lower than groups with other levels of education. Respondents with education higher than a bachelor's degree gave two

Table 4: Mean differences in perceptions of studio attributes by income

| Attributes | Income (THB\$) | | | | F | Significance |
|--|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------|--------------|
| | Lower than 20,000 | 20, 000-35,000 | 35, 001-50,000 | More than 50,000 | | |
| Venue's atmosphere | 4.53 | 4.35 | 4.12 | 4.18 | 3.788 | 0.011* |
| Vacancy during the desired banquet date | 4.36 | 4.19 | 3.95 | 4.12 | 3.009 | 0.031* |
| Facilities of the banquet room | 4.57 | 4.33 | 4.05 | 4.24 | 4.971 | 0.002** |
| Ability to provide wedding ceremony services | 4.60 | 4.31 | 3.95 | 4.21 | 7.290 | 0.000** |
| Package prices (food and beverages, plus venue rental costs) | 4.52 | 4.31 | 3.98 | 4.18 | 6.146 | 0.000** |
| Food prices | 4.46 | 4.19 | 3.81 | 4.18 | 8.167 | 0.000** |
| Beverage prices | 4.43 | 4.23 | 3.91 | 4.12 | 5.334 | 0.000** |
| Food quality | 4.56 | 4.27 | 4.07 | 4.12 | 5.782 | 0.001** |
| Ability to travel to the venue conveniently by car | 4.63 | 4.15 | 3.93 | 4.18 | 8.923 | 0.000** |
| Venue rental costs | 4.50 | 4.10 | 3.86 | 4.18 | 8.593 | 0.000** |
| Audio equipment | 4.51 | 4.15 | 4.05 | 4.06 | 6.099 | 0.001** |
| Good service from employees | 4.57 | 4.35 | 4.02 | 4.36 | 4.882 | 0.003** |
| First impression | 4.35 | 4.40 | 3.91 | 4.18 | 4.061 | 0.008** |
| Personal preference | 4.50 | 4.13 | 3.98 | 4.18 | 5.074 | 0.002** |
| Family's preference | 4.58 | 4.12 | 3.95 | 4.06 | 3.860 | 0.010* |
| Musical services | 4.63 | 4.31 | 4.07 | 4.00 | 7.158 | 0.000** |
| Photography service | 4.63 | 4.31 | 4.07 | 4.00 | 7.158 | 0.000** |
| Personal preference | 4.50 | 4.13 | 3.98 | 4.18 | 5.074 | 0.002** |
| Bridal limousine services | 3.48 | 3.73 | 3.93 | 4.06 | 3.053 | 0.029* |
| Venue's promotions | 3.94 | 3.81 | 3.79 | 4.30 | 2.971 | 0.033* |
| Salespeople's influence | 3.63 | 3.54 | 3.77 | 4.15 | 4.511 | 0.004** |
| Suggestions from friends and relatives | 3.54 | 3.52 | 3.72 | 4.00 | 3.343 | 0.020* |
| Wedding couple's experiences with the venue | 3.57 | 3.62 | 3.72 | 4.18 | 3.788 | 0.011* |

*,**Significant at 5 and 1%, respectively

Table 5: Mean differences in perceptions of wedding venue attributes by education level and age

| Attribute | Age | | | | Level of education | | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------|-------|----------------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| | Lower than 25 | 25-30 | 31-35 | Higher than 35 | F | Sig. | Less than bachelor's degree | Bachelor's degree | Higher than bachelor's degree | Sig. |
| Ability to provide wedding-ceremony services | 4.21 | 4.40 | 4.40 | 4.25 | 0.752 | 0.522 | 4.68 | 4.25 | 4.40 | 0.042* |
| Beverage prices | 4.12 | 4.22 | 4.28 | 4.33 | 0.590 | 0.622 | 4.60 | 4.18 | 4.19 | 0.034* |
| Photography service | 4.09 | 4.40 | 4.47 | 4.25 | 2.030 | 0.111 | 4.72 | 4.25 | 4.40 | 0.039* |
| Venue's promotions | 4.00 | 3.82 | 4.02 | 3.83 | 0.955 | 0.415 | 3.88 | 3.82 | 4.16 | 0.025* |
| Bridal limousine services | 3.77 | 3.53 | 3.88 | 3.58 | 1.415 | 0.239 | 3.28 | 3.67 | 3.96 | 0.029* |
| Salespeople's influence | 3.79 | 3.71 | 3.72 | 3.54 | 0.476 | 0.699 | 3.24 | 3.78 | 3.75 | 0.009** |
| Wedding couple's experience with the venue | 3.81 | 3.64 | 3.71 | 3.67 | 0.327 | 0.806 | 3.24 | 3.76 | 3.76 | 0.031* |
| Musical services | 3.95 | 4.44 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 2.683 | 0.048** | 4.56 | 4.20 | 4.25 | 0.193 |

*,**Significant at 5 and 1%, respectively

attributes (venue's promotions and bridal limousine service) a higher mean rating than other respondents with a lower level of education.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed that good service from employees, food quality and the venue's atmosphere are critical determinants of wedding banquet venue selection. Similar to the finding of previous research (Parsa *et al.*, 2012) regarding restaurant selection and of Lau and Hui (2010) regarding banquet venue selection, this research found that good service from employees was the most important factor in the selection. Consistent with earlier

research (Lau and Hui, 2010) suggesting that food and beverage prices were not the top determinants in the selection of a banquet venue, this research found that food prices and beverage prices were not even in the top ten most important factors (Table 2). Although many hotels and some restaurants offer a full package that includes accommodations offer, wedding ceremony service and a bridal limousine, only wedding ceremony service was perceived to be of high importance whereas accommodations offer and a bridal limousine were viewed as non-essential.

Respondents who chose to organize wedding banquets at hotels ranked the venue's atmosphere as the first most important factor. For those who chose to

organize wedding banquets at restaurants, however, the venue's atmosphere fell to the ninth most important factor (Table 3). Normally, a hotel has a more luxurious, neater, better-looking landscape than a restaurant with more trees, lawn and flowers. Respondents who planned to have their wedding banquet at a restaurant normally were aware of this difference and cared less about atmosphere than did those respondents who scheduled their wedding banquet at a hotel. This view is in line with the finding that respondents who chose to have the wedding banquet at a hotel ranked that venue's first impression as the seventh most important factor while respondents who chose to organize a wedding banquet at a restaurant instead indicated their first impression as seventeenth most important factor (Table 3).

Respondents who choose to establish the banquet venue at a restaurant ranked the banquet room facilities as the most important factor. This is because hotels regularly host wedding banquets and usually have these facilities ready which renders this factor of little concern to hotel customers; however, if customers hold the banquet at a restaurant and are uncertain about the readiness of the facilities, they tend to be interested in this quality. The findings suggest that respondents who choose restaurants rank package price, food price and beverage prices as more important than those who choose a hotel ballroom. The results imply that couples who hold their wedding banquets at a restaurant are more concerned about expenses than those who hold their wedding banquets in a hotel ballroom.

The results indicate that first impression and personal preference are more important factors for banquet venue selection than family's preference, opinions from online social networks, suggestions from friends and relatives and salespeople's influence.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to study factors that affect the wedding banquet venue selection of Thai couples. Results showed that among 30 factors affecting wedding banquet venue selection, good service from employees was the most influential, followed by food quality and the venue's atmosphere. The results showed that significant differences in perceptions of factors affecting the selection of the wedding banquet venue among Thai couples exist across demographic variables (i.e., age, monthly income, level of education). This study offers the following suggestions for entrepreneurs and marketers of hotels and restaurants:

- Since good service from employees plays an important role in wedding banquet venue selection, hotels and restaurants should train their employees extensively in service techniques. Hotel/restaurant managers must encourage all employees to provide more services than customers expect. Employees work in close proximity to customers and thus will have a better understanding of what customers want when they choose a banquet venue. The hotel/restaurant manager should seek service innovation by encouraging competitive employee suggestions and incorporating the winning suggestions into wedding services.
- Since quality of food is viewed as an essential factor in banquet venue selection and food price is not ranked as important, a hotel/restaurant manager should maintain and enhance high-quality food without a focus on reduced costs. Building a reputation for providing high-quality food will impress customers and enhance the venue's image. This can be accomplished by selecting a talented chef and fresh ingredients as well as soliciting customers' opinions.
- The findings indicate that atmosphere is a salient factor in banquet venue selection, especially for hotels. Therefore, a hotel/restaurant manager should focus on planning and enhancing the hotel/restaurant's physical infrastructure in order to create a unique appearance that distinguishes the facility from its competitors. For instance, a hotel/restaurant should consider making a significant investment in interior design.
- Today many hotels and some restaurants provide packages that include the wedding ceremony service, bridal dressing room, accommodations offer and bridal limousine services; however, all of these offers, except for wedding ceremony service, are viewed as non-essential in banquet venue selection. The services that respondents perceived as important were the wedding ceremony service, photography service and musical service. Therefore, hotel/restaurant managers should consider including these services in their wedding package to satisfy customer needs.
- Respondents who earned a monthly salary of THB\$ 20,000 or lower and whose level of education was lower than a bachelor's degree assessed the ability to provide wedding ceremony services and the ability to provide photography services and concern about price level of the beverages to be of higher importance. Therefore, hotel/restaurant

managers should offer packages that focus on these three factors to serve customers in lower-income and lower-education groups.

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