ITALIAN GELATO IN THAILAND:
SUCCESS STORIES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS TO PURCHASE ARTISANAL GELATO

EDOARDO ROVEDA

A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MANAGEMENT
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2023

Thematic paper
entitled

ITALIAN GELATO IN THAILAND: SUCCESS STORIES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS TO PURCHASE ARTISANAL GELATO

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management
on
April 29, 2023

....
Mister Edoardo Roveda
Candidate

....
Asst. Prof. Simon Zaby,
Ph.D.
Advisor

....
Assoc. Prof. Astrid Kainzbauer,
Ph.D.
Chairperson

Vichita. Ractham.
....
Assoc. Prof. Vichita Ractham,
Ph.D.
Dean
College of Management
Mahidol University

....
Asst. Prof. Jantima Banjongprasert,
Ph.D.
Committee member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Life is like an ice cream cone… you have to learn to lick it!"

– Charlie Brown, Peanuts by Schulz

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Ajarn Simon Zaby, not only for the critical support he provided during the research and the high quality teaching in all his classes. I would also like to thank him for considering my application as a Master's Degree student at CMMU and convincing me that it was the right educational choice, when he interviewed me as a candidate. I lived this Master's Degree course first of all as an experience to grow and be a better version of myself, and it honestly changed the way I see myself, my ambitions, my roots. I want to recognize that I achieved this result also thanks to the wonderful people I met here, with whom, I am sure, I will have an everlasting special bond.

Not less, I have to thank my family for sustaining me during my studies and for accepting my decision of moving abroad for my academic, professional, and personal development. I cannot take for granted the support they have always been giving me, and making them proud can only be a piece of demonstration of my gratitude. Cartoon obviously deserves to be mentioned as well for the research, or even the Degree, would not be complete without her fond support.

I must thank the business owners who did not hesitate to dedicate pieces of their precious time to be interviewed for the purpose of my research and everyone else who filled my survey, as they made possible the realization of thematic paper.

Eventually, I enjoy a little reward thanking myself for the decision to embrace this journey in a time of pandemic, always having clear what is the destination I pursue. Even though I have been a little brave, I must recognize how lucky and privileged I am to have the opportunity to accomplish this. Life might not be as easy as learning how to lick an ice cream cone, but surely can come as flavorful.

Edoardo Roveda

ITALIAN GELATO IN THAILAND: SUCCESS STORIES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS TO PURCHASE ARTISANAL GELATO

EDOARDO ROVEDA 6449092

M.M. (ENTREPRENEURSHIP MANAGEMENT)

THEMATIC PAPER ADVISORY COMMITTEE: ASST. PROF. SIMON ZABY, Ph.D., ASSOC. PROF. ASTRID KAINZBAUER, Ph.D., ASST. PROF. JANTIMA BANJONGPRASERT, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Italian food is acquiring more and more recognition around the world and is often perceived as premium and high quality. This success may also be pushed by the increasingly popular trends of influencers visiting Italy and promoting the renowned “la dolce vita” lifestyle. This research explores the popularity of Italian artisanal gelato in Thailand and investigates which are the main factors that attract people to consume it. The main objective is to support local entrepreneurs in presenting the product in a way that customers like and perceive as premium. In particular, the research reviews relevant literature concerning external factors that have been demonstrated to influence gelato consumption and perception, such as music and atmospherics. The research methodology adopted consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the first, 102 people were surveyed through an online questionnaire. For the second, 5 business owners were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The research findings show two factors that mainly influence the consumers’ behavior toward artisanal gelato, which are the location or environment of the shop and the taste and quality of the product. The findings are correlated, between the quantitative and qualitative research. In addition, they mostly find a match with the information provided by the reviewed literature. Eventually, recommendations are provided for local entrepreneurs interested in running an artisanal gelato business in Thailand through an analysis of the managerial implications of the findings.

KEY WORDS: Gelato / Consumer Behavior / Sensory Marketing / Atmospherics / Entrepreneurship

46 pages

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Italian gelato is a popular frozen dessert that has gained worldwide recognition and appreciation, including in the Thai market. Technavio (2020) estimates the global gelato market value to grow by USD 2,503.75 million (about THB 83.47 billion) during 2019-2024, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 7.02% (*Figure 1*).

Figure1: Gourmet Ice Cream Market Analysis Highlights the Impact of COVID-19 2020-2024 (Technavio, 2020)

The rapid spread of gelato, especially in Asia, may be motivated by a variety of factors, including the popularity of Italian food and culture in other countries and in general the renowned quality of Italian products. As a matter of fact, Ipsos (2021), which is the French consultancy firm global leader in market research, in its research study focusing on the attractiveness of Italy in other countries ("BE-ITALY Indagine sull'attrattività del Paese", 2021), verified that one in two people from 19 countries all over the world claims to know Italy "well" or "enough". Not only, but 44% of the interviewees are also "extremely interested" or "very interested" in media content on Italy, its culture, and "Made in Italy" in general, and the Internet and social media provide the main source of information (Ipsos, 2021). Specifically, 'Food & Wine' in 2020 was the third most popular topic in online discussions related to Italy with 16% of mentions. It ranked first if we consider only positive arguments, with 21% of mentions as a net value of positive-negative discussions (Ipsos, 2021) (*Figure 2*). It has to be noted that 89% of the interviewees "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that Italy has an excellent Food & Wine offer (Ipsos, 2021).

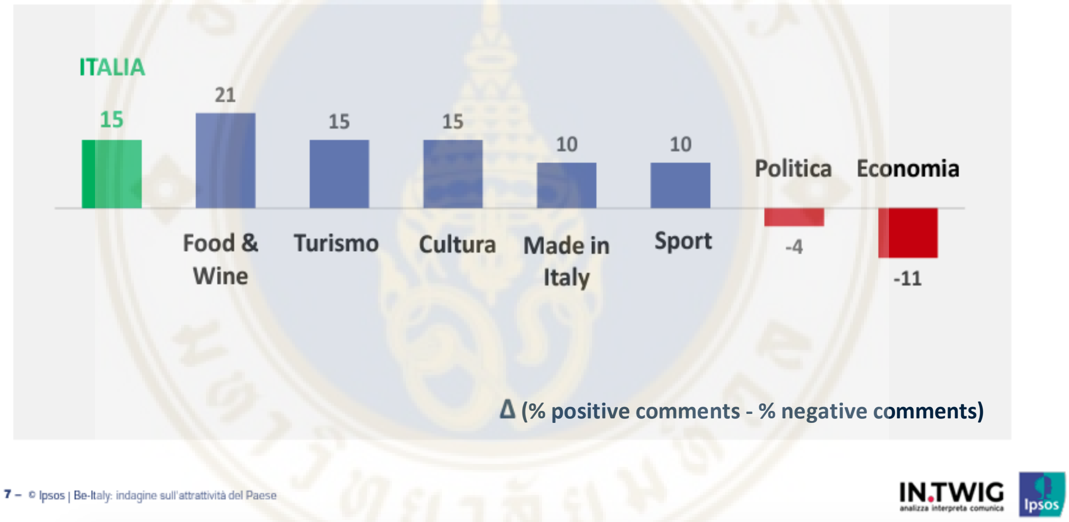

Figure 2: How are individual topics perceived on the Internet? (from left to right: Italy, Food & Wine, Tourism, Culture, Made in Italy, Sport, Politics, Economy). (Ipsos, 2021)

In this context of the increased popularity of Italian food products, Gelato is receiving tremendous interest. SIGEP is the International Trade Show of Artisanal Gelato, Pastry, Bakery and the Coffee World ("*Salone Internazionale della Gelateria, Pasticceria, Panificazione Artigianali e Caffè"*). According to SIGEP (2019), artisanal gelato is a global product already, with over 65,000 gelato points of sale in Europe in 2018 and sales that totaled 9.5 billion Euros (about THB 343 billion). Outside Europe, global sales reached 16 billion Euros (about THB 578 billion) in 2018. 43,000 gelato outlets can be found in Argentina, the United States, Brazil, Korea, Malaysia, Australia, and China (up 6% over 2017) (SIGEP, 2019). In particular, since 2018 China is regarded as a market that offers potential growth, as ICE (*Agenzia per la promozione all'estero e l'internazionalizzazione delle imprese italiane*[1]) of the Italian Trade Agency reported in its "Market Overview on Gelato, Coffee and Sweet Food in China" (N-Dynamic Market Research & Consultancy Ltd., 2018). In line with Ipsos, the report confirms that "made-in-Italy" coffee and confectionery are often perceived as "premium" by Chinese consumers, making the potential market for Italian products especially appealing (N-Dynamic Market Research & Consultancy Ltd., 2018). N-Dynamic Market Research & Consultancy Ltd. (2018) mentions that the value of gourmet ice cream in China has increased while volume has decreased, indicating a greater demand. With Thailand being home to one of the largest Chinese communities in the world (*Chinese Influence on Thai Cuisine*, n.d.), it can be assumed that there are relevant similarities in the eating habits of Chinese consumers and Thai consumers. The researcher's observation of the history and roots of Thai cuisine may serve as a confirmation. As a matter of fact, Technavio (2017) signaled that the global gourmet ice cream market is mainly divided into three segments, with gelato accounting for 69% of it. Technavio (2017) predicted that the Asia Pacific region would have soon become the fastest-growing market for gelato products due to rising demand from countries like China itself, India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (*Figure 3*). The report motivated the growth of the market for gelato with the rising disposable incomes of consumers in developing Asian economies and the increasing influence of online retailing (Technavio, 2017).

[1] Agency for the promotion abroad and the internationalization of Italian enterprises

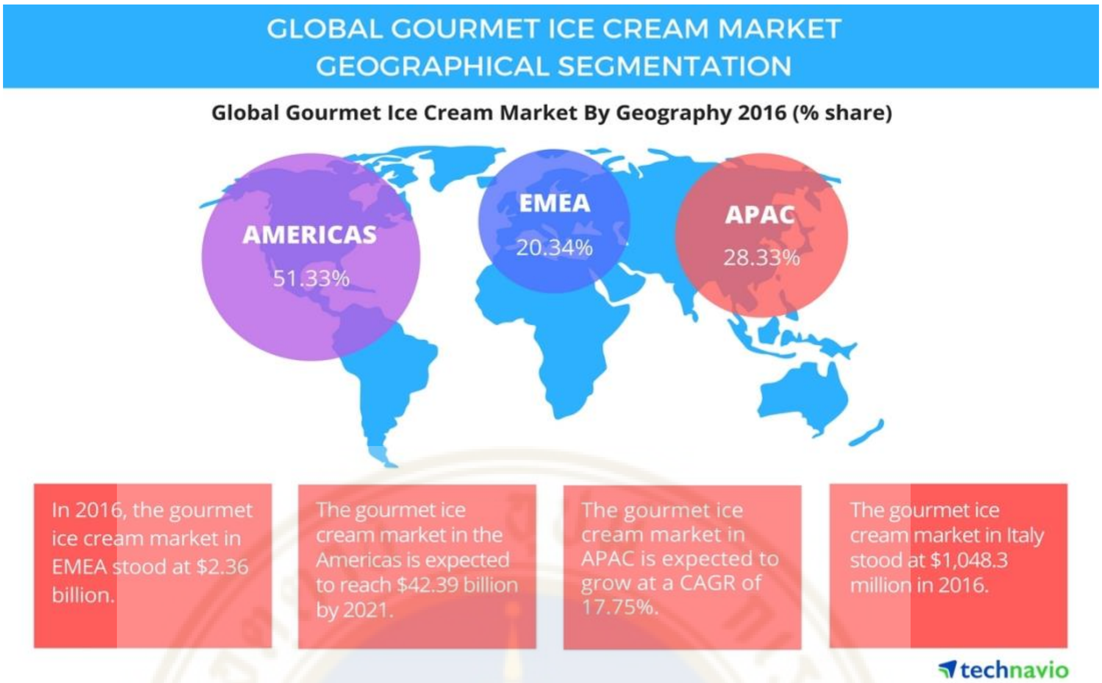

Figure 3: Global Gourmet Ice Cream Market from 2017-2021. (Technavio, 2017)

To shift the focus onto Thailand concerning these statistics, in 2021, the Kingdom's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at the rate of 6.6% (real annual growth rate), to USD 774.8 billion (about THB 26 trillion). The sales of food and beverage products recorded a value of USD 11,416.8 million (about THB 380.6 billion) (Chauvin & Government of Canada, 2022) (*Figure 4*).

Category type	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	CAGR* % 2021-2026
Total - foodservice food and drink	**19,654.7**	**21,508.2**	**23,333.5**	**25,163.2**	**27,277.9**	**29,579.7**	**8.5**
Food value	11,416.8	12,474.6	13,504.5	14,475.1	15,597.2	16,848.7	8.1
Food share breakdown (%)	58.1	58.0	57.9	57.5	57.2	57.0	−0.4
Drink value	8,238.0	9,033.6	9,829.0	10,688.0	11,680.6	12,731.0	9.1
Drink share breakdown (%)	41.9	42.0	42.1	42.5	42.8	43.0	0.5

Source: Euromonitor International, 2022

***CAGR**: Compound Annual Growth Rate

Note: Base year for growth rate is 2021, which is actual retail value sales. Data for 2022 to 2026 is forecast by Euromonitor International.

Figure 4: Foodservice - sales of food and beverage products in Thailand, forecast values measured in US$ millions, annual (year-over-year) exchange rates. (Chauvin & Government of Canada, 2022)

The other reasons mentioned by Technavio (2017) also align with the findings from StrategyHelix (2022), a data and analytics company, which also adds as factors of growth for the ice cream market the increase in per capita sugar and dairy consumption. In particular, according to their report, the ice cream market in Thailand is projected to expand by USD 209 million (about THB 7 billion) from 2021 to 2027, with a CAGR of 6.4% (StrategyHelix, 2022). Recent media reports suggest that the forecast is accurate (ElAtassi S., 2022). Mr. ElAtassi (2022) claims that for ice cream-consuming growth rate Thailand ranks among the top three countries in the Asia Pacific region. Evidence shows that in 2021 Thailand's second-largest foodservice channel in terms of sales was from Limited-Service Restaurants (USD 4.4 billion, about THB 146.7 billion), a category that includes ice cream parlors, which counted for 4.0% of the total value (THB 5.87 billion) (Chauvin & Government of Canada, 2022).

1.1 Research objectives

Chinese consumers are not yet able to differentiate between ice cream and artisanal gelato (N-Dynamic Market Research & Consultancy Ltd., 2018). We may assume that the same is valid for Thai consumers, where it is essential to pay attention to the varying popularity growth rates between different ice cream categories (ElAtassi S., 2022) to accurately study the market for artisanal gelato. For this reason, the differences between gelato and ice cream will be reviewed in this paper, and the statement will be compared with the actual feedback from the quantitative research carried out. Generally, producers are responding to the market trends by "*premiumizing*" their products, making them more luxurious, delicious, and creamy (ElAtassi S., 2022), all characteristics that can be considered more peculiar to artisanal gelato rather than ice cream (Goff, 2022). *Premiumization* is currently focusing on introducing more innovative and intricate flavor combinations to create a new and luxurious eating experience (ElAtassi S., 2022). Additionally, varieties that have a lower environmental impact and are more sustainable because they are prepared with locally sourced ingredients may meet the curiosity of younger generations, who are more attentive to these topics (ElAtassi S., 2022).

Hence, the objectives of this research can be summarized as

- Define the differences between artisanal gelato and ice cream,
- Analyze the popularity of Italian artisanal gelato in the Thai market according to a variety of factors, such as branding, originality, authenticity, and seasonality, and investigate if the recognition of Italian food worldwide and Thai consumers' behavior contribute to the popularity of gelato in Thailand;
- Identify factors that influence Thai consumers when choosing artisanal gelato, focusing on the product being sold in a kiosk, in a restaurant or a stand-alone shop, or in other venues;
- Provide an analysis of the market landscape to those interested in exploring the opportunity to set up a small business, such as an artisanal gelato shop laboratory.

Various perspectives will be taken into account in the analysis, also recurring to business case studies whose experience shall provide accurate insights on the use of marketing strategies and the trends that drive purchasing behavior of local consumers.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, a review of literature that discusses theoretical concepts contributing to the research topic is presented. In particular, related research (*2.1*) will constitute the necessary background to inform the reader about the research topic. Theoretical concepts such as Consumer Behaviour (*2.2*), Sensory Marketing (*2.3*), and Atmospherics (*2.4*) will support and provide a reference to guide the research.

2.1 Artisanal Gelato

Gelato, which means frozen, is a typical Italian frozen dessert that probably originated around the 14th century in Florence, at the Medicean court of Caterina de' Medici. It becomes popular only in the 16th century thanks to Bernardo Buontalenti, an artisan from Florence, and Francesco Procopio de' Coltelli. The latter took the road from Sicily and made gelato popular across Italy, bringing it even to Paris (*La Storia Del Gelato, Dall'antichità Ai Primi Anni Del 1900*, 2022).

Compared to other frozen desserts, artisanal gelato is an appealing and healthier alternative with a richer taste profile, since the preparation of it results in a lower percentage (25–60%) of air being incorporated into the product. Moreover, since it contains more sugar than conventional ice cream, it has a much softer, scoopable texture despite having less fat (4–8%) and less protein, and less fat and other nutrients dissolved or suspended (so-called *total solids*) (32-42%) (Shingh et al., 2020). It has to be noted that artisanal gelato is not frozen solid, but served immediately after manufacture and capt at a higher temperature than ice cream but lower than that of soft-serve ice cream (Goff, 2022). As a result, extruded gelato has a semi-frozen consistency and is quite viscous. Thus, ice cream and gelato differ in many ways from just their chemical composition. Their production processes and methods of storage also vary in terms of quality, as the US-style ice cream is often made in an industrial continuous freezer where it is aerated and frozen (Shingh et al., 2020). Depending on the gelato, fresh fruit, dried fruit, almonds, chocolate, and other ingredients can be added to provide a variety of nutrients. Fresh berry gelatos may be high in natural antioxidants that can lower oxidative stress, which enhances vascular and physical function (Shingh et al., 2020). These gelatos may also contain Vitamin C, which is necessary for a healthy immune system, good skin, and the maintenance of cartilage, bones, and teeth. Calcium, iron, Vitamin A, and protein sources can also be added, though the amount varies by business and flavor (Shingh et al., 2020). Shingh et al. (2020) also mention that gelato is high in simple sugars and carbs, which our bodies can absorb and use as energy. Fruits such as pineapples and berries include enzymes that are advantageous to gelato production (Shingh et al., 2020). Its excellent palatability stimulates digestive juices and aids digestion, while its high moisture content aids hydration (Shingh et al., 2020). The minimal fat intake also lowers the dangers of obesity and heart disease. Because gelato is made from milk, it is a good source of calcium (Shingh et al., 2020).

2.2 The Theoretical Concept of Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior refers to the series of actions an individual takes about obtaining, evaluating, utilizing, and disposing of goods and services (Tyagi, 2018). According to Ramya and Ali (2016), it encompasses the selection, purchase, and consumption of goods and services to meet their needs. Consumer behavior may be observed in earlier conduct, and marketing can foresee consumer success in the sense of a decision by evaluating it (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) and the several influences on it, including psychological, cultural, economic, and personal factors. These behaviors can also evolve as a result of changes in social lifestyles, industrialization, and globalization, all of which impact consumer product choices (Asshidin et al., 2016). One factor that mostly influences consumer behavior is Sensory marketing, which is also a topic of review in this paper. The marketing technique we're discussing here aims to create unique customer experiences at every step of the buying journey. It starts with sparking a desire for the product or service, followed by building awareness, comparing it with other options, making the purchase, and evaluating the experience after use. This comprehensive sensory approach helps to pinpoint the different touchpoints between the consumer and the brand throughout the entire process - from before the purchase, during it, and even after it's completed. (Manzano et al., 2020).

The Black Box theory by Kotler and Keller (2016) details the buyer's characteristics and decision-making processes that determine their behavior. It is divided into three areas: (i) the psychology of the buyer, which includes factors such as motivation, perception, learning, and memory, (ii) the buyer's characteristics, including social, personal, psychological, and cultural influences, and (iii) the five-stage decision-making process the buyer goes through, which consists of recognizing a problem, searching for information, evaluating alternatives, making a purchase, and post-purchase behavior. Among the buyer’s characteristics, attitude is a crucial element frequently employed to forecast consumer purchase intentions (Karahanna & Limayem, 2009). Research on consumer attitudes has revealed that they substantially impact the decision to purchase products online and offline, particularly in terms of convenience and safety. Consumer lifestyle, technology, and economics can also influence consumer purchase intentions because these external factors have the ability to shape consumer attitudes.

2.3 Theoretical Concept of Sensory Marketing

Manzano et al. (2020) analyze the topic of Sensory marketing and its significance in the current market scenario, as it uses all five senses to manipulate consumers' motivations, wants, and behavior by influencing perceptions, memories, and learning processes. The purpose of sensory marketing is to activate both the rational and emotional components of the brain through the use of all five senses. Advancements in neuroscience have mainly propelled the growth of sensory marketing, in response to the need for brands to stand out in an increasingly competitive global market. Hence, a strategy for appealing to emotions rather than relying on rational processes.

Sensory marketing can be divided into three categories: creating a complete sensory experience through 360° sensory marketing, incorporating all five senses for a cohesive sensory experience, and using a dominant sensory signature to strengthen the brand image. Brands aim to create memorable experiences for consumers to foster a deeper connection to the product or service, enhance satisfaction, and impact their behavior and attitude at every step of the buying process by prioritizing the touchpoints between the consumer and the brand (Manzano et al., 2020). The involvement of multiple senses results in a multiplying effect on perceptions, with each sensory stimulus enhancing the messages conveyed by the others (*Figure 5*).

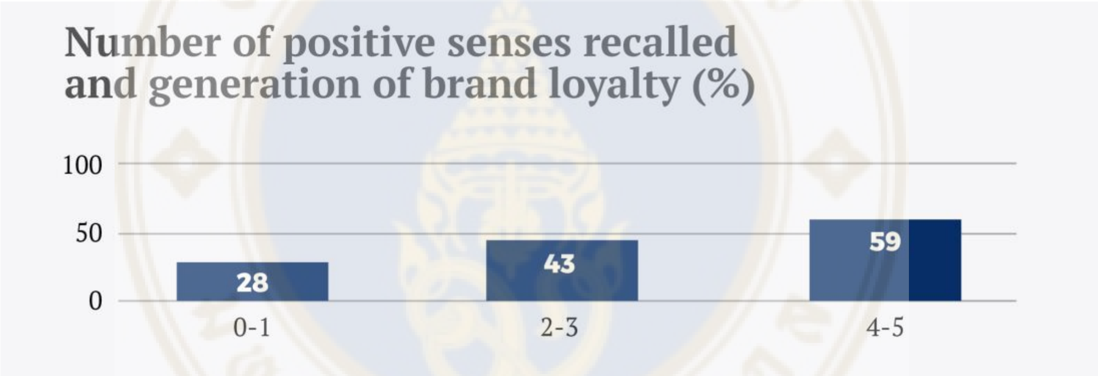

Figure 5: Retrieved from (Manzano et al., 2020), Hollis, N. (2007). Smelly Business. Esomar Fragrance 2007. Millward Brown

The importance of each sense varies depending on the product and the stage of buying behavior, but in general, a higher level of sensory stimulation results in better communication and experience. Vision and touch are typically linked to functional objectives and conscious processes, while taste, smell, and hearing, which are often considered of lesser value, contribute to emotional experiences and have a greater impact on customer loyalty (Manzano et al., 2020).

Hence, sensory marketing constitutes a strategic approach that seeks to communicate a brand's image, or sensory branding, by using the senses to reinforce the product's attributes, benefits, values, and personality. The goal is to convey the brand's relevance and identity to the consumer by creating a unique "sensory signature" highlighting its positioning and competitive advantage (Manzano et al., 2020). Choosing this signature is thus an important decision for each brand (*Figure 6*). A sensory signature has only two requirements: the sense chosen must be appropriate for expressing the category to a specific customer demographic and, most significantly, the signature must communicate the brand's differentiating value proposition. Any sensation can become a sensory signature as long as those two conditions are satisfied (Manzano et al., 2020).

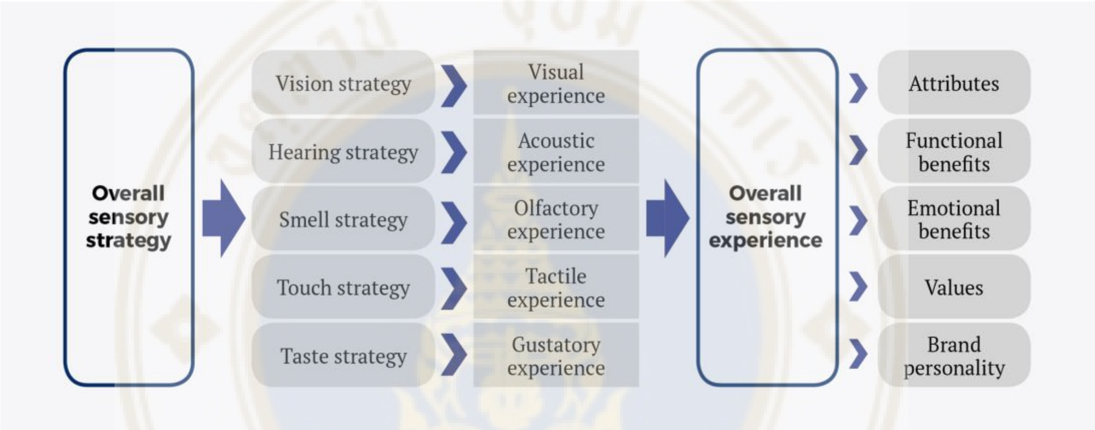

Figure 6: From Sensory strategy to Sensory experience (Manzano et al., 2020)

2.3.1 The sense of hearing: music affecting gelato perception

In line with the emergence of sensory marketing as a powerful tool to vehicle consumer behavior, the impact of music and noises on food perception has recently gained attention. Not only have researchers looked into the effects of sound on food perception, but also showed that the valence of music genres influences hedonic assessments of gelato in particular (Kantono et al., 2016, 2018). Curiously, preferred genres boosted pleasantness ratings of chocolate gelato compared to disliked genres. Kantono, Hamid, Shepherd, Yoo, Grazioli, et al. (2016) successively discovered that sweetness prevailed under both neutral and liked music situations, with a commensurate rise in pleasant feelings. When individuals listened to hated music, which produced unpleasant feelings, bitterness was more prevalent.

In more recent studies, Kantono et al. (2018) investigated the influence of music on flavor dynamics under three distinct environmental situations. First, significant variances in emotional reactions to music were discovered, with individual preferences ranging (*Figure 7*).

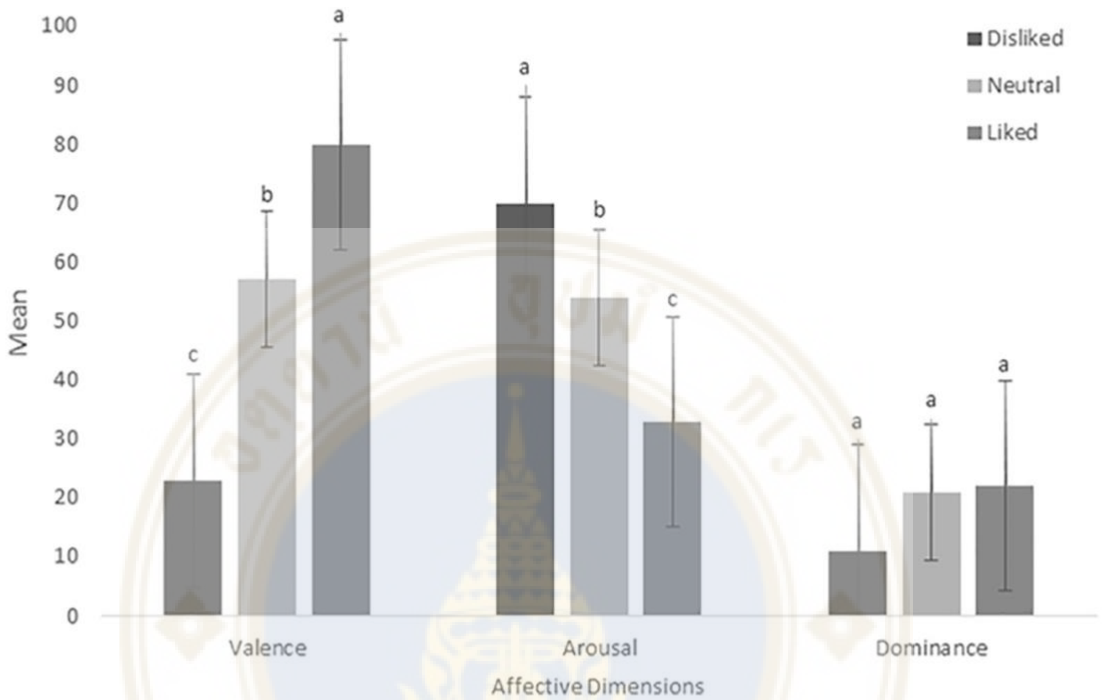

Figure 7: Differences in valence, arousal, and dominance of music varying with liking. a,b,c: mean affective ratings of music varying in liking with different letters significantly differ in terms of affect dimensions. (Kantono et al., 2018)

Disliked music was perceived as significantly less pleasant and more stimulating than music that was liked or neutral (Kantono et al., 2018). On the other hand, liked music was rated as much more pleasant but less stimulating than disliked and neutral music. Although there were differences in pleasantness and arousal scores, the ratings for dominance were similar across all types of music.

Second, the study (Kantono et al., 2018) also revealed significant differences in the emotional states induced by different types of music. (*Figure 8*).

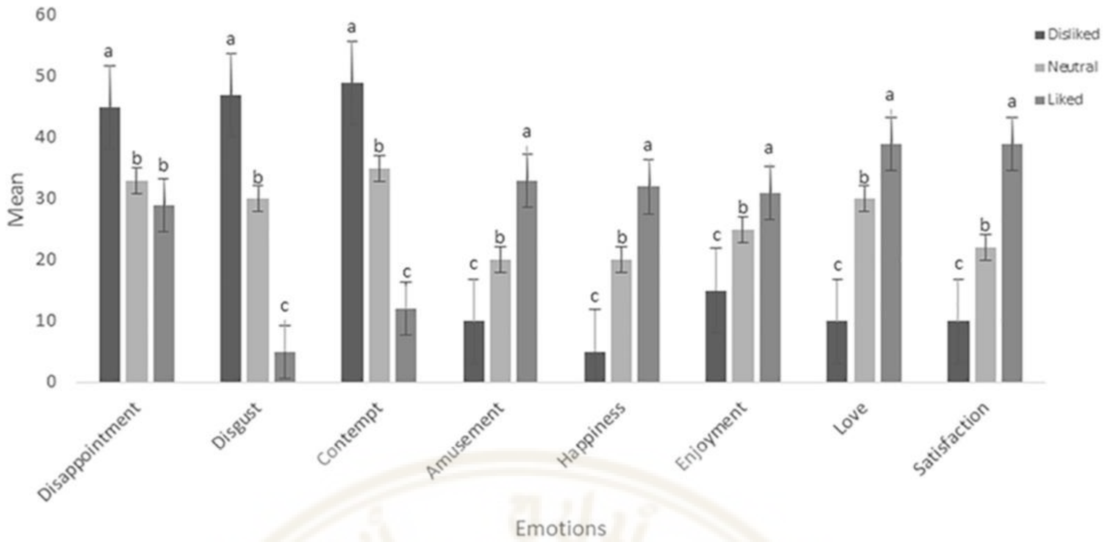

Figure 8: Differences in emotional responses to music varying in liking. a,b,c: mean emotion ratings of music varying in liking with different letters showing significant differences in terms of emotions. (Kantono et al., 2018)

Compared to neutral and hated music, liked music elicited considerably greater scores of positive feelings (satisfaction, happiness, amusement, love, and enjoyment). Conversely, disliked music elicited much greater negative emotions than neutral and liked music, including disdain, disgust, and disappointment (Kantono et al., 2018). Hence, the study found that liked music elicited consistent happy feelings, whereas disliked music elicited considerable negative emotions.

Last, Kantono et al. (2018) concluded that liked and hated music as external stimuli also reinforced sweetness and bitterness, respectively. This finding may indicate that listening to music with varied degrees of preference alters the flavor perception of gelato. The study claims to be the first to demonstrate the link between flavors and music, also adding that listening to neutral music enhances the sense of milkiness and “cocoaness” while listening to disliked music also increases the feeling of creaminess (Kantono et al., 2018).

In conclusion, a variation of the sensory attributes of gelato while consuming it could be explained by the consideration that listening to music evokes certain feelings (Kantono et al., 2018).

2.4 The Theoretical Concept of Atmospherics

The study mentioned above by Kantono et al. (2018) was carried out in three different environments, evidencing that atmospherics also play a significant role in perceiving the sensory attributes of gelato. The pleasantness across the three locations was observed to vary in rank, with natural and immersive environments scoring particularly high (Kantono et al., 2018). Thus, the concept of Atmospherics emerges as relevant in the context of this research, as its impact on customer behavior has piqued the curiosity of marketing practitioners and other researchers.

Atmospherics is described by Kotler (1973) as the purposeful design of space to induce particular emotional responses in customers that increase their purchase likelihood. Music, lighting, and furniture are examples of physical and intangible environmental factors that comprise atmospherics (Liu & Jang, 2009). Bitner (1992) classified atmospherics into three categories: "ambient conditions," "spatial arrangement and functioning," and "signs, symbols, and artifacts." He observed that the impact on consumer behavior was especially noticeable for service organizations since their context offers consumers frequent encounters with the complete set of categories. In the service industry, consumers prefer to infer service quality from tangible signals of the physical environment. Hence, the physical environment, which functions as a sort of "nonverbal language," can impact an individual's belief in and evaluation of the company, product, and service inside that setting (Bitner, 1992). For example, if a restaurant's eating space is pleasant and appealing, it may influence guests' impressions of service quality and overall ratings of the dining experience (Liu & Jang, 2009). Kantono et al. (2018) also mention that food acceptance is heavily influenced by the setting in which it is consumed. Curiously, previous studies have shown that customers chose more and had a higher perception of Italian food products (e.g., pasta) at an Italian-themed restaurant (Bell et al., 1994). As a result, to increase our knowledge of the link between atmospherics and consumer behavior, we must include both cognitive and emotional reactions evoked by the environment (Liu & Jang, 2009). Among others, Wood and Munoz (2006) even refer to ethnic restaurants as cultural ambassadors for their home country, while other research defined the experience of dining in an ethnic restaurant as "culinary tourism" (Long, 2003). Hence, atmospherics may become even more critical in the success of ethnic eateries (Liu & Jang, 2009).

Delicious cuisine, good service, and a pleasant ambiance are all necessary for the success of an ethnic restaurant, as they are for any other institution. Restaurant owners must understand which characteristics of the eating atmosphere are significant and how they connect to customers' behavioral objectives (Liu & Jang, 2009). Perceived value was found to be a key factor in the interaction between atmospherics and behavioral intentions, and both interior design and human components are major predictors of perceived value. Managers should consider their target clients' likes and preferences while designing or decorating a restaurant. To create a pleasant eating environment, they should employ a variety of visual components such as color, paintings/pictures, and green plants (Liu & Jang, 2009). Furthermore, Liu and Jang (2009) discovered that to optimize the influence of physical cues on customer impressions, both the design style and personnel look should be compatible with the restaurant's overall brand, and that atmosphere is the most important contributor to happy feelings, with atmospheric authenticity being a vital component of a genuine eating experience.

2.5 Proposed framework and additional factors

Summarizing the literature review, the peculiarities of the taste, texture, and properties of artisanal gelato as a frozen dessert, sensory marketing techniques, and atmospherics may be effective in driving Thai consumer behavior toward the choice of the product and educating them to recognize the product among substitutes. To the researcher’s knowledge, only one peer carried out a previous analysis of the factors that may influence the purchasing behavior of Thai consumers in a very limited area of Bangkok. However, excluding sensory marketing and atmospherics from the scope of research and focusing on the classic 4Ps of marketing (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) (Junsri, 2014). Thus, the current research aims to verify the researcher’s observation and investigate applications of sensory marketing and the adequate use of atmospherics by gelato business owners in Thailand. Moreover, the research will also be aimed at inspecting the consumers' preferences towards gelato, including their knowledge about the product and its properties, compared with other frozen desserts.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the the target population (*3.1*) and the data collection (*3.2*) are presented. It will also be explained (*3.3*) how the research combines quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to inspect and address the full set of research objectives. As such, the quantitative research will be carried out through an online questionnaire (*3.3.1*), while qualitative research will take place in the form of structured interviews (*3.3.2*).

3.1 Target Population

The following characteristics define the target population for this quantitative research. Considering that Bangkok has a population of about 10.7 million people (Statista, 2022), sample answers are collected from people over 18 who reside or work in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region or other main cities in Thailand. The age is not restricted further to avoid missing relevant data from all the age groups. In addition, the survey does not consider individuals with an income lower than THB 20,000 per month, considering the higher price of gelato compared to industrial ice cream and frozen desserts. To ensure a feasible sample size within the limited time available for data collection (approximately 4 weeks), a non-probability sampling method based on voluntary response was utilized. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to his contacts and their contacts, aiming for a total of 100 survey responses. Given that the researcher is not a Thai national and does not speak the local language, this method was deemed appropriate. Peers have also noted that the chosen sample size is appropriate for the study's timeframe (Pokawattana, 2017).

As for the qualitative research, three gelato business owners from Bangkok Metropolitan Region, one gelato business owner from Chiang Mai, and one gelato business owner from Phuket have been contacted and interviewed with a structured questionnaire. As retrieved from peers' analysis (Sattarayak, 2013), Baker and Edwards (2012) investigated the optimal number of qualitative interviews by assembling a group of methodologists' contributions and found that it depends on the objectives of a study, time constraints, sample size, and so on. Thus, what is relevant to take into account is how the findings were saturated.

3.2 Data Collection

The survey to collect data for the quantitative research has been carried out via an online close-ended questionnaire developed on Google Forms and then circulated over social media platforms such as LINE and Instagram.

The questionnaire to collect information for the qualitative research has been developed by the researcher based on the objectives of this paper and submitted to respondents via online or in-person interviews.

3.3 Research instruments and data analysis

Following, a detailed representation of the research instruments utilized and the explanation of how the data will be analyzed.

3.3.1 Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire is divided into three sections.

The first part is related to the respondents' anonymized data, including demographic questions with just one response per question aimed at obtaining information on the age, marital status, gender, and income of the respondents.

The second part is related to the consumers' knowledge of gelato, in general, and of popular gelato shops in Thailand. Questions allow multiple choices and are aimed at gathering information on the frequency of consumption, favorite flavors, preferred substitutes, timing, and location. It has to be noted that several questions are related to frozen desserts in general, which is needed to understand consumers' attitude towards the category in general.

The third part is related to the atmospherics and marketing strategies that affect consumers' purchasing decisions the most, and the strengths of the brands available in Thailand, through a selection of multiple choice questions where the respondents have to choose their preferred option or mark the option as "irrelevant", "influence positively", "influence negatively". As the researcher is not using a tool such as SPSS for the analysis of descriptive statistics, the answers are interpreted through numeric analysis on a spreadsheet. It has to be noted that ice cream brands have been included to assert the real knowledge of respondents towards artisanal gelato.

3.3.2 Interview Questionnaire

The interview questionnaire consists of open-ended questions that are analyzed in light of the literature review findings. The questions are shared with the interviewees before the interview session, which shall not exceed 30 minutes in length. The interview session aims to be a friendly discussion. The questions will be related to, but not limited to, the habits of the interviewee's customers, the trends they can recognize in their customers' choices, any attempts made at educating the consumers towards the product, the marketing strategies adopted focusing on sensory marketing and atmospherics when they are a choice, and why they are.

The researcher assumes that this analytical framework might be useful in developing an effective marketing strategy for an artisanal gelato retail business in Thailand, as it is based on common practices among peers. Several researchers used this model to better understand a market's present state and assess the feasibility and viability of setting up and conducting a business in the same market (Sattarayak, 2013).

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, the data collected through quantitative (4.1) and qualitative (4.2) methods will be displayed and analyzed. In addition, findings will be discussed (4.3), comparing the consumers' perspective of the product and market to the knowledge and experience of the business owners.

4.1 Analysis of data from quantitative research

An online close-ended survey developed on Google Forms was circulated to approximately 600 people through social media such as Instagram and LINE. The survey received 109 responses (approximately 18% response rate). As previously mentioned, the target population excludes individuals under 18, and individuals whose income is lower than THB 20,000 per month. Out of 109 respondents, 7 were excluded from taking the survey, thus bringing the final number of responses to 102. In particular, one respondent was excluded because they were under 18, while 6 respondents were excluded because of the income criteria.

4.1.1 Respondents profile

The following *Table 1* reports the profile and demographics of the survey respondents.

Table 4.1: Profiling and demographics

Table 4.1: Profiling and demographics (cont.)		
Profile of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Table 4.1: Profiling and demographics (cont.)

Profile of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender Identity		
Male	25	24.51%
Female	74	72.55%
Other	3	2.94%
Total	102	100.00%
Location		
Bangkok	75	73.53%
Nakhom Phatom	0	0.00%
Pathum Thani	6	5.88%
Nonthaburi	11	10.78%
Samut Prakan	6	5.88%
Samut Sakhon	1	0.98%
Phuket	0	0.00%
Pattaya	0	0.00%
Chiang Mai	0	0.00%
Other Provinces	3	2.94%
Total	102	100.00%
Relationship Status		
Married/In a relationship	24	23.53%
Married/In a relationship with child(ren)	4	3.92%
Single	73	71.57%

Table 4.1: Profiling and demographics (cont.)		
Profile of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single with child(ren)	1	0.98%
Total	102	100.00%
Level of education		
High School	1	0.98%
Bachelor's Degree	58	56.86%
Postgraduate studies	38	37.25%
None of the above	5	4.90%
Total	102	100.00%
Monthly Income (THB)		
20,000 - 29,999	32	31.37%
30,000 - 39,999	20	19.61%
40,000 - 49,999	7	6.86%
50,000 or +	41	40.20%
Students	2	1.96%
Total	102	100.00%

Of the 102 respondents, females represented 72.55% of the population, while males represented 24.51% and others (Transgender, Queer, …) 2.94%. Due to the limited network of the researcher, the result is expected. Almost all the respondents live in Bangkok (73.53%) or the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (23.53%), as expected and according to the target population. Most of the respondents are single (71.57%), while only five have children. Such a result is not expected. 56.86% of the respondents have obtained a Bachelor's degree, and 37.25% even proceeded with postgraduate studies. This information makes sense in light of the researcher's network, which is mainly composed of Master's degree students and professionals. However, 40.20% of the respondents earn equal to or more than 50,000 THB per month, while 31.37% earn between 20,000 and 29,999 THB. Two respondents declared themselves to be students, which was offered as an alternative choice for respondents of working age without an income.

4.1.2 Consumer habits and motivation towards lack of gelato consumption

73.5% of the respondents purchased or consumed gelato in the six months preceding the survey. Of the remaining 26.5% who did not, 63% (or 17) purchased ice cream instead, which is a point it will be taken into account later concerning the knowledge about the product. Interestingly, 14.81% of non-consumers mentioned that they cannot find a gelato shop near them or the gelato shops are not sufficiently spread, even though 75% of them live in Bangkok Metropolitan Region. 7.4% do not know what gelato is, and 7.4% do not like it and prefer ice cream instead. One respondent gave no reason (*Figure 9*).

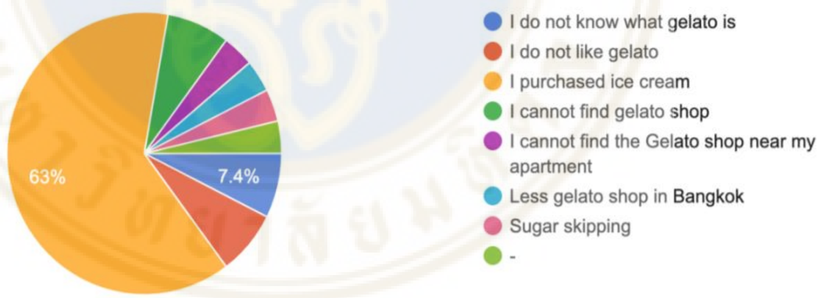

Figure 9: Motivation for not purchasing or consuming gelato in the past six months

Given the opportunity to select a frozen dessert other than gelato, 51.9% of the respondents who did not purchase or consume gelato in the past six months would choose ice cream, while *bingsu* (Korean shaved ice) also received consistent preferences as an option (25.9%).

4.1.3 Consumers’ knowledge and confidence towards gelato

When asked if they would be able to identify the differences between artisanal gelato and ice cream, only 9.8% of consumers of these products affirm that they would not, while 41.3% says “maybe” and 48.9% affirms they would.

Excluding the respondents who are confident they would not be able to identify the differences between artisanal gelato and ice cream, the questionnaire tested the actual knowledge of the “yes” and “maybe” respondents. 96.4% correctly identified Italy as the origin country of gelato. Gelato contains less fat and total solids (*see definition in 2.1)* than ice cream and 90.4% recognize it. When asked which one is frozen solid and can be maintained for a longer time, only 67.5% answered correctly, “ice cream”. Last, 96.4% know that gelato is an overall healthier option.

In conclusion, we can say that the majority of respondents affirming they may or be able to recognize the differences between gelato and ice cream actually do.

4.1.4 Consumers’ purchasing behavior and preferences

When asked to select the most usual location where they consume gelato or ice cream, the majority of gelato and ice cream consumers selected cafes as number one (33.7%) and restaurants as number two (27.17%). The least usual locations for consuming ice cream or gelato are parks and the workplace (fifth, 30.43%) and parks (sixth, 30.43%). Malls are slightly preferred to home, as a usual location for gelato or ice cream consumption (*Figure 10*).

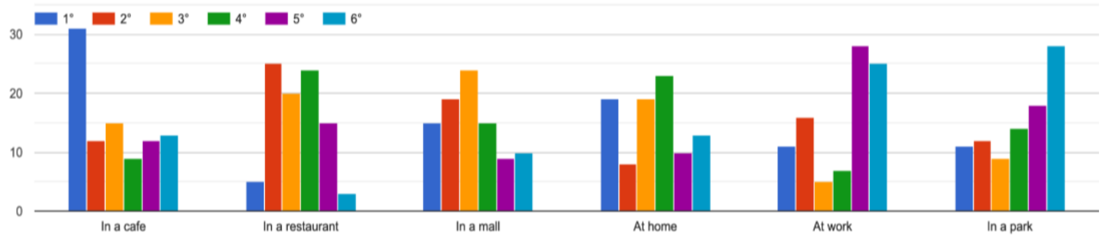

Figure 10: Where is gelato mostly consumed?

Opposite to these results, only 57 consumers expressed a preference for being “Sit in a shop” when asked where they would rather eat gelato or ice cream. “Walking around (on the street, in a market, in a mall)” received 63 preferences (the number of consumers of gelato or ice cream in the last six months is 92 out of 102 respondents, *Figure 11*).

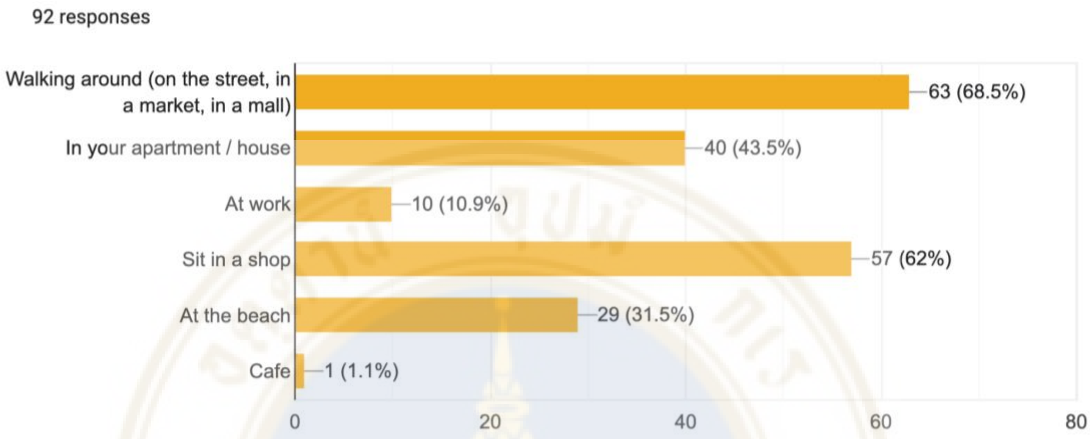

Figure 11: Where would consumers prefer to eat gelato or ice cream?

The large majority of the consumers eat gelato or ice cream in the afternoon, at snack time (74), rather than at lunch or night. No consumer expressed their preference for morning consumption (*Figure 12*).

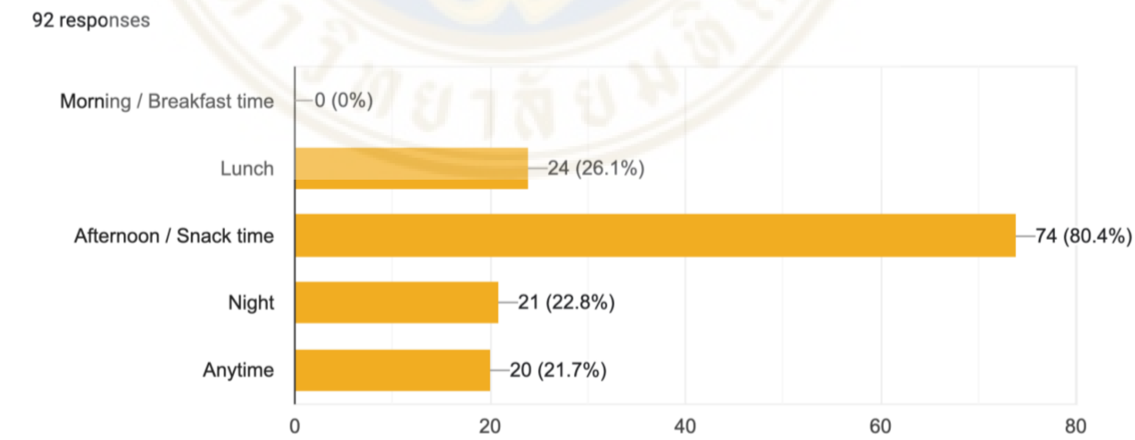

Figure 12: Where do consumers prefer to eat gelato or ice cream?

Only 47.8% of the consumers surveyed are able to identify a gelato or ice cream shop/brand in Thailand as their favorite. In particular, Grazia Gelato & Coffee and Molto Premium Gelato received the highest number of preferences, 10, which may be an indicator that consumers of both products prefer gelato over ice cream.

In addition, when asking consumers to mark the brands of gelato and ice cream that they have tried across Thailand, the brands receiving the most recognition are multinational ice cream franchise chains. Swensen's is the most recognized and tried, marked by 73.9% of consumers, followed by Dairy Queen (72.8%) and Cold Stone (68.5%). If we consider Thai brands, Molto Premium Gelato is the most recognized and tried (58.7% of consumers marked it) together with iBerry, almost equal to Umm! Milk (57.6%). Even though 28 gelato and ice cream brands were proposed, two consumers did not mark any of them.

When asking consumers how they like to eat gelato or ice cream, 82.61% of them affirms they like to eat it in a cup. Eating gelato on a cone is only appreciated by 57.61% of the consumers, while 68.48% of them want to eat it combined with some other ingredient or product (23.91% with fresh fruit, 17.39% with coffee "Affogato" style, and 27.17% with other desserts, *Table 2*).

Table 4.2: Preferences of 92 consumers toward the modality of gelato and ice cream consumption

Table 4.2: Preferences of 92 consumers toward the modality of gelato and ice cream consumption (cont.)		
Preference	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
In a cup	76	82.61%
On a cone	53	57.61%
With fresh fruit	22	23.91%
Affogato	16	17.39%

Table 4.2: Preferences of 92 consumers toward the modality of gelato and ice cream consumption (cont.)		
Preference	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
With cake/brownie	25	27.17%
Other	1	1.09%

4.1.5 Factors that influence purchasing behavior toward gelato

Consumers participating in the survey were presented with a series of factors and asked if those may influence their decision to purchase gelato. *Table 3* shows the results of the survey, where it emerges that only a few factors have a strong influence over the decision to purchase gelato. In particular, the factor that negatively influences the decision to purchase gelato the most is the price, here assumed at 120 THB per one scoop (23.90% of consumers). However, for 45.70% of consumers, such a price is irrelevant to their decision. Instead, the factors that mostly influence the purchasing behavior of consumers towards gelato positively are the variety of flavors (which influences positively 72.80% of the surveyed consumers), the authenticity of the product ("Authentic product", 71.70%), the uniqueness of flavors and the shop providing seats (66.30%). The product being awarded also positively influences 59.80% of the consumers. On a side note, Thai-cuisine-inspired flavors are irrelevant to the decision to purchase gelato for 59.80% of the consumers surveyed.

Table 4.3: Factors influencing purchasing behavior toward gelato

Table 4.3: Factors influencing purchasing behavior toward gelato (cont.)			
Factor	**Influence positively**	**Irrelevant**	**Influence negatively**
Price	30.40%	45.70%	23.90%

Table 4.3: Factors influencing purchasing behavior toward gelato (cont.)

Factor	Influence positively	Irrelevant	Influence negatively
Authentic product	71.70%	26.10%	2.20%
Awarded product	59.80%	35.90%	4.30%
Social media suitable product	54.30%	38.10%	7.60%
Variety of flavors	72.80%	25.00%	2.20%
Uniqueness of flavors	66.30%	26.10%	7.60%
Inspired flavors	28.20%	59.80%	12.00%
Shop with seats	66.30%	29.30%	4.40%
Themed shop	48.90%	42.40%	8.70%
Italian shop/brand	53.30%	42.40%	4.30%
Premium shop/brand	53.30%	41.30%	5.40%
Organic/Bio Shop/Brand	54.30%	37.00%	8.70%

Out of the 92 respondents who consumed gelato, or ice cream as an alternative, in the past six months, 72.8% declared that compared to other frozen desserts, gelato is their favorite option. 14.1%, instead, affirms that gelato is their least favorite option. These numbers in absolute value (67 and 13) reflect the previous division between gelato consumers and ice cream consumers. For the remaining 13.1%, gelato is just as valid as other frozen dessert choices.

4.1.6 Consumers' preference towards gelato, ice cream, and other frozen desserts consumption

When asked about which characteristics and textures they look for when in the mood for consuming any frozen dessert, the majority of the respondents (63.73%) affirm they look for a refreshing and thirst-quenching dessert. Close to half of them also mention that they look for something less sweet (49.02%) and creamy (48.04%). Chewiness (41.18%) and softness (40.20%) are also characteristics that are commonly sought by the respondents (*Table 4*).

Table 4.4: Texture and characteristics consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert

Table 4.4: Texture and characteristics consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert (cont.)		
Preferred characteristic	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
Chewy	42	41.18%
Creamy	49	48.04%
Refreshing and Thirst-quenching	65	63.73%
Less sweet	50	49.02%
Crunchy	25	24.51%
Soft	41	40.20%
Jelly	18	17.65%
Sour	25	24.51%

Table 4.4: Texture and characteristics consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert (cont.)		
Preferred characteristic	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
Other (vegan options)	1	0.98%

Concerning which flavors consumers mostly look for in a frozen dessert, an outstanding 81.73% of the respondents claim they seek chocolate, coffee, vanilla, yogurt, and other creams. It can be noted that this high share of preference, oddly, does not match the much lower preferred "creamy texture". Other flavors score average, while tea flavors are only chosen by 17.65% of the respondents, and soda flavors or other creative flavors are selected by just 5.88% of the respondents (*Table 5*). This last result is aligned with the question (*Table 3*) on how inspired flavors influence the purchasing decision of consumers, which resulted to be an irrelevant factor.

Table 4.5: Flavors consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert

Table 4.5: Flavors consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert (cont.)		
Preferred flavors	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
Chocolate, coffee, vanilla, yogurt, and other creams	83	81.37%
Nuts, pistachio, almond, and similar	37	36.27%
Creative flavors based on other menus	37	36.27%
Fruits	35	34.31%
Macha	32	31.37%
Tea flavors	18	17.65%
Soda (cola, Fanta, Italian soda, Sprite...)	6	5.88%

Table 4.5: Flavors consumers look for when they want to purchase a frozen dessert (cont.)		
Preferred flavors	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
Other creative flavors (for example chewing gum, chilli, liquor...)	6	5.88%

About half the respondents said they are used to purchasing frozen desserts alone (54.90%) or with their partner (47.06%). However, the large majority (73.53%) claimed that when purchasing frozen desserts they are with friends. This result may be due to the demographics of the population intervening to answer the survey. The same reason could also explain why only 15.69% of the respondents purchase frozen desserts with children, or 16 of them, when just 5 mentioned having children (*Table 6*).

Table 4.6: Who consumers purchase frozen desserts with

Table 4.6: Who consumers purchase frozen desserts with (cont.)		
Consumers are	**N° of consumers**	**% of consumers**
Alone	56	54.90%
With friends	75	73.53%
With partner	48	47.06%
With older relatives	14	13.73%
With children	16	15.69%
With colleagues	22	21.57%

A high number of respondents purchasing frozen desserts with friends also may explain why the majority of consumers claimed to consume gelato or ice cream mostly sitting in a shop or cafe, and the shop having seats influences their purchasing behavior positively.

Last, it can be noted that the most preferred location to purchase frozen desserts are local shops, with 40.20% of the respondents marking it as the first choice. A solid preference also goes for international franchise chains and multinational brands, which rank second as a first choice (17.65% of preferences) and first as a second choice (22.55% of preferences). Local franchise chains also obtained a good amount of preference in high ranks, while street vendors and supermarkets are the least preferred choice: street vendors rank first as a fifth choice with 25.49% of preferences, while supermarkets and hypermarkets rank first as a sixth choice with 24.51% of preferences (*Figure 13*).

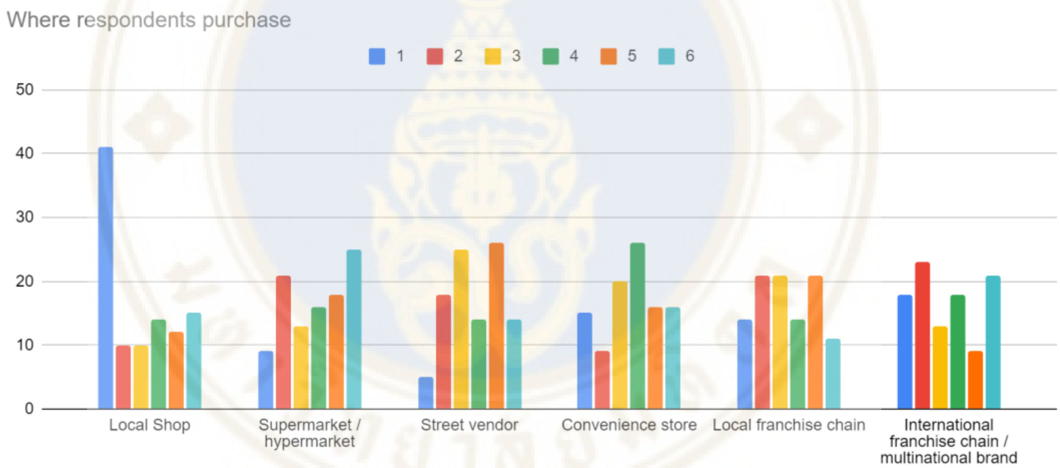

Figure 13: Preferred choice of shop to purchase frozen desserts

4.2 Analysis of data from qualitative research

A questionnaire of seventeen open-ended questions was submitted to fifteen business owners in Thailand that sell gelato. Four of them returned the questionnaire filled in, while one invited the researcher for a one-to-one interview. In all cases, the structure of the questionnaire has been followed. One business is located in Chiang Mai, one is located in Phuket, and the others are located in Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Four of them are open to the public, one is a wholesaler.

When asked about the customers frequenting gelato shops or purchasing gelato products, business owners indicate that while Thai people constitute the majority of the customers, expats and tourists also form a significant market segment. The owner of a business located in Phuket reports that their customer base mainly comprises expats and tourists, while a newly established business and a wholesaler claim that their customers are primarily Thai.

It is worth noting that the wholesaler, which does not have a physical store for direct sales to the public, is an exception. With respect to the shops themselves, all businesses, except for the wholesaler, provide a parking lot or are located in a mall with parking facilities. Three businesses offer both takeaway and sit-in options, and two are sand-by kiosks. One business plays Italian and Jazz music in its stand-alone location, while another business plays music that changes with the seasons, and two businesses selling to the public do not play any music.

Peak gelato sales are generally observed from late afternoon to late evening, except for two shops that experience a steady stream of customers throughout the day. One business owner reports offering 480 flavors, with classic cream and fruit flavors being the most preferred by customers. Another business owner notes that their customers prefer intense taste flavors, while the wholesaler indicates that customers prefer sorbet, a fruity and refreshing variation of gelato with less fat.

Almost all business owners state that a significant percentage of their customers are health-conscious and may request non-dairy or low-sugar products. Only one interviewee uses natural sweeteners for some flavors and offers variations made with alternative milk bases. The choice to use imported or local ingredients varies depending on the availability and suitability of ingredients. Two businesses make their gelato bases in-house, while others import nuts and bases. Two businesses advertise their use of premium imported ingredients as a selling point. Almost all businesses expect to offer seasonal fruit flavors and flavors related to festivals.

Regarding customer retention, two business owners report that around 80% of their customers return, while the other shops only mention having repeat customers. Two businesses do not experience any seasonality in demand, while three do. A business owner identifies a decline in demand during the rainy season and after major holidays. Interestingly, the same reported an increase in sales after opening an outdoor area in front of its kiosk.

Some businesses offer a variety of other products, and gelato-only sales are mostly from takeaway customers. One business created a fusion menu that is compatible with gelato and became a best-seller. The wholesaler is uncertain if their consumers purchase their product combined with other menus.

Only two business owners attempt to educate their customers and staff about artisanal gelato and its difference from ice cream. Nonetheless, all four businesses selling to the public recognize that there is some confusion in customers' perception of the product, but they understand the difference once they try gelato.

Most businesses promote the authenticity of their product, with the belief that it affects their reputation, although one business owner contends that authenticity does not drive sales. All businesses aim to be perceived as premium, except for one, and they claim that they are perceived as such. Three business owners believe that their product most influences customers' purchasing behavior, while one owner asserts that the ambiance of the shop is crucial. The rest considers customer service to be the most influential factor.

Overall, businesses believe that taste and quality are the primary factors that drive customer satisfaction, followed by location, uniqueness, and service.

4.3 Discussion

Starting with the consumers' knowledge about artisanal gelato, business owners are right to affirm that people are confused. As a matter of fact, about 90% of the respondents identify the characteristics of gelato over ice cream correctly, but almost half of them lack the confidence to admit they are able to do so. This is why they may realize the differences between the two products only after tasting artisanal gelato. And it may also explain why ice cream brands are more well-known, but local gelato shops are the favorite, according to the survey conducted.

The choice of the business owners to equip their venues with sitting areas and offer a parking lot meets the preference of customers for consuming gelato, as well as other desserts, sit in a cafè or restaurant, or shop. This is a winning solution also due to the fact that the majority of respondents purchase gelato and other frozen desserts when they are with friends, thus spending a longer time at the venue. On the other hand, a consistent share of respondents also mentions they like to consume gelato walking around, which may explain the winning choice of the businesses that set up a kiosk in a mall.

As for the time of consumption, it seems that afternoon really is the peak time for gelato sales. Although some business owners mention their shops record good sales in the morning, no respondent expressed their preference for such a time.

Business owners never mentioned price as a factor in attracting or pushing away customers. However, they are all branded as premium. In light of the survey, this makes sense as most of the respondents consider a premium price not relevant to their decision to purchase gelato. Then, even though consumers widely agree that a variety of flavors positively influence their decision to purchase gelato, business owners notice that the majority of consumers select standard and common flavors. This perception of the business owners is reinforced by the preference of respondents for cream flavors like chocolate, coffee, vanilla, and yogurt. Interestingly, the preference of consumers for thirst-quenching desserts finds a match in the wholesaler's opinion that their customers mostly opt for sorbet.

Consumers positively value the authenticity of the product; hence, the business owners considering it relevant for their reputation are right. As well, all of them are right considering product quality and location as the main factors influencing consumers' behavior. In particular, the researcher pays attention to the two businesses among the interviewees where music is played, and the owners utilize strong Italian branding to promote themselves as authentic. There may be a relation between the nice ambiance created in their locations in terms of green area, seating area, decorations, lighting, and music, and their ability to sell gelato all day long including morning time, differently than other businesses.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the conclusion of the paper is presented (*5.1*) through a comparison between the literature review carried out by the researcher and the findings resulting from the research (*5.1.1*, *5.1.2*). Moreover, recommendations are given to support entrepreneurs that may decide to venture into the artisanal gelato business in Thailand (*5*.2).

5.1 Conclusion

The conclusion summarizes the correspondences found regarding the topics object of research, hence, the environment, the atmospherics of a shop, and the implications that can be deducted for the managers or business owners.

5.1.1 Correspondences between the research and literature concerning music's influence on sensing gelato flavors

According to the literature reviewed by the researcher, listening to music may evoke certain feelings that induce a variation of the sensory attributes of gelato while consuming it (Kantono et al., 2018). In particular, listening to music that is neither liked nor disliked is found to enhance the sense of milkiness and “cocoaness”. Assuming that Italian and jazz music, as well as festivities’ themed music, fit into this music category from the perspective of Thai listeners, Kantono et al. findings may match this research. When asked which flavors they mostly look for, respondents show a considerably high preference for chocolate, vanilla, coffee, yogurt, and similar, which are milky and chocolaty flavors. At the same time, two businesses playing jazz music, Italian music, and festivities’ themed music, experience sales in the morning, differently than other businesses that do not play any music. Hence, neutral music could be proven to be a trigger for customers towards the purchase of milky and chocolaty flavors of gelato in Thailand, even outside the common time of consumption.

Further research may be needed to prove that music triggers the consumption of gelato in Thailand, considering the limited sample population and the preference of consumers for standard and common flavors.

5.1.2 Correspondences between the research and literature concerning atmospherics influence on gelato consumers

Previous research analyzed in paragraph 2.4 revealed that atmospherics impact on consumer behavior can be prominent for service organizations due to the fact that consumers perceive tangible signals of the physical environment as a higher quality of the service (Bitner, 1992). This hypothesis results to be particularly true, according to the gelato business owners interviewed. They all mention the location of their shop or kiosk as an important factor to catch the customers' attention and drive their decision toward consumption. In particular, the survey revealed that respondents do prefer to consume gelato sitting in a venue, including that they often are with their friends or with their partner when doing so. The preferred brands among the respondents, which all offer a pleasant and appealing environment, are evidence. According to Liu & Jang (2009), the environment may influence the customers' impression of the service quality and improve their overall eating experience.

However, businesses that service their customers in malls as stand-by kiosks are considerably successful. Hence, further research may be needed to demonstrate that the immersive environment and the spatial arrangement of a stand-alone gelato shop can drive more sales than a nice-looking kiosk resembling an authentic Italian experience.

To this extent, it may be worth mentioning that the wholesale business is more successful with a slightly different product, which is sorbet, and it does not have control over the location where its gelato is sold. Interestingly, sorbet matches the preferences of the respondents towards a frozen dessert that is less sweet and thirst-quenching, with a creamy texture. It may be possible that, without the influence of atmospherics, consumers in Thailand would be more willing to consume sorbet rather than traditional artisanal gelato.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The research findings (*4.1, 4.*2) and the discussion (*4.3*) evidence a few implications that may support entrepreneurial strategies to enter the market for artisanal gelato in Thailand.

Two main factors influence people in Thailand to consume gelato which are not strictly related but both results from the analysis of the consumers' behavior and the experience of the business owners.

The first factor is certainly the location, which seems to attract more customers when it can accommodate groups of friends or couples. The environment and ambiance of the location are also relevant to make the customer feel involved, through music and decorations that possibly recall Italian vibes. These details may stimulate consumption and enhance the appreciation of the product. For example, an outdoor area could be a reason to visit the shop and stay longer in winter, while a joyful room that is suitable to create content for social media could invite customers to stay longer during the rainy season or hot days. Kiosks and stalls may benefit from being located in lifestyle malls, rather than department stores and multi-floor malls, as the environment looks greener, healthier, and overall more positive.

The second factor is with no surprise the product itself. Business owners are convinced that their product is the main reason why consumers choose them. Consumers, on the other hand, show interest in products with specific characteristics, such as thirst-quenching and creamy frozen desserts. The key takeaways are that too creative flavors may not find the favor of consumers. However, entrepreneurs have the opportunity to create a unique selling point by developing signature flavors or servings, for example as a fusion menu. They must pay attention to the preference towards creamy flavors such as chocolate, vanilla, yogurt, or milk, as these are the standard and possibly the reason why customers come back.

Despite being against the tradition of artisanal gelato and often a practice not well-seen by artisans, entrepreneurs shall also consider the demand for less sweet and healthier products. The science behind gelato allows exploring new ways of recreating the scoopable texture even with alternative ingredients. It has to be noted that although the voice of consumers seems unequivocal, their decision on the spot is impulsive and may not reflect their preference. Hence, alternative gelato flavors should not constitute the main feature of a new gelato brand.

Eventually, the premiumization of the product through choosing imported ingredients or locally sourced fresh ingredients may be the real reason behind the success of artisanal gelato, despite a higher price. Educating consumers to recognize gelato from ice cream justifies the higher price and matches the demand for a healthier frozen dessert. A premium product could also indicate authenticity and immediate connection with “Made in Italy”, which is a strength for small local brands promoting themselves as authentic. Consumers recognize authenticity and are willing to support local shops against multinational brands. Hence, businesses that are able to offer them at least the same quality service with a premium product could be on the way to compete against the “giants” of frozen desserts.

5.3 Study limitations

As previously mentioned in this Chapter and Chapter 4, the findings suffer from limitations that are mostly linked to the network of the researcher. In particular, the sample size might be too small to draw incontrovertible conclusions, as the data come from the answers of 102 respondents. Moreover, as most of the survey respondents were females, the findings may not represent accurately the behavior and preferences of the whole population of interest. However, there is a good distribution of the respondents across income ranges, which is a relevant factor to be considered when discussing pricing and premiumization.

The qualitative research is also affected by the rate of response, as only five business owners accepted to be interviewed. In addition, two of them are located in areas far from the sample population geography. This is particularly relevant when discussing the importance of the environment and the location, if businesses are located outside Bangkok Metropolitan Region. However, businesses of comparable size, reputation, product quality, and organization, located in different cities, provided very similar answers.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Further research on the topic shall still comprise both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as the approach provides the opportunity for a more accurate analysis of consumers' behavior. Additional research should be conducted separating the focus for different cities and areas in Thailand. This may allow comparing the perception and behavior of tourists and expats with that of Thai people. Moreover, it could highlight different trends across the country's environments: city, seaside, or countryside.

A wider size of sample population shall be surveyed. On the other hand, business owners could be clustered according to the specifications of their business: producer and seller, or retailer; stand-alone or in a mall; kiosk or shop.

Possibly, similar to the knowledge test submitted to the consumers, further research could also investigate if there are any benefits for businesses that decide to sell ice cream while being branded as artisanal gelato.

REFERENCES

Asshidin, N. H. N., Abidin, N., & Borhan, H. B. (2016). Perceived quality and emotional value that influence consumer's purchase intention towards American and local products. Procedia Economics and Finance, 35(3), 639-643.

Baker, S.E. and Edwards, R. (2012). How Many Qualitative Interviews is Enough? National Centre for Research Methods Review Discussion Paper. Retrieved Oct 15, 2014, from http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf

Bell, R., Meiselman, H. L., Pierson, B. J., & Reeve, W. G. (1994). Effects of Adding an Italian Theme to a Restaurant on the Perceived Ethnicity, Acceptability, and Selection of Foods. Appetite, 22(1), 11–24. https://doi.org/10.1006/appe.1994.1002

Bitner, M.J., 1992. Servicescapes: the impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. Journal of Marketing 56 (2), 57–71

Chauvin, E. C. & Government of Canada. (2022). Foodservice Profile – Thailand. agriculture.canada.ca. https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/international-trade/market-intelligence/reports/foodservice-profile-thailand-0

ElAtassi S. (2022, October 27). Scoop up new ice cream opportunities. Bangkok Post Public Company Limited.
https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/pr/2423920/scoop-up-new-ice-cream-opportunities

Goff, H. D. (2022). Ice Cream and Frozen Desserts: Product Types. Encyclopedia of Dairy Sciences, 498–503. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818766-1.00033-7

Ipsos. (2021, June 17). Be-Italy! Exploring the dynamics of Italy's international reputation. https://www.ipsos.com/en/be-italy-exploring-dynamics-italys-international-reputation

Junsri, S. (2014). Factors influencing purchasing decisions towards gelato ice cream [MBA Independent Study]. Stamford International University.

Kantono, K., Hamid, N., Shepherd, D., Lin, Y. H. T., Brard, C., Grazioli, G., & Thomas Carr, B. (2018). The effect of music on gelato perception in different eating contexts. Food Research International, 113, 43–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2018.06.030

Kantono, K., Hamid, N., Shepherd, D., Yoo, M. J. Y., Carr, B. T., & Grazioli, G. (2016). The effect of background music on food pleasantness ratings. Psychology of Music, 44(5), 1111–1125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735615613149

Kantono, K., Hamid, N., Shepherd, D., Yoo, M. J., Grazioli, G., & Carr, B. T. (2016). Listening to music can influence hedonic and sensory perceptions of gelati. Appetite, 100, 244–255. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.02.143

Karahanna, E., & Limayem, M. (2009). Email and V-mail usage: Generalizing across technologies. Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce, 10(1), 49-66.

Khaniwale, M. (2015). Consumer buying behavior. International Journal of innovation and scientific research, 14(2), 278286.

Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2010). Principles of marketing. 13thed. Retrieved from https://www.worldcat.org/title/ principles-of-marketing/oclc/813854600

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). A framework for marketing management (p. 352). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Kotler, P., 1973. Atmospheric as a marketing tool. Journal of Retailing 49 (4), 48–64.

La storia del gelato, dall'antichità ai primi anni del 1900. (2022, November 16). Gelato News. https://gelatonews.it/storia-del-gelato/

Liu, Y., & Jang, S. S. (2009). The effects of dining atmospherics: An extended Mehrabian–Russell model. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28(4), 494–503. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2009.01.002

Long, L., 2003. Culinary Tourism. University of Kentucky, Lexington.

Manzano, R., Serra, T., & Gavilán, D. (2020, February 7). Sensory Marketing: Straight to the Emotions. IE Insights. https://www.ie.edu/insights/articles/sensory-marketing-straight-to-the-emotions/

N-Dynamic Market Research & Consultancy Ltd. (2018). MARKET OVERVIEW ON GELATO, COFFEE AND SWEET FOOD IN CHINA. In www.sigep.it. ITA - Italian Trade Agency. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.sigep.it/sigep/note-di-mercato/2019/ice-canton_market-overview-on-gelato-coffee-and-sweet-food-in-china-2018.pdf

Pokawattana, J. (2017). THE FACTORS THAT DRIVE THE PURCHASE DECISION FOR THE SELECTION OF RESTAURANTS AND CAFÉS IN BANGKOK [Master of Management Thematic Paper]. College of Management Mahidol University.

Ramya, N., & Ali, S. M. (2016). Factors affecting consumer buying behaviour. International Journal of Applied Research, 2(10), 76-80.

Sattarayak, T. (2013). ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PIZZA CONSUMPTION IN BANGKOK [Master of Management Thesis]. College of Management Mahidol University.

Shingh, S., Rani, R., & Kanse, S. (2020). A review on Gelato: An Italian delicacy. Emergent Life Sciences Research, 06(02), 74–81. https://doi.org/10.31783/elsr.2020.627481

SIGEP. (2019). Gelato in Europe around the World. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from https://www.italiangelato.info/gelato-market/gelato-in-europe-around-the-world.kl Sources: Acomag, AIIPA, Coldiretti, Confartigianato, SIGEP Study Centre, Uniteis e.V. - Union of Italian Gelato-makers in Germany

StrategyHelix. (2022, April 12). Ice Cream Market in Thailand 2021. https://strategyh.com/report/ice-cream-market-in-thailand-2021/

Technavio (2017, August). Gourmet Ice Cream Market - Top Regions, Drivers, and Forecasts. www.businesswire.com. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170815005772/en/Gourmet-Ice-Cream-+Market---Top-Regions

Technavio (2020, May). Gourmet Ice Cream Market by Product and Geography - Forecast and Analysis 2020-2024. https://www.technavio.com/report/gourmet-ice-cream-market-industry-analysis?utm_source=pressrelease&utm_medium=bw&utm_campaign=t_auto_rfs_wk28_faq&utm_content=IRTNTR43642

Tyagi, A. (2018). A Study on Factors Affecting Consumer Buying Behaviour. International Journal of Business & Engineering Research, 11 (7), 1-7.

Wood, N.T., Munoz, C.L., 2006. 'No rules, just right' or is it? The role of themed restaurants as cultural ambassadors. Tourism and Hospitality Research 7 (3/4), 242–255.