Synthesizing Gastronomy Tourism Perceptions on Street Food in Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

Thailand as a well-known nation with amazing tourist centers that keeps attracting tourists from around the globe for visitation purposes. Admittedly, factors such as education, healthcare services, tourism, research among others, are things that gave Thailand an edge on Tourist visitation. This paper aims to synthesize various factors of Thailand’s gastronomy tourist attraction in relation to street food in the capital city: Bangkok from previous research papers. However, it will focus on contributing factors in Thailand that is responsible for gastronomy tourism perception on street food in Bangkok by taking a closer look on service value, gastronomy tourism, atmosphere, satisfaction, word of mouth (WOM) and visit intention of tourists’ perception in the sector. This synthesization aims to ensure that Thailand maintain its global recognition amidst market competitiveness by constant interaction with tourist.

Keywords: Perception, Gastronomy Tourism, Street Food
Introduction

Thailand has one of the most developed tourism markets in Asia. The ‘Land of Smiles’ as it is called, is famous for its hospitality, eye-catching beaches, historical places and eco-attractions, state-of-the-art cuisine, robust infrastructure and beautiful affordable accommodation. Recognizing this potential, the Thai kingdom sought to tap into this channel to create more wealth and boost its national GDP. The first thing we need to understand is the meaning of the term "Gastronomy Tourism". Gastronomy was not the new term but it was originally coined by Jean Anthelme and Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826), which meant the art of cooking and good eating (cited in Kivela & Crotts, 2006). In the recent decade, the researchers have proved that there is the strong relationship between foods, culture and tourism (Du Rand & Heath, 2006), in which laid the ground for the study of gastronomic tourism. As can be seen, it is recently considered a form of tourism that becomes a popular choice for international tourists. With a richness in flavors and a variety of menus, Thai foods and beverages are among other things that international tourists wish to experience while they are travelling. Therefore, Thai foods and beverages are one of the main ingredients in travelling business. Thailand Street Food has become a common business practice in Thailand and Bangkok has been nominated by CNN to be the best street food in the World in 2017 which is ahead of Tokyo, Honolulu, New Orleans and so on (Shea, 2017). This way, the expectations of the foreigners have always been met and exceeded. This is why despite the so many options the tourists may have to choose from, they have not, and they may not encounter elsewhere the unique food on Street in Bangkok for which Thailand is known to visit intentionally.

Background and Overview

Thailand had been promoted as one of the best tourist destinations in the world and it has been predicted to generate more revenue than those of other competitors such as London, Paris, Dubai, or New York based on MasterCard’s survey in 2016 (Hedrick-Wong, & Choog, 2016).
With a wide array of traditional heritage such as crafts, national arts, culture, and food, tourist naturally feels attracted from everywhere in the corner of the world. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), gave a statistic that predicted a dramatic increase in the number of visitors. For example, the data indicated a difference of around 3 million increments for 2017 against the number of visitors that visited in 2016. This rise shows about 8% increase in a number of visitors, generating about 733 million Baht in the first quarter and a total revenue of 2.77 trillion Baht for the entire year (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017). This amazing statistic is a solid proof of Thailand’s distinguishing hospitality towards visitors with a variety of foods that they can relish. (Sritama, 2016).

The International TV and cable satellite, CNN, in 2017, nominated Bangkok as the world’s best street food. This announcement attracted a great number of visitors from around the globe to want to visit Thailand. The number is expected to rise speedily in coming years, according to TAT (Pullphothong & Sopha, 2012). The solid link between food and tourism couldn’t be separated. And this, among some other tourist attraction with a mixture of tourist activities are what Thailand offers to its potential visitors. Here is a list of five best places known for scintillating street food in Thailand (Nualkhair, 2015):

### Chart A: Global Destination Cities Index 2016 Top 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Visits (Million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>21.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>19.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>18.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubai</td>
<td>10.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>10.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>9.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>9.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seoul</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>8.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>7.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taipei</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>7.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osaka</td>
<td>7.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>6.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MasterCard’s survey in 2016
The above-listed neighborhoods are known for their distinctive characteristics; hence, international visitors are more willing to visit more often.

However, an important question that requires attention is on how to increase and sustain Thailand’s food tourism. The factors to be considered include; service value, gastronomic characters, atmosphere, satisfaction and word and mouth. In order of significance, this paper will critically analyze these factors, discussing how they relate with one another within the context of Thailand Street Foods, with Bangkok in mind. This will help get a thoughtful understanding of tourist’s insights on Thailand’s gastronomic tourism.

In most instances, gathered information for this paper came from empirical information with tourists of various research papers. As mentioned, most of the paper focus on getting a proper and in-depth understanding of tourists’ view with respect to visit intention. Moreover, the paper observed the factors that impacted the gastronomy tourism in Thailand. These factors came from different means, and not from the individual preferences, tourists or travelers that reason is that there is a cause for concern as this could create a risk factor for the products and services that may not interest tourists.

The Department of Tourism in 2016, gave a comprehensive report indicating the number of foreign visitors to be approximately 21 million that visited the Country’s capital city (Department of Tourism, 2016). The report was centered on the best five tourist destination listed earlier, using content analysis method. A detailed information on international visitors’ viewpoint was gathered with respect to tourist’s perception towards Thailand Street Foods, as it will be summarized in the next section of this paper, with other areas.

Tourists’s Perception

1. Service Value

By definition, service value or service quality refers to the overall impression of the consumers with respect to the relative inferiority or superiority of the organization as well as the services that the same organization offers (Liu & Lee, 2016). In many contexts of the
businesses, high level of service quality delivered by the organizations to its clients is a very crucial factor for success. Worth noting is that this business contexts may include, but not limited to major professional sporting events. In the context of sport, SPORTSERV scale is used to determine the level of perceived service quality that spectators enjoy in close reference to tangibles, responsiveness, security, access and reliability. Similarly, the process of service delivery can also be a very crucial factor in-service evaluation (Ho Kim et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2011). Other aspects that determine service quality include employees, price, facility access, concessions, supporters’ comfort, game experience, show time, convenience and even smoking. Most modern researchers have come up with four most salient targets of event quality evaluation regarding sporting events namely; game performance, in-game entertainment, staff quality and general physical surrounding (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Another important thing is the fact that the most significant dimensions of service evaluation are deeply ingrained in the core product and the service outcome. Therefore, the service value can be represented by the perception of the tourist that evaluated the reasonable price and quality of the products.

2. Gastronomy

Gastronomy refers to the relationship between food and the culture that several scholars tend to investigate in the gastronomy tourism. For instance, Correia, Moital, Da Costa, and Peres (2008) examined the determinants of gastronomic tourists' satisfaction: a second-order factor analysis focused on the general satisfaction of the journey in tourists’ experiences, tend to include the general elements of the gastronomic experience in their list of satisfaction items such as gastronomy, variety of food and quality of food. Similarly, Wang and Jie (2013) observed that food quality, price-quality relationship, atmosphere, hygiene, location and convenience are some of the attributes perceived to facilitate recognition for food service satisfaction of tourists. Hence, gastronomy can be described as ‘food experience’ of tourists toward tangible and intangible products. Therefore, in this considerations studies, it has been accepted that the list of five best places known offering street food located in Bangkok provided food and culture are commonly available and are a part of tourist perceptions on street food in terms of gastronomy tourism.
3. Atmosphere

The atmosphere can be defined as the design of the retail chain outlet that produces specific emotional effects on the buyer that enhances his purchasing ability (Hussain & Ali, 2015). Therefore, the role of store atmosphere in the success of retail outlet cannot be neglected. This means that a pleasant atmosphere of the retail chain outlets is one of those elements which are extremely desired. Retail chain industry has its success tied or attributed to convenience, choice of goods, huge space and low prices. Consequently, the atmosphere has to do with our feelings toward shopping experience which cannot be seen. Pleasant atmospheric stimulus in the store increases the customers' probability of staying longer, thus spending more on buying of goods. The environment has a huge impact on tourists' emotion and satisfaction. The impression of the retail chain outlets enhances the customer satisfaction level and purchase experience. Despite the fact that there is limited empirical research on the impact of the store atmosphere on the consumer behavior, this does not deny the important role it contributes to consumers' behavior. For a conducive atmosphere to be maintained in the store, the collective impact of major atmospheric settings, such as cleanliness, music, temperature, lighting, color, display or layout and scent or fragrance at one point in time, should be considered (Hussain & Ali, 2015).

4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction, by definition, can be referred to as the feeling that a customer experienced upon completing a purchase, in the phase following the acquisition of a service (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2013). A function of expectations and perceived product or attributes of the services mostly represents customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is actually an emotional reaction that is normally manifested in situations when the perceived performance of a product or service exceeds its expectation. Noteworthily, both cognitive and effective reaction to services encountered is very crucial to customer satisfaction. Satisfaction based on transactions and overall satisfaction are the two main distinct types of satisfaction that are known. The contrast between these two is; Transaction-based satisfaction emerges when a customer judges the product or service on one particular purchase experience, while overall satisfaction is based on the total customer experience that was formed as a result of previously made purchases (Marinkovic, Senic, Ivkov, Dimitrovski, & Bjelic, 2014).
5. **Word of Mouth (WOM)**

WOM is defined as a form of advertising communication where the recipient of the advertisement becomes the information disseminator for others looking for such information (Rawal & Saavedra, 2017). It is simply a practice where an exchange of information in regard to a product available in the market takes place. WOM has been found to be mainly powerful when customers are making buying decisions about the products or services that are new in the market, and customers are only aware of these products and services without full knowledge about them. Nowadays, WOM is found and accessible through diverse channels like networking sites, blogs, online forums or purchase reviews available on respective online buying websites. WOM plays a very tangible role when new products are released to the market. However, it could be risky when poor information is passed to potential customers, as this may scare them off. Therefore, credible information has to be passed to reduce the risks accompanying the customer's buying decisions (Wang & Jie, 2013).

6. **Visit Intention**

The most important point to note here is that visit intention and customer satisfaction is inseparable in the sense that the higher the satisfaction a restaurant or a business delivers, the higher the possibility that customers will visit (Ho Kim, Jae Ko, & Min Park, 2013). When a company offers goods or services, there is always the possibility that similar goods and services are offered on the market by other competitors. Since the customers always have many alternatives, it is very important that the companies do all that is within their disposal to ensure that they increase the value of the existing consumers besides attracting new ones (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2013). Taking these effective steps will automatically attract customers’ repurchase behaviors. There are different fields where target customers visit intention has been studied like tourism services, catering services, hospital services, retail businesses, bank services and telecom services. Logistic regression or structural equation modelling was constructed and several numbers of customers' retention driving factor models were estimated. In those models, the factors such as satisfaction, trust, number of previous visits, perceived switching cost and customer value were considered (Huang & Hsu, 2009; Lee, Kim, Ko, & Sagas, 2011). Accordingly, the visit intention can be described by several purposes to attract the tourists to purchase the products and services or come to visit. Furthermore, visit intention can be created as the relationship between the product and tourists in long-term.
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Service quality and Visiting Intention

Several scholars attempted to describe the relationship between service qualities and visit intention in some contexts but with identical purpose. For instance, Brady and Cronin (2001) provided the new concept of service quality by synthesizing the famous concept from several researchers. Included are Grönroos (1984), Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1998), Rust and Oliver (1994), and Dabholkar, Thorpe, and Rentz (1996). Additionally, Brady and Cronin (2001) defined the three dimensions to represent the service quality which is: interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality. Similarly, Marinkovic et al. (2014) considered the quality of interaction, atmosphere, and price in the restaurants context, and Ho Kim et al. (2013) determined the performance, staff quality, and physical surrounding to explain the service quality in the events. Therefore, the three dimensions that are important towards appropriately labelling and managing the service quality in the present phenomenon include, the price and quality of product, presentation, and atmosphere.

Price, Quality and Visiting Intention

Price and quality of the product have a significant impact towards visiting intention in terms of positive influence as proved by several researchers (Ho Kim et al., 2013; Liu & Lee, 2016; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Yan, Wang & Chau., 2015). For instance, Marinkovic et al. (2014) and Yan et al. (2015) demonstrated that price has an influence on visit intention significantly and positively ($\beta = 0.134, p < 0.05$) and ($\beta = 0.121, p < 0.10$) respectively. Besides, service and food quality dimensions also have significant impact on visit intention in the positive direction ($\beta = 0.411, p < 0.05$) and ($\beta = 0.160, p < 0.10$) (Yan et al., 2015). Correia et al. (2008) defined this dimension as a latent variable which is explained by price and quality of food. Liu and Lee (2016) gave evidence in price sensitivity of tourist on visit intention in terms of monetary and behavior price. Consequently, the price and quality of products can be represented by the service value towards the gastronomic tourists’ visit intention in Bangkok. In particular, Thailand has a low cost in tourism. As an example, the survey results below.
Gastronomy and Visiting Intention

Gastronomy has become an important determinant factor at describing tourists’ experience towards food presentation which affected their visit intention significantly and positively (Correia et al., 2008; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Yan et al., 2015). For instance, Correia et al. (2008), mentioned that components of gastronomy factor included are local courses, food presentation, originality and exoticness, and staff presentation. Wang (2015), also explained the impact of the image of gastronomy tourism on tourists’ intention in terms of positive direction ($\beta = 0.689, p < 0.05$). Similarly, Brady and Cronin (2001) explained the interaction quality by attitude, behavior, and expertise. Marinkovic et al (2014) demonstrated that the quality of interaction has an effect on visit intention significantly and in the positive direction ($\beta = 0.512, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, the presentation of restaurants or types of restaurants has an impact on visit intention when interacted with the service value positively and significantly ($\beta = 1.515, p < 0.05$) (Yan et al., 2015). Hence, gastronomy can be represented by the experiences of tourists on presentation and image through the local product which affected their visit intention of gastronomic tourist in Bangkok.
Atmosphere and Visiting Intention

Atmosphere can be described as the quality of physical environment which is related towards the sensation and emotion of customers that influenced on their visit intention positively and significantly (Hussain & Ali, 2015; Ho Kim et al., 2013; Jensen, Limbu & Choi, 2016; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Yan et al., 2015). For instance, the atmosphere has an impact on customer visit intention in the restaurants in terms of online review ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.05$), full-service restaurants ($\beta = 0.271, p < 0.05$) (Marinkovic et al., 2014; Yan et al., 2015). Furthermore, Correia et al (2008) defined the observed variables to explain the atmosphere for gastronomic tourist which includes ethnic decoration, modern music, lighting, and entertainment. In other words, the atmosphere can be described as the sensational and emotional feelings of the tourists in terms of physical environment. This factor can be affected by the visit intention.

Tourist Satisfaction and Visit Intention

Satisfaction of gastronomic tourists can be described through the three dimensions which are; quality and price, gastronomy, and atmosphere. Likewise, this factor has a positive relationship towards visit intention significantly and mediated between explanatory variable (Correia et al., 2008; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Yan et al., 2015). For instance, Correia et al (2008) demonstrated the gastronomy ($\beta = 0.814, p < 0.05$) and atmosphere factors ($\beta = 0.585, p < 0.05$) has a positive impact on visit intention significantly. Yan et al (2015) considered the price and value ($\beta = 0.121, p < 0.10$), atmosphere ($\beta = 0.298, p < 0.05$), service quality ($\beta = 0.411, p < 0.05$), and food quality ($\beta = 0.160, p < 0.10$), and Marinkovic et al (2014) confirmed the role of tourist satisfaction as the mediator variable factor ($\beta = 0.157, p < 0.05$). Therefore, the tourist satisfaction determinant is an independent and mediator variable which explain the impact on visit intention in terms of gastronomy tourism.

Word of Mouth and Visit Intention

Word of Mouth (WOM) has a significant contributing factor, such that scholars considered its impact towards visiting intention, as the explanatory and mediator variable especially in the gastronomy tourism phenomenon (Liu & Lee, 2016; Wang, 2015). For instance, Lie and Lee (2016) provided the framework to explain visit intention through service quality and word of mouth. The result was that the service quality has a positive impact on word of mouth significantly ($\beta = 0.401, p < 0.05$), and word of mouth has an influence on visit intention positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.400, p < 0.05$). Similarly, Wang (2015) demonstrated that the
image of gastronomy tourism has a positive effect on electronic word of mouth ($\beta = 0.611, p < 0.05$), and electronic word of mouth too, has a positive influence on tourists' intention ($\beta = 0.7, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, Jensen et al. (2016) and Rawal and Saavedra (2017) determined that word of mouth as mediator variable, increased the impact towards dependent variable.

For instance, Limbu and Choi (2016) demonstrated the impact of word of mouth as mediator variable in the service industry, found that this determinant has a positive impact on two pairs. Firstly, the word of mouth has mediated between production budgets and box office revenue ($\beta = 0.581, p < 0.05$). Secondly, word of mouth has a mediated impact on a number of screens and box office revenue, positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.523, p < 0.05$). Thus, word of mouth can be performed as independent and mediator variable which affected and increased the impact towards dependent variable.

**Service Quality and Word of Mouth**

Several researchers implied and confirmed the determinants of service quality, which includes price and quality, gastronomy, and atmosphere. These factors have a positive impact on word of mouth in the service industry significantly (Jensen et al., 2016; Liu & Lee 2016; Wang, 2015). For instance, Liu and Lee (2016) examined the impact of price on word of mouth, found that the monetary price ($\beta = 0.620, p < 0.05$) and behavioural price ($\beta = 0.280, p < 0.05$) has a positive impact on word of mouth. Also, Jensen et al. (2016) investigated the impact of the atmosphere on word of mouth in the college football game context, found that the atmosphere has an influence on word of mouth positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.539, p < 0.05$). Wang (2015), found that the gastronomy factor in terms of the image of cuisine, restaurant, and food-related activities has a positive impact on word of mouth significantly ($\beta = 0.611, p < 0.05$). Therefore, several scholars have successfully confirmed the positive impact of price, gastronomy, and atmosphere on word of mouth in context of the hospitality industry.

**Recommendations and Conclusions**

There is a need to take an insightful look at some areas of the Thai government for sustainability purpose of gastronomy tourism. It is applauding knowing that Thailand government has shown considerable interest at gastronomy tourism perceptions on street food on Bangkok to international visitors, as this is a step in the right direction towards the promotion of gastronomy tourism. However, there is a need for improvement that will lead international visitors to some other tourism perceptions, thereby attracting more foreigners.
The following points highlight this paper’s recommendations:

1. The structural model should be in place that will fast-track decision-making process, which in turn will increase visit intention from international tourists.

2. There should be a reliable source of information indicating tourists’ perceptions of street food in Thailand to gain in-depth knowledge about Street Food and propose the guideline for improving the food-related tourism in Thailand.

3. The body of knowledge in the field of Tourism Management should be expanded especially for Thailand Street Food in order to help get a thoughtful understanding of the effect of service value, gastronomy, atmosphere, satisfaction, and word of mouth on visit intention of tourists’ insights on Thailand’s gastronomic tourism.

Conclusively, Thailand is rated high on the global scale for being home to many tourists due to its renowned gracious hospitality, especially gastronomy tourism on street food in Bangkok. Tourists who have experienced Thailand’s gastronomy tourism not only base their commendations on factors like political stability, competent health-care system, internationally recognized colleges and universities, world-class tourist destinations, tolerant and peace-loving citizens, among others but also service value, gastronomic characters, atmosphere, satisfaction and word of mouth management. Thailand is known for business integrity and human rights promotion to the tourists has seen people from various religious, political and geographical backgrounds flood into Thailand for various purposes as mentioned above. Therefore, in the view of tourists, Thailand is among the outstanding countries that offer gracious hospitality in terms of gastronomy tourism perceptions on street food in Bangkok, having cited the reasons discussed above.

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