

## Factors influencing Tourist Satisfaction: The Moderating Role of Gastronomy and Conceptual Perspective

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: May 17, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: October 20, 2021</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords :</b> Gastronomic Experience, Tourist Satisfaction, Gastronomy Tourism</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> 10.5281/zenodo.5586099</p>	<p><i>The study proposes the theoretical concepts to establish the moderating effect of gastronomic experience on the relationship between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction in the Southern Thailand. The primary data will be gathered through questionnaires from 384 foreign tourists in Phuket, Surat Thani, Krabi, and Phang Nga provinces. This study will clarify the moderating effects of gastronomic experience on the relationship between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction of Southern Thailand. The significance of this study will contribute to insights into the tourism industry with gastronomic experience and develop strategies to increase satisfaction, retention, and increased tourists to travel in Southern Thailand. The findings not only contribute to travelling operators' understanding which can create competitive advantages in terms of Service Quality, Marketing Mix and gastronomy experience in tourism in the Southern region, but contribute to the development of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) also.</i></p>

### Introduction

Nowadays, tourists spend plentiful money on food at the top of their trip, and cuisine has become important factors in choosing a destination to travel (LaMondia, Snell, & Bhat, 2010). Gastronomy has always been closely linked to tourism, and in the 20th century, global travel is expanding. So, gastronomy becomes an asset to attract tourists to specific destinations and offers the tourists pleasantly new and memorable experiences. Gastronomy tourism covers food and beverages, restaurants related to the social, cultural, and historical aspects of food and eating (Gillespie & Cousins, 2002). Moreover, it does not focus on cooking and preparation of food and drink as many tourists are relatively interested to know how, where, when, or why people eat such food, but it is more varied (Santich, 2007). Many countries support gastronomy tourism because they want to increase their market share in the tourism industry and to be competitive destination using marketing strategies, Service Quality and selling point which are different from other countries for tourists. Having such different attractive points, the countries aim to satisfy their tourists. Gastronomy tourism still has both opportunities and limitations. One of the limitations is the lack of standardized and well-known restaurant promotions leading to tourist dissatisfaction (Singsomboon, 2014). Tourist satisfaction has been important issues in the tourism industry, and is known as expectations from the expectation and experience; we may define "tourist satisfaction" as the result of comparison magnum between tourists' expectations and the experiences tourists receiving from tourist attractions (Pizam & Calantone, 1987). Tourists today are seeking meaningful and memorable experiences. An experience created by a unique event increases the chance to turn tourists into loyal tourists that wish to repeat experiences (Niculescu, (2014); Pine & Gilmore, 1999). So, tourists have set out to result in a sense of gratification means that tourists will be satisfied. However, if the result is a feeling of not enjoying, not feeling emotional, it means unhappy tourists (Pizam, 1982). In the same way, Hughes (1991) explained that tourists who have expectations to be responded with various experiences will be satisfied. Additionally, Service Quality, Product and Price are the key of customer satisfaction. Service as a type of product, or an activity that can provide benefits or satisfaction when offered to sale (Kotler & Armstrong, 2002). A score of studies have been conducted on the five dimensions of Service Quality (Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy) which are the keys of customer satisfaction (Nguyen et al.,2018). Product quality provides satisfaction, increases competitive advantages, and attracts the target customers (Nuseir & Madanat, 2015). When customers feel satisfied with the quality of products, never switch to other products (Nikhashemi et al., 2017). Furthermore, customers will feel satisfied if the quality of the products exceeds the costs that they pay. Price is significant for customers and companies because the pricing of a product affects customer satisfaction.

In Thailand, dissatisfaction of foreign tourists with food or restaurants is caused by some weaknesses or lack of service efficiency that affects the returning (Office of the Permanent Secretary of Ministry Of Tourism and Sports[OPSMTS], 2015-2019). Moreover, OPAMTS (2019) reports that foreign tourists recommended being

clean, cheap, hygienic, quality, labeled with food prices, and avoiding overpriced. Furthermore, the survey of OPAMTS (2016) found that Southern Thailand needs to be developed as poor service quality in gastronomy tourism should be improved. It can be concluded that Southern Thailand lacks service quality and lack of product and price (OPAMTS, 2017). Hence, it is important to investigate the effect the factors on gastronomy experience and tourist satisfaction.

As indicated, the restaurants lacks service quality, product, price, and gastronomy experience to increase tourist satisfaction in the South of Thailand. The study attempts to investigate what influences tourist satisfaction in gastronomy tourism. Most tourist satisfaction studies have focused on western cultures, with few studies conducted in Asian countries (Wang et al., 2009) and the gastronomy tourism industries. Moreover, the gastronomy experience is different among national groups, and many aspects of the tourists' experience are country-specific (Nield et al., 2000; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2003). Considering this gap, this research intends to answer an important question of what factors influence gastronomy experience and tourist' satisfaction in gastronomy tourism. Hence, the researchers propose to fill the literature gap by holistically investigating tourist satisfaction through the moderating effects of gastronomic experience on the relationship between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction in the Southern Thailand.

### **Literature Review**

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), the exchange relationship can be divided into Social exchange and Economic exchange. It creates an expectation of some return in the future. The person has the hope that s/he deserves anything from investment by the economic exchange which can be used in the form of calculating the return (Blau, 1964). So, SET is suitable for the scope of study as tourists hope good service quality and good experience from money which they will pay for travel, and their expectation will definitely affect their satisfaction. Many researchers in different fields have applied EDT to better understand customer expectations and requirements concerning their satisfaction. These fields include marketing, tourism, information technology, repurchase behaviours, and retention (Fallon & Schofield, 2003; Yoon & Kim, 2000; Oliver, 1980; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010). EDT is experiential in its evaluation of customer satisfaction with hospitality and tourism services. It can be contested for several reasons, and there is limited use of expectations (Hill, 1986). EDT explains and measures satisfaction when consumers purchase a specific product and service (Woodruff et al., 1987) and can predict when their first expectations are met, consumers are satisfied (or unsatisfied or satisfaction is unmet). For this reason, this study will use Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Expectation Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) as theories underpinning to explain and understand how the effect of Service Quality, Marketing Mix on tourist satisfaction, and the effect of gastronomic experience is a moderating factor on tourist satisfaction in gastronomy tourism.

#### **Service Quality**

Nowadays, many countries attract tourists to come to their places and employ Service Quality strategies (Weiermair, 2000). A great Service Quality to the tourist is the best long-term strategy to keep the business successful (Yoon & Ekinci, 2003). According to Cronin & Taylor (1992), the best quality of service can lead to tourist satisfaction which will have an important effect on revisit purposes. However, Service Quality is a measure of service providers' level of service to customers as to how well their needs are met based on consumer' expectations or all the experiences that customers can assess (Lewis & Booms, 1983). Parasuraman et al.(1988) develop SERVQUAL dimensions which are Tangible, Reliability Responsiveness, Empathy, and Assurance. A concept of Service Quality has been applied in several studies, and many previous studies show that Service Quality significantly affected tourist satisfaction (Manfredo et al.,1996). On the other hand, Nam and Lee (2011) refer to many researchers' findings that not all dimensions are necessary. In Thailand, many previous studies focusing on hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions found that all aspects of the Service Quality had positive relationships with satisfaction Service Quality and satisfaction of the tourists (Chaianukool, 2014; Annunub, 2017). Some studies found that some Service Quality dimensions negatively affected Service Quality and tourist satisfaction (Kudhinnok, 2014 ; Sae-here, 2015). Besides, the lack of study on relationship between Service Quality and tourist satisfaction in Thailand is particularly the case in the field of gastronomy tourism. Consequently, this study proposes that:

**Proposition 1:** There has a positive relationship between Service Quality and tourist satisfaction.

#### **Product**

Product quality provides satisfaction, increases competitive advantages, and attracts the target customers (Nuseir & Madanat, 2015). For tourism marketing was classified the level of product into three levels. Level 1 or "core product" (the essential service or benefit), Level 2 or "tangible product" (the service offered for sale and consumption), and Level 3 or the "augmented product" (the tangible product plus all added-value features)(Middleton, 1988). Moreover, the previous studies show that product positively affects tourists' satisfaction (Sudari et al.,2019; Kadhim et al., 2016). In Thailand, most of the studies about Product is part of Marketing Mix (4Ps/7Ps/8Ps), and tourist product is part of destination image. Most of the results obtained from those studies showed that tourist products are the most critical factors affecting the tourist satisfaction (Janchai et al., 2020; Wongsawat & Deebhijarn, 2019; Qin & Campiranon, 2016). Therefore, this research uses a product that focuses on developing a gastronomy tourism product for attracting tourists and increasing competitive advantages in the hospitality industry in Thailand. Consequently, this study proposes that:

**Proposition 2:** There has a positive relationship between product and tourist satisfaction.

### **Price**

Price is the consumer's exchange for the benefits of having or using that product or service. Price shows the quantity of money charged for a product, service, or the total values (Kotler et al., 2005). Price competitiveness in tourism is the prices of the goods and services that tourists buy, expressed in some common currency. Besides, customers will feel satisfied if the quality of the products exceeds the costs that they pay. Price is significant for customers and companies as the product's pricing demonstrates customer satisfaction. If customers assess the price and perceive that the product is valuable and creates utility suitable for the price or amount paid, this kind of perception will bring about satisfaction to the customers. Some research explained a relationship between price and tourist satisfaction (Kadhim et al., 2016; Luekveerawattana, 2016; Teas, 1993). In Thailand, the cost of living was lower than European's but higher than some Asian's such as China, which resulted in the different opinions of respondents (Hiransomboon, 2017). Past studies about Price are relatively part of Marketing Mix (4Ps/7Ps/8Ps) (Janchai et al., 2020; Wongsawat & Deebhijarn, 2019), and Price is applied in studies about destination competitiveness or destination equity and hotels (Mechinda et al., 2010; Hiransomboon, 2017) Moreover, most of the results found that Price affected tourist satisfaction (Dayee et al., 2017; Tanasubsinn, 2019). Some studies revealed that Price had negative impact on customer satisfaction (Xie, 2020), and a few studies investigated Price in gastronomy tourism. Therefore, the lack of study about relationships between Price and tourist satisfaction in Thailand is particularly the case in the field of gastronomy tourism. Consequently, this study proposes that:

**Proposition 3:** There has a positive relationship between price and tourist satisfaction.

### **Gastronomic Experience: Moderating Variable**

The experience of tourists will help to increase the level of satisfaction in Service Quality (Bradley et al., 2017). Tourist satisfaction is understood as "an individual's cognitive-affective state derived from a tourist experience" (del Bosque & San Martin 2008). Tourists' ability to co-create with a service provider and to create personalized experiences can contribute to travel satisfaction and loyalty to the company (Mathis et al., 2016). The tourist industry provides a variety of services and goods, and it is a primary concern to give the tourists a fine selection of benefits to develop satisfaction in customer preferences and demands [products and services] (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). Customer perceptions of products or services through direct use or indirect observation display the value of experience (Mathwick et al., 2001). Furthermore, Price is the personally relevant experience that provides customers with meaningful utility (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). Price is the fundamentals of customer satisfaction. It will also build long-term benefits for the service company (Ryu & Han, 2009). Products and Prices have a significant effect on the satisfaction of tourists (Christian, 2013). Conversely, when Product and Price are poorly implemented, visitors would be dissatisfied (Azhar et al., 2019).

Based on the provided literature on the experience that drives tourists to influence their satisfaction levels. In addition, the experience gained from the Service Quality of tourists will have a direct impact on the satisfaction of tourists (Yasin et al., 2017) and the gastronomy experience is different for national groups (Nield et al., 2000). In Thailand, currently, the study of Thai food tourism is a study that focuses on the image, taste, ingredients, and benefits of Thai food. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of emotional education and experiencing Thai food experiences of tourists (Anan, 2018) and a lack of linking moderating effects of gastronomic experience on the relationships between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction model. This study attempts to fill a gap as mentioned before that there is a lack of linking between moderating effects of

gastronomic experience and the relationships between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction model. Therefore, this study proposes that:

**Proposition 5:** gastronomic experience moderates the relationship between Service Quality and tourists' satisfaction.

**Proposition 6:** gastronomic experience moderates the relationship between Product and tourists' satisfaction.

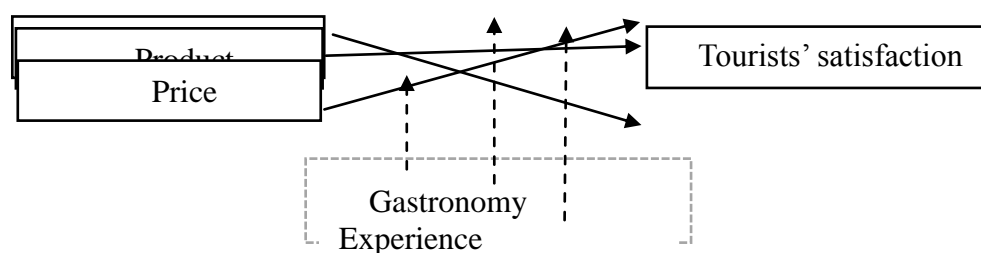
**Proposition 7:** gastronomic experience moderates the relationship between Price and tourists' satisfaction.

### Theoretical Framework

Based on several scholars' extensive literature review and suggestions, this study developed a research framework that conceptualized the moderator variable and other variables. Gastronomy experience as the moderator variable of this study is analysed to investigate relationships between Service Quality, product, price, and tourist satisfaction of gastronomy tourism in Southern Thailand (Fig.1). In this study, the independent variable is Service Quality and Marketing Mix whereas the study's dependent variable is the tourist satisfaction. In addition, the moderating variable is gastronomy experience.

Figure 1.1

*The conceptual framework of the study*



### Research Methodology

#### Sampling Design

The target population will be in Phuket, Surat Thani, Krabi and Phang Nga because they are popular tourist destinations in the South of Thailand. There are international tourists of ~~are~~ 3,941,894 visiting Phuket, Surat Thani, Krabi, and Phang Nga provinces (by The Ministry of Tourism & Sport (2020)). To determine the sample size, table criterion was used (Krejcie & Morgan, 1979). The confidence level was set at 95%, and the population size was 3,941,894. The minimum sample required for this study is 384, and the respondents are chosen using the stratified sampling technique as shown in Table 1.1. The target respondents will be the tourists who have eaten the local food in Phuket, Surat Thani, Krabi, and Phang Nga provinces.

Table 1.1

*Proportionate Stratified Sampling*

Tourist Attractions (Provinces)	No. of Tourists	Proportionate Sample Size
Phuket	2,110,854	206
Surat Thani	629,185	61
Krabi	627,258	61
Phang Nga	574,597	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,941,894</b>	<b>384</b>

#### Research Procedure

The study will collect the primary data from the questionnaires in order to investigate each variable and adopts several measures from previous studies. Service Quality is adopted from research conducted by Parasuraman et al., in 1988. Across the five dimensions of Service Quality (Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance,

and Empathy), 22 items will be investigated. Product and Price will be measured/examined using seven items and five items respectively; these two variables are adopted from a previous study by Amofah (2015).

Gastronomic experience will be examined in 16 items adopted from Manthiou et al (2014). For terms of tourists' satisfaction, there will be three items adapted from a previous study, Oliver et al., (1997) as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

*Summary of Measurement of Variables*

Measurement	Items	Sources/Authors/Years
Tourists satisfaction	3	Westbrook & Oliver (1991)
Gastronomic Experience	16	Manthiou et al., (2014)
Tangibles	4	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Reliability	6	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Responsiveness	3	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Assurance	4	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Empathy	5	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Product	7	Amofah, (2015)
Price	5	Amofah, (2015)

### Data analysis technique

The questionnaires collected will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze for descriptive statistics: percentages, means, and standard deviations. Partial-Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) is employed to explain the relationship between multiple variables and to test each other's interrelationships (Duarte & Raposo, 2010).

### Conclusions

This proposed conceptual research offers clarity on the moderating effect of gastronomic experience on the relationship between Service Quality, Product, Price, and Tourist Satisfaction of Southern Thailand. Likewise, it will expand the knowledge and the complex of gastronomic experience in the gastronomy tourism. Based on SET theory, EDT theory, Service Quality, Product and Price are worthwhile to increase the tourist satisfaction. This study will consider seeking the new approach for enhancing value addition as competitive advantages for tourist destinations with gastronomic experience. Thus, this study will investigate the moderating effects of gastronomic experience on the relationship between Service Quality, Marketing Mix, and tourist satisfaction of Southern Thailand. Practically, the findings of this study will contribute knowledge and insights to the tourism industry and particularly shed the light to gastronomic experience to increase satisfaction of the tourists. Not only the tourists will come back, but the number of tourists travelling to the Southern Thailand will increase also.

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