

The Influence of Food Service Quality in Tourists' Overall Service Experiences: A Study in Bangkok, Thailand

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This study analyses the food service role and its importance in satisfying tourists between regional groups, as well as examining how food service quality influences tourists' overall service experiences during their visit to Thailand. Data was collected from 502 respondents who visited the capital city of Thailand. The study was conducted by Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) for Statistical Packages. The empirical findings show significant differences between tourist groups' satisfaction perceptions on the number of dishes, value for money, speed of service, food quality and service, and the presentation of food in general. The structural equation modelling of the study showed that food service quality positively influences the overall service experience of tourists to Thailand. In general, quality food, numerous dishes, food presentation, and value for money was found to be the most important attributes. Thus, it can be concluded that among satisfied tourists, food service is an important contributor.

Key words: *Food Service, Tourists Satisfaction, Bangkok, Thailand.*

Introduction

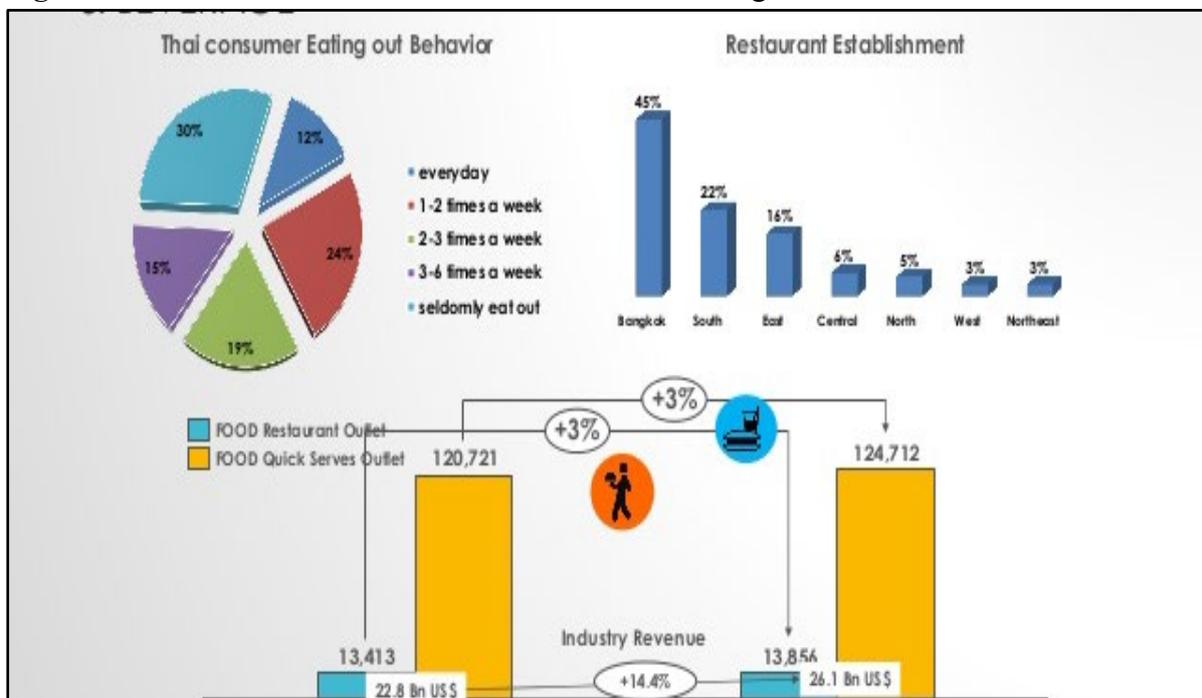
Although there have been a number of studies conducted which focused on tourist satisfaction, there are limited studies which look at the relationship between quality food service and tourist satisfaction. According to Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn (2017), food service has been largely ignored. There may be a greater economic impact on tourism if the improvement of food service is explored, with a view to understanding how this intersects with traveller satisfaction. In other words, the amount of money that tourists spend on food services and

whether that brings satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Indeed, food service is an underlying factor in tourism development and greatly contributes to the national economy (Lertputtarak, 2012).

Undeniably, there are limited studies that can be found in the marketing literature which investigates the impact that food service has on tourist satisfaction (Ploenhad, Laoprawatchai, Thongrawd, & Jermsittiparsert, 2019). However, different features of food service have been offered for the holiday satisfaction, but little is known of the overall impact of the food service experience. Furthermore, there has been limited studies conducted on cultural differences and consumer satisfaction with food., In the context of the Thailand tourism industry particularly, academics have shown an unwillingness to find out how tourists view food quality and service,. Hence, it is imperative to understand the role of food service in achieving customer satisfaction, especially since the tourism expenses for dining and accommodation average around 25% of the total spending. Considering the huge amount of spending on food and accommodation, overall dissatisfaction may occur if tourists have unfavourable experiences with food services; this can flow on to negative effects, leading to tourists being unlikely to return to a destination.

Figure 1 shows the current trend of the Thai food forecast from 2008 to 2016. The table also shows the dining out behaviours of Thai consumers.

Figure 1. Current and Forecast Trend in Food and Beverage in Thailand



Almost 30% of Thai inhabitants eat outside every day, followed by 24% who eat outside 1-2 times a week, 19% of them 2-3 times a week, 15% of them 3-6 times a week and 12% of them who seldom eat outside. Food and beverage outlets have been increasing rapidly around Thailand. This indicates the considerable availability of restaurants for tourists and general food lovers in Thailand.

Similar to food service and tourist satisfaction, little is known about cultural differences in relation to food service. It is well-known that tourists' perceptions of a destination may vary because of multicultural differences and because tourists derive from so many different countries (Poolklai, 2015). A study by Burusnukul, Binkley, and Sukalakamala (2011) compared the cultural differences in perceptions of a destination, or the quality of a destination, by foreign visitors who visited Canada and the USA. For example, different nationalities exhibit differing perceptions of complaining behaviours (Singsomboon, 2015). Given the facts, consumers with different attitudes and behaviours should pay greater attention to destination management. Tourism market segmentation and new marketing strategies should follow appropriately for every different market. Some scholars have paid attention to culture, tourism, and food. For instance, Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2013, examined how Japanese visitors experience food and drink in Australia. Although the most important factors in Japanese tourist satisfaction levels were identified as language and communication skills, food and drink also played an important part.

The efficient implementation of functional economic policies and the suitable promotion of well-organised resource allocation significantly contributes to the development of the Thai economy, and enhances the standard of living of the population. The national poverty level decreased to 8.1% in 2009 from 24% in 1981. As a result, the country achieved its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the national level in 2015. However, MDG 1.9 is used as a hunger marker but in 2010 and 2011 it is still showing as 16%. Table 1 shows the food security indicators for Thailand.

Table 1: Food Security Indicators for Thailand between 1990-1992 and 2006-2008

Selected Food Security Indicators	1990-92	2006-08	% Change
Population (Mil.)	57.4	66.5	15.9
Proportion of undernourished population (%)	26.0	16.0	-38.5
Number of undernourished population (Mil)	15.0	10.7	-28.7

Food needs (kcal/person/day) Minimum dietary energy requirement	1810	1850	2.2
Average dietary energy requirement	2310	2380	3.0
Intensity of food deprivation (kcal/person/day)	270	240	-11.1
Food consumption DES (kcal/person/day) Protein	2250	2540	12.9
(grm/person/day) Fats	53.0	56.9	7.4
(grm/person/day)	44.9	56.0	24.7

Sources: SOFI (2011) and FAO food security statistics

Despite some attention given by previous researchers to food and drink, little is known about the effects of tourist satisfaction exclusively in relation to beverages, food service experiences and particular types of food, in relation to destination. The present study aims to investigate tourists' opinions about the food service in Bangkok, and compares the opinions of German, Indonesian and Thai tourists. Based on the results of this research, the impact of these factors will be explored based on food service experiences and recommendations will be made to further tourist satisfaction in this respect in Bangkok.

Literature Review

Food Service Quality

Food quality is an underlying component of providing a proper dining experience (Hiransomboon, 2017). It has been found that the quality of food significantly affects customer loyalty whether in regular or casual-dining restaurants (C. T. Tsai, 2016). Food quality further affects whether patrons will revisit a restaurant (Jung, Ineson, Kim, & Yap, 2015). A study by Wu & Pearce (2016) compared food quality with other aspects such as service quality and environmental components. Their study declared that quality of food is the most valuable aspect of a restaurant. In order to improve the level of customer satisfaction, it is necessary for restaurant owners to maintain appropriate hygiene and safety regimens in the service of food .

In addition, food quality is one of the underlying elements of understanding customer satisfaction and behavioural intention (Altintzoglou, Heide, & Borch, 2016). To understand food quality, different scholars use diverse attributes. For example, Mynttinen, Logren, Särkkä-Tirkkonen, & Rautiainen (2015) include the taste of food, food variation, and nutritional facts to order to understand the quality of the food that satisfies customers and encourages them to return to the restaurant. Some authors include food presentation, serving size, and menu design (Adongo, Anuga, & Dayour, 2015), while other scholars include the texture, food safety,

portion size, taste, presentation, colour, temperature, and dietary acceptability to evaluate food quality in the food service industry (Tsai & Wang, 2017) . Similarly, taste, food freshness, temperature, nutritional value, and menu variety is required to understand the quality of food (Gnanapala, 2015).

Generally, food safety is one of the most important factors with respect to health, and helps protect people from developing health problems. In such situations, efficient controls could be accomplished through the application of a prevention system. It is important for food handlers to maintain preventative actions which are also in line with the laws. Food handlers play a role in the transmission of food borne pathogens, thus food handlers require food safety education. However, although the safety of the food has been recognised, it has been underutilised in the prevention of public health issues which often results in diseases of diverse aetiology (Del Chiappa, Martin, & Roman, 2016). Food handlers can spread food borne diseases in several ways. Inappropriate hygiene factors and low levels of food hygiene knowledge are the most important factors in the creation of diseases in food (Noorhaiza, Faiz, & Astri, 2017). Food reheating, inappropriate food supply and food storage, inadequate thermal treatment, and contamination of raw foods are the most widely evidenced in the practice of food handlers (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2017). There are three important aspects, namely, physical environment (ambiance), employee service, and food quality that have been focused upon in previous studies which test restaurant service performance (Choe & Kim, 2018),

Through the use of the SERVQUAL method, the above aspects were considered in order to measure employee service and the physical environment. In restaurant settings the quality of food is considered to be the most valuable measure of consumer satisfaction (Suhartanto, Chen, Mohi, & Sosianika, 2018). These researchers included five dimensions of food quality, namely, food nutrition, food variety, the smell of food, deliciousness, and food freshness. Goolaup & Mossberg (2017) investigated the association between behavioural intentions, service quality, food quality, perceived value and customer satisfaction in Western restaurants. Their study found a direct and positive link between quality of food and customer satisfaction (Tiago, Amaral, & Tiago, 2015). Indeed, the most critical part of any restaurant setting is food. According to Miranda, Rubio, & Chamorro (2015), food presentation is the technique designed to appeal to the customer's attention and facilitates the perception of food quality (Lai, 2015).

A study by Han & Hyun (2015) found a positive relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction. Another study by Vu Vu, Li, Law, and Zhang (2019) confirmed that customer perception and customer satisfaction are significantly and positively related to food performance. Wijaya, King, Morrison, and Nguyen (2017) identified that food freshness is an important element of customer purchase intentions. Food freshness attracts customers, and the customer subsequently experiences greater food hygiene. This indicates that conducting food service in a timely manner is important for ensuring food freshness.

Consumers tend to spread word of mouth reviews once they experience greater satisfaction. In turn, potential consumers are stimulated by positive word of mouth reviews concerning the fast food industry. However, the quality of food may differ from consumer to consumer (Wijaya et al., 2017). Customers and products are the two main dimensions of food service quality (Wannasupchue, Othman, Zainal, Abidin, & Mohamad, 2019). The goods category includes the safety of food, food hygiene, culinary arts, and the attributes of products. Service quality, marketing, promotion, and environment are elements of the consumer category. Sthapit (2017) investigated the influence of the buying behaviours of consumers on food quality and confirmed that food quality has effects on food performance.

Overall Service Experience

Customer satisfaction and overall service experience refers to the post purchase evaluation of any products by consumers concerned with satisfaction (Sengel et al., 2015; Chienwattanasook & Jermittiparsert, 2019). Lewin (1938) is used the most popular approach to customer satisfaction which is known as the theory of expectancy disconfirmation. This theory postulates that customers evaluate their level of satisfaction with the actual performance of the products by comparing their actual experience. The process of this form of satisfaction depends on cognitive evaluation by consumers. The theory further suggests that customer evaluation based on there are three possible situations can find from the concept based on evaluation from customer. These situations are: (1) satisfaction occurs once actual performance matches expectations; (2) when the actual achievement exceeds expectations, and (3) dissatisfaction occurs once the actual performance does not meet expectations. However, customer satisfaction does not depend on cognitive aspects only. Therefore, customer satisfaction was further evaluated by researchers using the performance-based approach. Customer satisfaction integrates cognitive judgments and the affective reactions of customers (Almeida & Garrod, 2017). For example, consumption emotion plays an important part in the evaluation of satisfaction (Sthapit, 2017).

It has been noted that pleasure derives from the affective components of consumption experiences (Markovic, Dorcic, & Krnetić, 2015). One of the popular definitions of customer satisfaction, as defined by Priporas, Stylos, Rahimi, and Vedanthachari (2017), is that customer satisfaction refers to the degree by which customers' expectations and fulfillment is pleasant or unpleasant. In other words, satisfaction refers to customers' expectations and the performance of service providers. Therefore, customers' affective responses in the context of restaurant since customers interact with service providers (Nilnoppakun & Ampavat, 2015). Following the previous research, this study aims to understand customer satisfaction according to the cognitive evaluations of service/food quality, as well as by considering the affective aspects produced by consumption experiences.

Customer satisfaction and overall service experiences are different structures that indicate supportive relationships with each other. Han and Hyun (2015) offered customer satisfaction and brand loyalty as a customer experience. The perceived customer experience brings customer satisfaction, which subsequently leads to greater brand loyalty. In addition, the best experiences create positive emotions and feelings which lead consumers to repeat experiences that not only affect customer satisfaction but also instil brand loyalty. The study revealed a significant impact of brand loyalty experiences by way of customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study examined the direct impact of customer service quality on customers' satisfaction.

Some hospitality studies have used art as the basis for developing service processes. In the area of service innovation, an ambitious outlook and the Double Action Program (PDCA) are two principles used to test the development of innovative services (Lai, 2015) This starts with the continuous improvement of existing service deficiencies. High-quality and stable services, while new art services bring the client a sense of stimulation and enrich the mind, but these two types of construction services are created through the use of different resources that developed by different decision-making methods and supported by different systems with high-quality and stable services. To allow the hotel to flourish and expand its horizons, achieving two conflicting goals at the same time, be it innovative services to improve the current development of services (Patwary & Omar, 2016).

Patwary and Rashid (2016) noted what an ambitious hotel can provide, while conservation offers a competitive advantage for customers. However, little research has investigated the successful hotel design process. In addition, the PDCA cycle is an innovative management tool that defines the phases of service development in order to help hotels increase the efficiency of targeted services. Although many researchers have looked at service innovation processes in an ambiguous way, or used the PDCA theory, few studies have suggested concrete steps to use art in the development of new services. To fill this gap, this study examined previous studies on designing service processes, integrated approaches with desires, and the PDCA cycle in order to develop an overall customer service experience.

Methodology

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire used in the survey comprises 21 items for respondents, including both socio-demographic background and respondents' dining experiences during a visit to Bangkok, as well as their overall service experience while visiting Thailand. Items were adopted from a study called the food service quality and overall service experience of tourists in Bangkok, and the number of items included was 10. The remaining 12 items in the questionnaire used the demographic sections of the survey tool and a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "poor-1"

and “excellent-5”, to rate eight attributes of food service. This type of scale reduces frustration in respondents and is the popular choice in social science research. Furthermore, respondents have the option to rate their overall satisfaction from “poor” to “excellent” (Ambrose,et.al 2016 ;Saqib, 2019).

In addition, a three-point scale was used in order to understand customer satisfaction with beer, bread, and coffee. In January 2019, a pilot study was also performed before the actual survey to establish any modifications that might be needed in the questionnaires and to understand the internal reliability of the construct with respect to item measurement . Researchers distributed the questionnaire to respondents directly. A group of eight researchers visited five resorts to collect data. During the distribution of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their language preference, either referring to their own language or in another language in which they were proficient. The inclusion of language preferences were to make sure that respondents understood the questionnaire correctly and to ensure there was no ambiguity present when filling out the questionnaire. A total of 502 samples were returned out of 720 distributed questionnaires.

Analysis of Findings

A descriptive examination for this study was conducted by Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. An inferential analysis was conducted by Structural Equation Modelling using Smart PLS 3. To ascertain the statistical differences between the socio-demographic profiles of each group, ANOVA tests were carried out. To further identify customer satisfaction levels from the food service attributes in different market groups, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. To find the significance difference between tourist groups and satisfaction levels, an independent statistical t-test was conducted. Again, this was to confirm the degree of influences of certain food service experiences.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables of the Study

Factors	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Value for Money	502	1.00	7.00	5.1892	1.24697
Food Quality	502	1.00	7.00	5.3725	1.03177
Number of Dishes	502	1.00	7.00	5.5777	1.05391
Standard of Food service	502	1.00	7.00	5.6036	1.06300
Variety of Dishes	502	2.00	7.00	5.8645	.99979
Food Presentation	502	2.00	7.00	5.3586	.98030
Speed of Service	502	1.00	7.00	5.3884	1.03169

Overall Satisfaction	502	2.00	7.00	5.5259	1.10448
Valid N (listwise)	502				

As shown in Table 2, among the food service components, the highest score consisted of a variety of dishes (5.8645) followed by the standard of food service (5.6036), number of dishes (5.5777), overall satisfaction (5.5259), speed of service (5.3884), food quality (5.3725) and value for money (5.1892).

Table 3 demonstrates the mean differences in terms of nationality of respondents, as this study focused on two foreign nationalities, (German and Indonesian), as well as local Thai tourists.

Table 3: Mean Scores in terms of Food Services for German, Thai and Indonesian Tourists

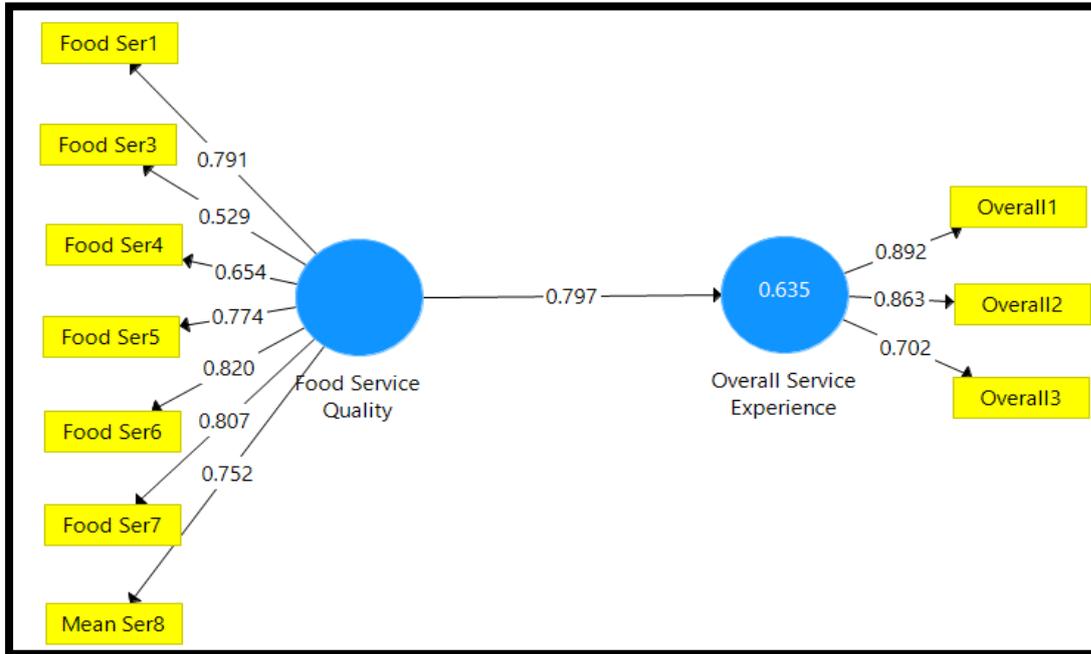
Factors	All Tourists	German	Thai	Indonesian	Sig.
Value for Money	5.1892	5.1875	5.6000	4.2444	.000
Food Quality	5.3725	5.4261	5.5333	4.5778	.000
Number of Dishes	5.5777	5.6420	5.6286	4.9556	.000
Standard of Food service	5.6036	5.6477	5.6476	5.1556	.012
Variety of Dishes	5.8645	5.9119	5.8286	5.5778	.099
Food Presentation	5.3586	5.4006	5.5333	4.6222	.000
Speed of Service	5.3884	5.4148	5.6381	4.6000	.000
Overall Service Experience	5.5259	5.6023	5.7048	4.5111	.000

As per the mean differences concerned, Indonesian tourists had the lowest mean scores for all aspects of food service quality and the overall service experiences of the tourists. The mean score differences were highly significant for value for money (sig = .000), food quality (sig = .000), number of dishes (sig = .000), standard of food service (sig = .012), food presentation (.000), speed of service (sig = .000), and overall service experience (sig = .000). Nonetheless, the variety of dishes was also significant in lower levels as sig. = .099.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

In the measurement model of the study, the outer loadings were good enough to fit into the construct (Figure 2). The outer loadings of the study ranged from 0.529 to 0.820 for food service quality and for overall service experience they ranged from 0.702 to 0.892.

Figure 2. Measurement Model of the Study



To measure internal consistency, Cronbach alpha or the average correlation among all items of the scale was applied. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are generally above 0.70, though in some case 0.60 is accepted. Therefore, every measure shows a high reliability and has a sound internal consistency.

As shown in Table 4, Cronbach's Alpha of food service quality was 0.863 and the overall service experience was 0.759, both of which are in an acceptable range. As far the requirement of the Structural Equation Modelling, the average variance extracted for both constructs was greater than 0.5 which indicates a strong construct with which to build up a statistical relationship.

Table 4: Results for the Assessment of Measurement and Composite Models

Construct	Items	Loadings/Weight	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Food Service Quality	Food Ser1	0.791	.863	.924	.892	.546
	Food Ser2	0.529				
	Food Ser3	0.654				
	Food Ser4	0.774				
	Food Ser5	0.820				
	Food Ser6	0.807				

	Food Ser7	0.752				
Overall Service Experience	Overall1	0.892	0.759	0.789	0.862	0.677
	Overall2	0.863				
	Overall3	0.702				

Assessment of Structural Model

The diagram in figure 3 is shown to demonstrate the structural model of the research. T-values of the model show high efficiency in the construct. The influence of the independent variable to the dependent variable is positively significant.

Figure 3. Structural Model of the Study

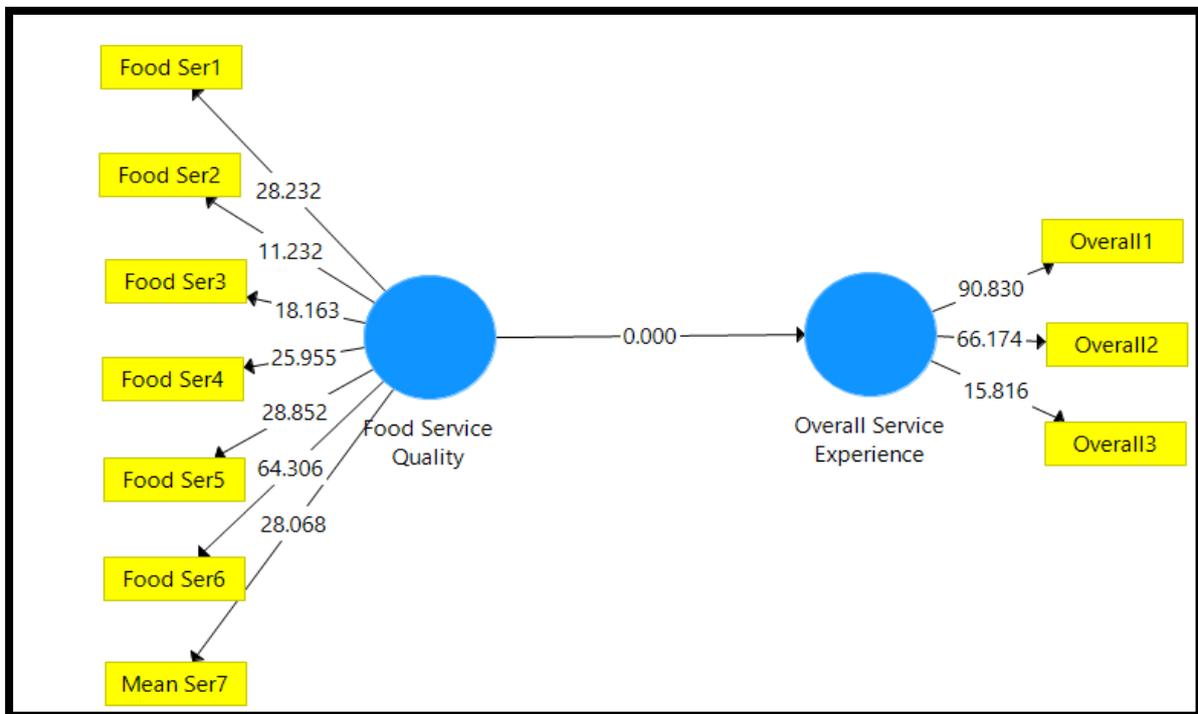


Table 4: Results of the Structural Model of the Study

Relationships	Direct/indirect Effect	t-value	p value	Effect Size (f ²)	Supported
Food Service Quality → Overall Service Experience	0.797	64.076	0.000	1.743	Yes

As shown in Table 4, the effect size among independent and dependent variables is higher ($f^2=1.743$) which shows good fitness of the model. The relationship between food service quality and overall service experience is positively significant ($p=.000$). When considering direct/indirect effects of the model, the path coefficient of the direct relationship is 0.797 which shows a positive relationship among the constructs.

Discussion

The structural equation modelling of the study suggested that food service quality positively influences the overall service experience of tourists in Thailand. The present study aims to understand the tourist experience with respect to the food service in the well-established tourist destination of Bangkok, Thailand. Specifically, the study examines tourist satisfaction levels in regard to food services, based on the cultural differences and experiences of German, local (Thai) and Indonesian tourists. The empirical evidence supports the notion that there are considerably different views between nationalities, in relation to the perceptions of some attributes of food services. This finding is relevant to the broadening of marketing strategies, by focusing on food services in Bangkok.

Some of the findings of the present study are consistent with a previous study carried out with a similar type of sample population that visited Thailand (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Eid & El-Gohary's (2015) study found that value for money, along with satisfaction relating to the total holiday experience, was found to have evidenced the most significant differences between the three nationalities, which included German, Indonesian, and Thai tourists. A lower satisfaction level was found in relation to the Thai tourists.

Due to cultural differences, significant variations were found between German, Thai and Indonesian tourists. The results indicate that visitors are not homogenous categories, and national tastes tend to differ, therefore generalised statements do not apply. This finding has positive implications for managers who seek to implement better marketing strategies in the future in Bangkok.

The recommendations for marketing managers are that food should be imported, or altered to better meet the tastes of major tourist groups in order to enhance satisfaction. Considering the facts, it would be a great challenge to change the food choices or rely upon the importing of foreign food into the local market, as this could be dangerous for the local food industry. In such a situation, it may be unwise to import food from other countries for the sole purpose of increasing the satisfaction levels of visitors from various regions. There is a danger that this might affect Thai culture, and cause it to be less sustainable. In general, importing foodstuff from other countries could turn out to impose an intolerable drain on the balance of trade in Thailand.

Limitations of the Study

Although the present study provides some influential findings for tourism marketing managers for Thailand as a tourism destination, it is not beyond limitations. The first limitation is that the group of respondents were divided into three and focused on German, Thai and Indonesian tourists, due to the small number of respondents for each country. Given the low number of tourists from these countries, it may not be appropriate to generalise the findings of this study, but cultural differences might provide significant additional evidence. The second limitation is the relatively small size of the sample which may affect the significance for chosen respondents of the study. Finally, the cross-sectional data collection occurred over the course of a week; more time and further study, such as seasonal collection of data and a greater variety of tourist profiles could be carried out in order to more broadly understand satisfaction levels in relation to these issues.

Conclusion

Without doubt, food service is a prominent underlying factor for visitors to Thailand from different cultural backgrounds, and knowledge of this may help managers further strategise to satisfy tourists. The present study shows that tourists to Thailand who come from different cultural backgrounds are mostly satisfied with the food service. However, some of the food, including the services, causes dissatisfaction to visitors. This might be an important factor for potential visitors and impact returning visitors negatively. As a result of dissatisfaction with food services, visitors may not return to Thailand again. This could place the destination management in a critical situation which may affect the sustainable development of the destination.

A major result of this research is the significant differences found between the major tourist groups. Specifically, tourists with differing cultural backgrounds exhibit different satisfaction levels in regard to the food services in Thailand. For example, Thai visitors shows the lowest satisfaction levels with almost all aspects of the food service, while German tourists were better satisfied than Indonesian tourists.

Given the dissatisfaction with food services and that this dissatisfaction is likely to continue to grow, a serious problem may manifest, in regard to both domestic and international tourism. In turn, this will affect the economic impact for the country's tourism. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to food services for tourists from different nationalities and different cultural backgrounds. Given these findings, some important changes may be necessary in order to provide better food service experiences, by soliciting opinions from visitors with different cultural background.



After analysing the results and limitations, this study recommends further studies. Firstly, the major groups of visitors should be investigated for their food service opinions. Destination managers may compare major visitors and minor visitors to ascertain further food service strategies. The results obtained in this survey suggest that some dissatisfaction may exist with visitors to Thailand. Future research may use an importance-performance analysis method to differentiate satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels. For example, visitors from these countries may have the highest satisfaction levels, while Thai tourists may have the lowest scores. Thus, studies investigating the importance of group satisfaction that lead to a better understanding of satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels may be required.

Finally, this study may be replicated in another destination in order to further understandings of the impacts of food service in particular destinations. Due to the singular place of this study, it is not possible to generalise the findings. Besides, many complex factors are responsible for tourist satisfaction. Bearing in mind the many differing satisfaction factors, further studies could add additional factors to do with food services in order to better understand satisfaction levels. Future researchers may also consider the customer's characteristics, while measuring tourist satisfaction levels regarding food services. Tourist backgrounds may also have significant impacts on food services.



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