



Consumer Culture, Food Choices and Cultural Tourism Development: A Study from Thailand

Parichat Sriharan^a, Siwarit Pongsakonrungsilp^b, Pimlapas Pongsakonrungsilp^c, ^{a,b,c}School of Management, Walailak University, Nakhonsrithammarat 80611 Thailand

This research is about the meaning, method and importance of consumers who are involved in food and cultural tourism. The results show that the meanings of cultural consumption are different according to the variety of periods and environments. The meaning of cultural consumption consists of these important factors 1) Value Creation, 2) Meaning Creation and 3) Difference Creation. The behaviour of consumers can be changed by using the cultural consumption method which supports markets, especially those related to food and cultural tourism. When consumers experience alternative consumption, they obtain experience and satisfaction which leads to income and a sustainable economy. Regression findings show that cultural tourism development factors have a significant influence on food safety measures. For both industry and governmental officials, this study's results can provide a good understanding of the implications for strategic decision making in tourism development. However, this study is limited in terms of respondents, cross cultural comparisons and some advance analysis techniques which could be addressed in future studies.

Key words: *Consumer Culture, Food, Cultural Tourism development, Thailand*

Introduction

The post-modern era of the business world has brought about many challenges as well as opportunities. The threats and opportunities have helped global economies and markets in transforming many products and services as the profit making industries (Featherstone, 1991: Holbrook, 2006). In this era the consumption culture has emerged as one of the key determinates of the success of market initiates. Consumer Culture can manage lifestyles and requirements. The conduct of Producer and Service Providers has to consider the mental needs or mental requirements of those consumers in Middle Level, (Hwankaew, 1997: Brown, 2004: Bourdieu, 1984). Further, Cultural Consumption is not only creating the Distinction with Products and Services but also a focus on Imitation for avoidance of repeatability of Products and Services, (Kaewthep, 1998). Nevertheless, Cultural Consumption should be based on the Value Creation and Meaning Creation of products which are different and the conditions that can convince people to be involved in Sign Consumption (Arnold & Thompson 2005: Javed & Basheer, 2017).. Products in this study will be defined as the elements of ambiance which can be attractive to consumers, (Kanokkusollapong, 2004).

For international tourists, food choice is a very significant factor when travelling to any destination. The choice of food depends upon various factors as identified in the literature. For example, (Steptoe, Pollard, & Wardle, 1995) have specified the fact that food choices includes the health of the individuals, cost factors, convenience level to access the food, taste and some other factors. However, among the most significant, nine factors are identified and presented in this study as health, mode, sensory appeal, natural prices, familiarity and various ethical concerns (Asp, 1999; Dammann & Smith, 2009; Pollard, Kirk, & Cade, 2002; Wylie, Copeman, & Kirk, 1999). It is an old phenomenon that food availability and cultural factors are closed associated with each other (Leininger & McFarland, 2006). The influencing factor of a culture can lead to the habitual consumption of certain food and its traditional preparation. For social interaction food choice is very important, however, prestige food choice becomes an index of social status as expressed by Vermeir & Verbeke, (2006). The study was planned to explore the nexus between the

- Cultural tourism develops (CTD) and food choices (FC).
- Cultural tourism develops (CTD) and consumer culture (CC)
- Food choices (FC) (CTD) and consumer culture (CC).
- The mediating role of food choices in the relationship between cultural tourism development and consumer culture (CC).



Cultural Tourism Development

To attract tourists, regional economies normally work for investment in infrastructure (Eadington & Redman, 1991; Kamran & Omran, 2018; Rosentraub & Joo, 2009). Such investments not only secure their position as a tourism destination but add to the sustainable development of local industry (Buhalis, 2000; Elliott, 2002; Hassan, 2000). Various researchers have reflected their view point that cultural tourism may be a good tool for the revitalization and restoration of economic progress (Caffyn & Lutz, 1999; Garcia, 2004; Hospers, 2002). For this purpose, creation of those public areas which have significant attractions can improve the number of visitors and consequently, the quality of the life for the local residents. This is because such development not only provides the opportunity to earn revenue but also increase awareness of the local culture (Coccossis, 2016; Jovicic, 2016; Richards & Hall, 2003; Sofield & Li, 1998; Waqas & Bahrain, 2019).

A common notion in the literature regarding the development of small and medium-sized family enterprises through cultural tourism development is also examined, both theoretically and empirically. Various researchers have constituted their discussion on those factors which can contribute to cultural tourism development. For example, (Murphy & Boyle, 2006) have adopted an interview approach while considering the sample respondents of business persons. Their findings reflect the fact that for tourism development, significant factors are: the strategic planning, cooperation and coordination between the business persons, funds for such development, support from the local government, leadership, tourism packages, community support and both informational and technological assistance. In addition, for tourism development, a literature review was conducted by Carlsen, Hughes, Frost, Pocock, & Peel, (2008), revealing the fact that key factors that contribute to tourism development are: human resource management, marketing, financial planning, quality and authenticity. However, some other studies have provided further contribution across both developed and developing economies, concerning tourism development through cultural dimensions (Altman & Finlayson, 2018; Higham, 2018; Luo et al., 2019; Markwick, 2018; Richards, 2018; Sindiga, 2018).

Consumer Culture Model

In the case of consumer culture, there are lots of academics who studied various activities such as Sport, Holt (1995); Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder (2011); Healy and McDonough (2013), McAlexander, et al (2002); Leigh, et al. Deighton, et al (2010) and Computer Muniz and O'Guinn (2001); Belk (1988) Amulets and Holy things, Pongsakornrungrungsilp, et al (2011) Instalment Products, etc. These activities support the research about Consumer Culture more clearly and they pave the way to in depth study about marketing and consumption including

the current manners of consumers (Pongsakornrunsilp and Pusaksrikit, 2012). According to these findings, Consumer Culture Model was separated into 3 types, Consumption for Value Creation, Consumption for Meaning and Consumption for Difference.

Consumption for Value Creation implies that the requirements of consumers are individual and specific. Quality and service of products is more advantageous than benefits and more useful in marketing. Only addressing identified needs can lead to consumer satisfaction and a positive experience regarding the products or services. Mental requirements and Mood requirements were found by Holbrook (2006) that relate to the explanation between Consumption for Value Creation and Experience of consumers, which are from Social Values for example, Consumers who are interested in Rolex or Armani will enhance their consumption for their satisfaction. Conversely, Consumption for Value Creation does not create ready-made products for consumers and rather consumers are the ones who create it by using products or services. Moreover, the important concept is the value which is not tangible for consumers but can be felt and created by themselves, Pongsakornrunsilp (2014).

Consumption for Meaning is the important thing because it can express the character or lifestyle of consumers. In context of consumer awareness, this research focuses on Consumption for Meaning as a Symbol that was consumed and can create the character of consumers and this is related to Holt's (1995) definition of Consuming as Integration as a thing that symbolizes meaning for the consumer through consumption of products or services that enhance their own character or social conditions for example Consumers who use Camel Clothes which express that the consumer are travels and is adventurous.

Consumption for Difference can be implied where although consumers are in the same community, lifestyle and from the same opinion base they strive to be different. This need for difference can encourage their requirements. There are many types of difference such available through Products and Services etc. Consuming as a Classification is not only about a gathering of consumers, but it can also separate the fake consumers of that Product (Holt, 1995) for example real Liverpool FC fans can separate the fake fans from interactions both offline and online, (Pongsakornrunsilp & Schroeder 2011; Suy, Chhay & Choun, 2018).

Gastronomy Tourism

Since 2553 B.E. food has been considered one of the tourism elements for tourists when choosing restaurants and hotels, Rand & Health (2006). This element is defined by Gastronomy Tourism as the integration of environments, culture, service, facility, accessing, good host, uniqueness and experience that tourists can get from a food destination, especially the sense of tasting food and the sense of cooking food etc. These sensations can increase the



value of a tourism experience. Haukeland and Jacobsen (2001) defined this tourism model as "Tourism that you can feel the real unique of the places which is the consequence of globalization and you can locally reach the community." Gastronomy Tourism is what can completely please the tourists who came to visit and can continuously develop to retain the local arts and cultures.

Moreover, food tourism can convince tourists to buy local souvenirs and consume at the local restaurants, Dwyer, et al. (2009) are consistent with Cohen & Avieli (2004) what state that the outstanding and famous way of making local food is through support of the Gastronomy Tourism Model. Occasionally, local food has to be adapted for tourists, especially the foreigners and meanwhile the interchanging of culture between community and tourists also appeared. Urry (2002) defined that, "tourists who look for the real food experience are the ones who reflect the unique, simplicity, culture and local lifestyle". Therefore, the cultural uniqueness can be expressed through food (Luekveerawattana, 2018; Ashley, Hollows, Jones, & Taylor, 2004; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2012; Dart, 1957; Hatch & Schultz, 2008; Hertzler, Wenkam, & Standal, 1982; Kelemen et al., 2003). Gastronomy Tourism relates to a Consumer Culture that markets available food products as different, unique and sentimental and adaptable to religion, custom or hobby Sormaz, et al (2016).

Consumer Culture with Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomy Tourism is an important agent in Consumer Culture agent and can create advantage in competition, marketing opportunity and business. Consumer culture is the important tool or "agent for expressing social and lifestyle of the community", Hall (2003) in terms of overseas information and research. The research of Boniface (2003) showed local culture both past and present through the touchable experiences and Hall & Sharples (2003) explained the importance of Gastronomy Tourism or Food Learning Tourism as follows 1) tourists learn about local culture; 2) support of Tourism Market; 3) part of developing agriculture and local economy; 4) competition with opponent markets; 5) evaluation of prosperity in World Class, Country Class and Local Class; 6) products for tourists. The importance points for developing Gastronomy Tourism are the expected requirements of food taste and the facilities which were prepared for tourists by community, inclusive of protecting local community products (Kozicka & Szopa, 2016).

Hall and Mitchell (2005) studied France, Australia, Italy, South Africa, USA and their development of their tourism industries through wine and Canada with regard to beer etc. Pullphothong & Sopha (2012) studied famous foods, in Ayuthaya, which was well known by tourists such as Kuay Tiew Rue (Boat Noodle), burnt River Prawn and Roti Saimai and related them to Cultural Tourism.



Food and Tourism's experience making

Nowadays, promoting tourism in any model is equally important because tourists have lots of choices. Food is the one element that can be attractive to almost all tourists and some people choose travel by the food opportunities in the communities they visit. In addition to food experience, tourists also experience cooking locales, food festivals or any activities which relate to food etc. In order to focus on curious tourists who would like to try new things, new cultures for their future experiences must be made available. The location can create a pleasurable experience for tourists through a focus on a good and satisfying experience, for example Starbuck Coffee can please consumers by its smell, taste, sound and feel and therefore these factors can be attractive to tourists or consumers. Moreover, Japanese Café which was called “Cat Café” or “Toilet Restaurant” was decorated by using sanitary wares and tourists could get new and strange experiences when they consume the drinks, products or services, (Punturee, 2015;Singh, 2018).

Food in different communities is varied and is considered as cultural heritage, anything that consumers eat or know how to eat is considered as the basis of their culture (Fields, 2002), including how to cook exquisitely and outstandingly. For instance, some restaurants who previously used to place their kitchen at the back have moved it to the front to reveal how they cook to their tourist consumers, (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Foreign tourists are especially interested in Thai food because Thai food can represent Thai Eating Culture through the selection of ingredients, local garnishes such as herbs or spices and knowing how to cook the food and arrange and decorate the plate the Thai way - highlighting Thai food as one of the ancient arts from colour through to taste (Kijwikran, 2014).

Tourists look for perfection between their consumption need and the food experience (Dan & Puiu, 2013) and therefore food in each community is the one of factor which can push tourists to choose a unique experience which can be relied on to provide a real sense of the local culture. “Food” was considered as Cultural Tourism, as products for consumption and has become a Symbol of country or community for example, croissant or champagne are symbolic of France (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013).

Food can relate to Cultural Consumption in a symbol period which was created by consumption of tourists and consequently offered and resulted in Meaning Creation of Consumers for other customers, for example black eggs in hot springs in Owakudani, Japan, is legendary and historical in the creation of a new experience for tourists. The attraction for lots of tourists is to visit and try black eggs as whoever eats this egg will live 7 years longer according to legend. Moreover, tourists can enjoy environments and places etc. Thus, applying Consumer Culture Model to the mix with Promoting Tourism, especially in the context of food, is an interesting



idea and an important way to create unique effective tourism. Based on the literature reviewed the study has proposed the following hypotheses.

H1: CTD has significant impact on the CC.

H2: CTD has significant impact on the FC.

H3: FC has significant impact on the CC

H4: FC mediates the relationship between the CTD and FC

Research Methods

For analysis purpose, this study has developed a structural questionnaire, covering the title of cultural tourism development (CTD) and food choices (FC). To measure the factor of CTD, fifteen items have been extracted from the literature and added to the questionnaire. These items are under the title of CTD1-CTD11(details are found in the results and discussion section). Similarly, for the measurement of food choices, seven items were extracted from the literature and added to the questionnaire. For the data collection, various tourists in the region of Thailand were observed and a total sample of 330 responses was finally collected over an eight week time duration. In addition, demographic factors like age, gender, qualification and frequency of visit were also added to the questionnaire. The response rate of the current study is 67 percent which is considerably higher than the threshold level. For the analysis purpose, the study has adopted the SEM-PLS.

Results and Discussion

The study employed the SEM-PLS, which comprises of two steps namely the assessment of the measurement model and the assessment of the structural model. The measurement model of the current study has shown in Figure 1 below.

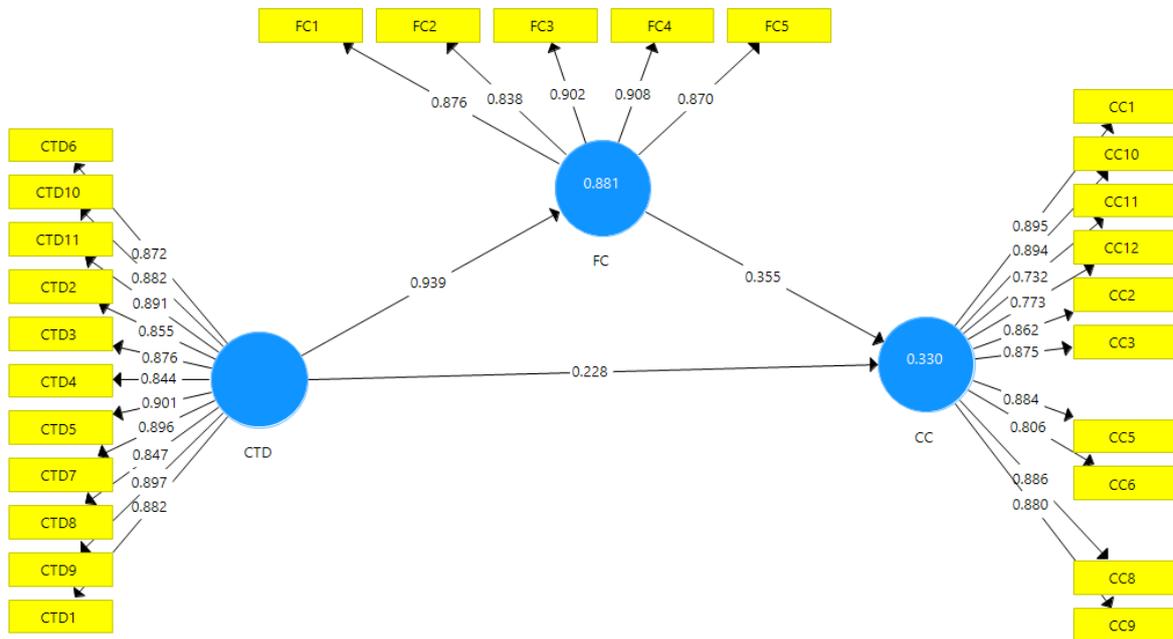


Figure 1: Measurement Model

The results of the outer loadings are shown in Table 1 below. As according to the studies of Basheer et al., (2019), Hafeez et al., (2018), and Hameed et al., (2018), and Muneer et al., (2019), the items with loading less than 0.70 , namely , the CC4, CC7, and FC6 were deleted from the analysis.

Table 1: Outer Loadings

	CC	CTD	FC
CC1	0.895		
CC10	0.894		
CC11	0.732		
CC12	0.773		
CC2	0.862		
CC3	0.875		
CC5	0.884		
CC6	0.806		
CC8	0.886		
CC9	0.880		
CTD10		0.882	
CTD11		0.891	
CTD2		0.855	
CTD3		0.876	
CTD4		0.844	
CTD5		0.901	

CTD6		0.872	
CTD7		0.896	
CTD8		0.847	
CTD9		0.897	
FC1			0.876
FC2			0.838
FC3			0.902
FC4			0.908
FC5			0.870
CTD1		0.882	

The reliability of the current model is shown in the Table 2 below. The reliability analysis has confirmed the fact that all the variables of the current study are reliable as their values are above the threshold values.

Table 2: Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	(AVE)
CC	0.957	0.960	0.963	0.723
CTD	0.970	0.971	0.973	0.769
FC	0.926	0.927	0.944	0.773

The results of validity matrix are presented in table 3 below. The upper diagonal values in the column are greatest among the other values in the same column. Thus, the result of the current study has confirmed that there is no issue of validity.

Table 3: Validity

	CC	CTD	FC
CC	0.850		
CTD	0.661	0.877	
FC	0.769	0.739	0.879

The next step after the assessment of the measurement model was to examine the structural model, which determines the nature and type of the relationship between and among the variables of the current study. The bootstrapping procedure with 1000 bootstraps was adopted for the estimation of the path coefficient as presented in Figure 2 below.

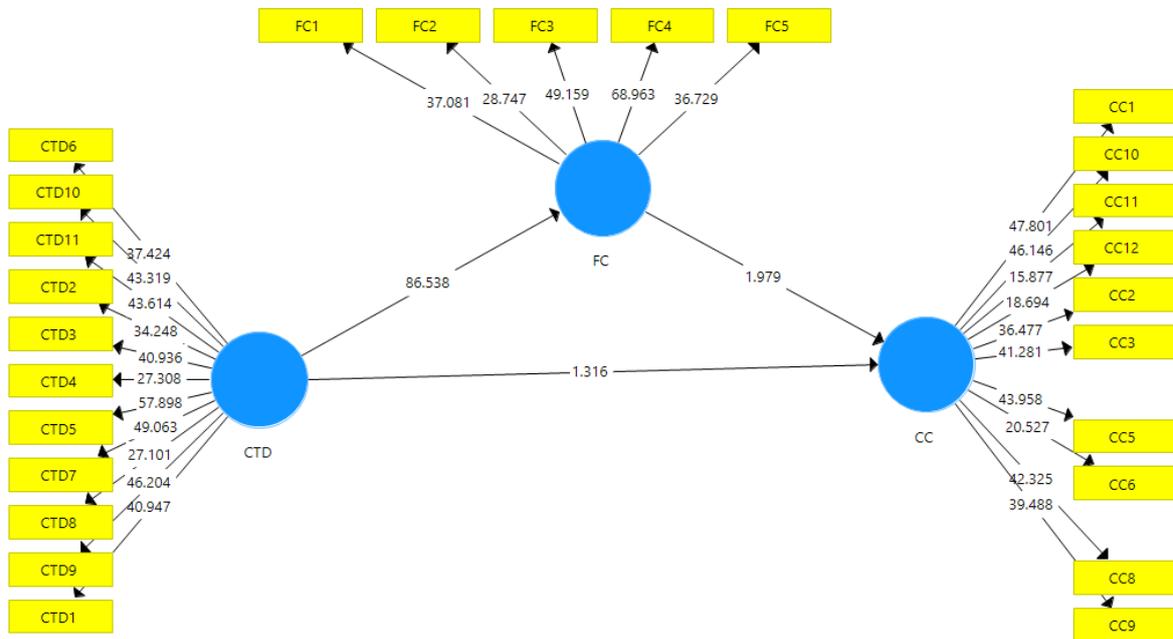


Figure 2: Structural Model

The direct relationship between CTD, CC, FC are explained in Table 4 below. Except the CTD-CC all path has appeared with the significant coefficient. The CTD and FC appears as significant determinants of the CTD.

Table 4: Direct Relationship

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)	P Values
CTD -> CC	0.228	0.239	0.173	1.316	0.094
CTD -> FC	0.939	0.939	0.011	86.538	0.000
FC -> CC	0.355	0.347	0.179	1.979	0.024

One of the objectives of the current study was to examine the mediating role of FC in the relationship between CTD and CC. The results of the mediation analysis are shown in Table 5 below. The findings revealed the fact that the FC significantly mediates the relationship between the CTD and CC.

Table 5: Mediation

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(O/STDEV)	P Values
CTD -> FC -> CC	0.333	0.326	0.168	1.982	0.024

The coefficient of the determination, which is termed as the R-square is examined and the values are above the threshold level, see Table 6 below.

Table 6: R-square

	R Square
CC	0.330
FC	0.881

The predictive relevance is measured using blindfolding procedure and results confirm the presence of predictive relevance, see Table 7 below.

Table 7: Q-square

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
CC	2,170.000	1,689.015	0.222
CTD	2,387.000	2,387.000	
FC	1,085.000	385.329	0.645

Conclusion

Cultural Consumption is considered to be the important factor to support marketing and increase competitive ability with producers and entrepreneurs. Currently, to understand consumer needs is essential to ensure customer satisfaction with products and services. Meanwhile, producers or entrepreneurs have to support Cultural Consumption. We can see that, a country which has rich resources, both as touchable and non-touchable, can be at an advantage. The food tourism industry is related to various fields such as the literary, historical, social, medical, nutritional and agricultural etc. Further, food is considered a product and a service that satisfies consumer requirements. If the relationship between food and tourism was created using a Consumer Culture Model such as Meaning Creation and or Difference Creation, the consideration of consumer identified need could lead to income making and economic sustainability. However, Consumer Culture with Gastronomy Tourism cannot reach the depth of food producers and food entrepreneurs. Thus, it is necessary that Producers, Entrepreneurs and the Community work together as stakeholders in the tourism industry to create the real character of local food so that consumers can mentally accept the allure of the food character.



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