

## Research note

# Understanding international tourists' attitudes towards street food in Phuket, Thailand



Luis Carlos Torres Chavarria <sup>a,\*</sup>, Panuwat Phakdee-auksorn <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Student for MBA Program at Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University-Phuket, Phuket 83120, Thailand

<sup>b</sup> Lecturer at Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism, Prince of Songkla University-Phuket, Phuket 83120, Thailand

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 28 April 2016

Received in revised form 24 November 2016

Accepted 25 November 2016

Available online xxxx

## Keywords:

Attitude  
Behavioral intentions  
Phuket  
Street food  
Thailand  
Tourism

## ABSTRACT

Street food is present throughout South East Asia, and represents a major tourist attraction in Thailand. Phuket, like other destinations, offers an array of different specialties from which to choose. This could be exploited as a visitor attraction, but certain factors need to be improved for the street food to be more attractive to international tourists visiting the island. The aim of this research was to describe the general attitude of international tourists towards street food in Phuket, as well as to identify what dimensions are most important in predicting their behavioral intentions. This study surveyed 294 international tourists, and using a multiple regression model, identified that out of hygiene, affection, food quality, service quality, satisfaction and value; affection is the most important predictor of tourist's behavioral intentions towards street food in Phuket.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important industries in Thailand. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand (2015), Thailand received nearly 25 million tourists in 2014, and earned >1.20 trillion THB in direct revenue, which is equivalent to >11% of Thailand's total gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand is 11th in the most visited countries ranking of the world, and 6th in the countries with most revenue from tourism receipts (UNWTO, n.d.). Thai food plays an important part in the image of Thailand as a destination. Campaigns such as "Amazing Thai food" or the "Thai street food festival in 2014" showcase authentic local dishes that have helped building a better reputation for the gastronomical offer throughout the kingdom (TAT, n.d.). Studies have concluded that food is one of the most important factors for tourists in deciding whether they want to visit or revisit a particular destination (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2013; Quan & Wang, 2004), and it constitutes an important motivator for tourists to visit Thailand (Kururatchaikul, 2014; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014).

In Thailand, the street food industry plays a very important role. There are approximately 90,000 street food outlets across the country (Street Stalls/Kiosks in Thailand, n.d.). In 2012, it was reported that annual earnings from the sale of street food amounted to nearly 250 billion THB. In the same year, street vending was responsible for the highest per capita spending in the food industry in Thailand with a total of six

billion transactions, and an average outlay of approximately 34 THB per transaction. In addition, according to a statistical report by Jalis, Che, and Markwell (2014), it is expected that the street food industry in Thailand will continue to expand with a compound annual growth rate of 0.3% in coming years (Nirathron, 2006).

Phuket is the second most important tourist destination in Thailand after Bangkok, almost one third of all Thailand's visitors arrive through Phuket. According to TAT statistics, in 2013, Phuket received 8,395,921 international tourists who produced revenue of >233 billion THB. These figures are predicted to increase in the coming years. Recently, Phuket local government have joined the UNESCO's creative cities network, and Phuket has been granted with the title of "creative city of gastronomy". Phuket is the only city in South-East Asia to have such title, this could serve as a competitive advantage for Phuket, to distinct their destination from other cities in the region that also use local gastronomy as a selling point (Phuket, n.d.). However, some studies have found that not all tourists are interested in street food in Thailand, due to the low standards of food sanitation or because they simply find it unappealing (Sirigunna, 2015; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014; Lertputtarak, 2012; Henderson, Yun, Poon, & Biwei, 2012; Howard, 2009).

Although a number of studies have examined the experience of tourists with food in Thailand (Choovanichchannon, 2015; Sirigunna, 2015; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014, 2013; Lertputtarak, 2012; Pullphothong & Sopha, 2012), little attention has been paid to explore the attitude of tourists towards local street food. As such, this is the first study that attempts to gain an understanding on international tourists' attitudes towards street food in Phuket, Thailand. All information

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [luis.toch@gmail.com](mailto:luis.toch@gmail.com) (L.C. Torres Chavarria).

obtained in this research was gathered by using a model based on previous studies, which explored and explained food related behaviors by using the theory of planned behavior (see Fig. 1).

This study is one of the first attempts to apply this model to street food. Information was gathered by applying a self-administered survey to international tourists visiting Phuket, it had three major purposes: first, to explore the characteristics of international tourists visiting Phuket; second, to investigate their attitude towards street food in Phuket. And third, to assess how their attitudes towards street food affect their behavioral intentions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Street food

Street food is an essential industry in many countries, it provides families that otherwise would not have any source of income with a significant revenue, with no tax payment and a very low capital investment is an option worth considering for a great number of vendors. In Southeast Asia street food or hawking is considered an important part of the social, cultural and economic organization (Toh & Birchenough, 2000). In countries like Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia street food is even considered as a touristic resource and authorities encourage the diversity of offers because it brings color and life to the destination landscape (Henderson et al., 2012; Jalis et al., 2014; Ramli et al., 2016; Muhammad, Zahari, Shariff, & Abdullah, 2016).

As famous chef Thompson and Carter (2009) said in Thailand “It’s all about the food” (page 27), a walk around the streets of big cities such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya or Phuket can confirm this statement. The streets are full with food of all kinds, from market stalls and ambulant vendors, to Michelin starred restaurants and five-star hotels, food plays a central role in Thai society. For example, sharing food precedes most of the business dealings, and treating or inviting friends and family to dine out is signal of social accomplishment (Walker & Yasmeen, 1996). This trend goes from locals to visitors, as several studies have found, food is one of the most important motivators for tourists to visit Thailand (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014; Kururatchaikul, 2014; Lertputtarak, 2012), this does not come as a surprise, Thai food is so unique, that is considered one of the best cuisines of the world (CNN, 2015).

The street food sector offers ready-to-eat food and beverages prepared partially or entirely in public areas. As such, it relies in fresh locally sourced ingredients that allow little or no storage time. In this way, local street food helps the consumers understanding the relationship between food and territory, and shortens the distance between producers and final consumers (Sengel et al., 2015). Furthermore, street food represents a way of interacting with the host culture, it offers the opportunity to understand the local way of life, and a richer and more meaningful holiday experience. Eating out on the street is more convenient than going to a restaurant. Usually, food is cheaper and better than more formalized food offers. Moreover, street food is available at any time of the day and there is a wide range of variety to select from.

Normally, street food is made with ingredients sourced from local markets and the recipes vary from vendor to vendor. Because of this, tourists who are familiar with street food from Kuala Lumpur or Bangkok could be less familiar with street food from Penang or Phuket. Differences in the local culture and geography across South-East Asia make street food unique in every region. These differences could therefore be a motivation for tourists that are familiar with Thai street food to revisit Thailand, and experience food of different regions (Kururatchaikul, 2014; Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

Unfortunately, in Thailand the economic benefits of street food are suppressed by health and social problems. Previous studies have identified several problems related to this industry such as limited knowledge of the vendors about food hygiene, food-handling standards, and personal hygiene. Additional challenges include bad design of food stalls and carts, poor management, inappropriate location of hawkers, lack of law enforcement, and the tendency to illegality and bribery. These problems cannot be solved easily, but a possible solution could involve changing the status of informality of street food vendors. In countries such as Malaysia or Singapore street food has evolved into a micro industry in which the government sets standards and provides education for vendors to regulate the food handling process. These measures have proved to be effective in improving the quality of the offered food and the image tourists have towards those countries’ street food (Henderson et al., 2012; Proietti, Frazzoli, & Mantovani, 2014; Toh & Birchenough, 2000).

### 2.2. Food and tourism

Food has a role in the social identity of every individual; thus, everyone selects food influenced by different factors such as culture or religion, socio-demographic factors, personal motivation, previous food experience, food related personality traits and other psychological factors (Cruwys, Bevelander, & Hermans, 2015; Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2013). However, when individuals go abroad they are outside of their routine, they no longer can procure their normal diet, and are forced to participate in the local culinary supply (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012).

Previous studies have shown that gender is an important factor in tourists’ food consumption, Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) suggested that “women were especially interested in tasting local food and excited about local food on their holidays” (Page 429). Nonetheless, studies in other disciplines have found that men show risk taking behavior more often than women (Stark & Zawojka, 2015; Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2013; Jianakoplos & Bernasek, 1998), and the consumption of local food could be described as an adventurous risk taking behavior, particularly if the destination is located in an unfamiliar country (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). It could be expected then, to find a significant difference in the attitude of male and female international tourists towards street food in Phuket. Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2012) suggested that age is an important factor in food consumption, and that older people have different food preferences due to loss of sensorial capacities and health concerns, it would be likely then, that tourists of different age groups have a different attitude towards street food in Phuket.

Cohen and Avieli (2004) suggested that people from different regions experience cuisines in different ways. People from western countries have been exposed to cuisines from other parts of the world due to the effect of immigration, while Asian cuisines have not been subject to the same degree of influence by outsiders. Mak, Lumbers, Eves et al. (2012) pointed out that “past experience can significantly affect food consumption behavior” (Page 929) and that previous exposure to a kind of food could create food memories and thereby improve the consumer’s attitude towards it. In this sense, there could be a significant difference in the attitude towards street food in Phuket between tourists who have visited Phuket in the past and those who have not. Other studies have suggested that factors like familiarity and exposure effect can have an influence in the attitude of consumers towards food related behaviors (Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kim et al., 2009).

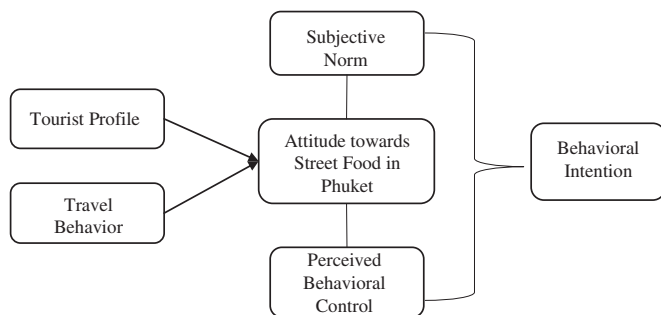


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of this research adapted from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5108808>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5108808>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)