

The Influence of Gastronomic Knowledge and Culinary Heritage on Gastronomic Involvement Thai tourism in Thailand

Butsakorn Julbanyong¹ and Theerakorn Udomratanamanee²

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Abstract

Gastronomic tourism is a key segment of cultural tourism, offering immersive experiences through food. This study examines how gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage influence gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists. Gastronomic knowledge is conceptualized as expertise and insight, while culinary heritage is explored through cultural and experiential dimensions. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected via a structured questionnaire from 437 Thai gastronomic tourists across four major culinary destinations. Regression analysis tested the hypothesized relationships. Results show that both gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage significantly and positively affect gastronomic involvement, with culinary heritage having a stronger impact. The model explained 55% of the variance in gastronomic involvement, highlighting strong predictive power. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural and cognitive factors in shaping tourist engagement. Practical implications suggest promoting traditional food practices and enhancing food education. Limitations include the cross-sectional design and focus on Thai tourists; future studies should adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches. New Knowledge from Research This study demonstrates that both gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage significantly drive gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists, with culinary heritage exerting a stronger influence. The findings highlight that meaningful food tourism engagement arises from the integration of cognitive understanding and cultural identity, Suggestions for Future Research Implications Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to explore how gastronomic knowledge, heritage appreciation, and involvement develop over time. Expanding the model to include variables such as personality, lifestyle, cultural openness, or destination image could enhance its explanatory power. Comparative studies across tourist segments or cultures

^{1,2,3}คณะบริหารธุรกิจ, มหาวิทยาลัยหอการค้าไทย

Business School, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce

Email: butsakornju@gmail.com



would reveal how context influences perceptions of culinary heritage. Additionally, qualitative or mixed-method approaches like interviews or ethnographic studies can uncover deeper insights into tourists' emotional and cognitive food engagement. Finally, research should examine the role of digital platforms in shaping gastronomic knowledge, motivation, and involvement in food tourism.

Keywords: Gastronomic knowledge, culinary heritage, gastronomic involvement, gastronomic tourism

Introduction

Over the past, gastronomic tourism has emerged as a vital part of cultural tourism, with food experiences becoming a key motivation for many travelers (Pencarelli, T. 2020; Sio K. P., et al. 2024). Modern tourists seek more than just meals they desire deeper cultural connections through culinary activities such as learning food traditions, preparation methods, and the stories behind regional dishes. This shift emphasizes the need to understand factors influencing gastronomic involvement, defined as tourists' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in food-related experiences.

Two key drivers of gastronomic involvement are gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage. Gastronomic knowledge involves an individual's understanding of ingredients, cooking techniques, and food cultures, which enhances participation in food-related activities (Richards, G. 2021). Culinary heritage refers to the cultural and historical significance of traditional food practices, shaping regional identities and offering authentic, immersive experiences (Pavlidis G., & Markantonatou, S. 2020).

In Thailand, renowned for its rich culinary traditions, these variables are especially relevant. Despite rising interest in food tourism, limited research has explored how gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage jointly influence tourist engagement in the Thai context. This study addresses that gap, offering insights for enhancing Thailand's position as a leading gastronomic destination through cultural and culinary strategies.

Research Objective

1. Investigate the effect of gastronomic knowledge on gastronomic involvement among tourists visiting Thailand.



2. Examine the influence of culinary heritage on gastronomic involvement as perceived and experienced by tourists.

Scop of Research

Scop of content

This research focuses on examining the influence of gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage on gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists. The study limits its scope to two independent variables gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage and one dependent variable gastronomic involvement. The context is confined to Thailand's gastronomic tourism, emphasizing cultural and experiential aspects of food-related travel. The research does not cover other potential factors such as personality, lifestyle, or destination image, nor does it include international tourists.

Scop of populations and Sampling

The population of this study consists of Thai tourists who engage in food-related travel. The sample is limited to 400 respondents, selected through convenience sampling from four major gastronomic destinations in Thailand: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya. These locations were chosen for their culinary diversity and popularity among domestic travelers. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and a pilot test with 30 participants was conducted to ensure reliability and clarity of the instrument.

Literature Review and concepts

Tourism in Thailand and Food

Tourism in Thailand is one of the country's most vital economic sectors, with food playing a central role in shaping visitor experiences. Thailand has consistently ranked among the world's top gastronomic destinations, with its cuisine recognized by UNESCO as part of the nation's intangible cultural heritage. The country's unique blend of flavors balancing sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and spicy creates a culinary identity that attracts millions of international and domestic tourists each year (Piboonrungraj P., & Disney, S. M. 2020).

Thai food tourism extends beyond consumption to include experiential activities such as cooking classes, farm-to-table experiences, temple food offerings, and culinary festivals. These activities not only highlight regional diversity but also reflect Thailand's integration of cultural heritage and hospitality into tourism (Cohen E., & Avieli, N. 2004).



Street food, in particular, has become an iconic feature of Thai tourism, with Bangkok repeatedly recognized as a global street food capital, offering affordable, authentic, and culturally rich experiences (Henderson, J.C. 2019).

Thus, Thai foods and culinary traditions are not just part of daily life but serve as a strategic resource for tourism development. By linking gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage with tourist engagement, Thai gastronomy contributes to sustainable cultural tourism, enhances destination branding, and fosters meaningful tourist involvement.

Gastronomic knowledge

Gastronomic knowledge involves the understanding and appreciation of food, cooking practices, and their cultural and historical contexts (Kovalenko A., et al. 2023; Richards, G. 2021). It includes knowledge of ingredients, techniques, regional cuisines, and food traditions, gained through formal education or informal experiences like travel and cooking (Richards, G. 2011; Gillespie C., & Cousins, J. 2012). Such knowledge enhances enjoyment, promotes sustainability, and aids in preserving culinary heritage (Richards, G. 2021; Rinaldi, C.2017).

Expertise refers to specialized culinary knowledge developed through training, practice, and continuous learning (Kiatkawsin K., & Han, H, 2019; Santich, 2004). It enables professionals to innovate, evaluate food, and safeguard traditions (Seyitoğlu F., & Ivanov, S., 2020; Scarpato, R. 2003).

Insight is an intuitive grasp of culinary trends and cultural meanings, helping individuals anticipate change, interpret food's social roles, and connect it to broader narratives (Seyitoğlu F., & Ivanov, S. 2020; Scarpato, R. 2003). It is shaped by diverse experiences and supports both innovation and cultural preservation (Richards, G. 2003; Santich, 2004).

Culinary heritage

Culinary heritage refers to traditional food practices, ingredients, and cooking methods passed down through generations, reflecting a community's identity and cultural values (Gyimóthy S., & Mykletun, R., 2009; Counihan C., & Van Esterik, P. 2013). It includes rituals, customs, and narratives tied to food, serving as a key element of cultural preservation (Montanari, M.2006; Alonso E. B., et.al. (2018). As a form of cultural representation, cuisine expresses historical and social identities through recipes, local ingredients, and food customs



(Stalmirska, A. M. 2023; Yang, L. 2011). Food festivals and guided tours help showcase this heritage, promote authenticity, and facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer (Timothy D. J., & Ron, A. S. 2013; Sims, R.2009; Almansouri M. et al. 2022).

Culinary heritage also fosters experiential engagement through cooking classes, rituals, and communal meals (Partarakis, N., et al. 2021; Reicks, M., et al. 2022) enabling tourists to connect with local values and food systems, while encouraging appreciation and sustainable tourism (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024; Di Giovine. M. A., & Brulotte, R. L. 2016; Filipiak-Florkiewicz, A., et al. 2022)

Gastronomic involvement

Gastronomic involvement refers to the degree of interest, emotional engagement, and behavioral participation individuals have with food and culinary activities (Bell R., & Marshall, D. W. 2003). It includes actions such as cooking, dining out, exploring cuisines, and learning about food, reflecting how individuals integrate gastronomy into their lifestyle.

Personal involvement highlights the emotional and psychological connection to food, often expressed through cooking, dining, and continuous learning. Those highly involved see food as a source of pleasure, identity, and social connection (Bell R., & Marshall, D. W. 2003).

Product involvement focuses on the attention given to food quality, origin, health, and sustainability. Consumers with high product involvement are selective about ingredients, often preferring organic, local, or ethically sourced items, and seek rich sensory and nutritional experiences (Laurent G., & Kapferer, J. N. 1985; Kim, Y. G., et al. 2009) Understanding gastronomic involvement helps tourism professionals tailor experiences to match the values and preferences of food-motivated travelers.

Theoretical Foundation: The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

This study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen, I. (1991), a widely used framework for understanding human behavior, especially in tourism and consumer contexts. TPB posits that behavior is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which influence behavioral intentions and actions. In gastronomic tourism, gastronomic knowledge contributes to positive attitudes toward food-related experiences, encouraging participation in cooking classes and traditional cuisine exploration. Culinary heritage aligns with subjective norms, reflecting cultural traditions and social values that guide tourists seeking authentic, culturally rich experiences. Gastronomic involvement, defined as emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in food activities, represents the behavioral



intention or actual behavior TPB aims to predict. By integrating internal cognitive elements (knowledge) and external cultural influences (heritage), TPB offers a coherent explanation of tourists' meaningful engagement with local food, highlighting the interplay between personal disposition and sociocultural context (Ajzen, I. 1991)

Hypothesis development

Gastronomic knowledge, encompassing both expertise and insight, plays a critical role in enhancing individuals' engagement with food-related activities. Studies have shown that those with greater culinary knowledge tend to exhibit higher levels of both personal and product involvement (Bell R., & Marshall, D. W. 2003). This knowledge enables individuals to better appreciate ingredients, cooking techniques, and cultural contexts, deepening their culinary experiences. According to Laurent G., & Kapferer, J. N. (1985) knowledgeable individuals are more likely to invest time in sourcing quality ingredients and refining their cooking skills, reflecting heightened product involvement. Similarly, their personal involvement increases as they pursue culinary hobbies, attend food events, and continuously expand their gastronomic repertoire. This cycle of knowledge and practice fosters sustained engagement in gastronomy.

Hypothesis 1: Gastronomic knowledge positively influences gastronomic involvement.

Culinary heritage, defined by traditional recipes, ingredients, and food practices passed through generations, plays a key role in shaping gastronomic motivation (Bessière, J.1998). It reflects the cultural identity and history of a region, making it an important driver for individuals seeking authentic and meaningful culinary experiences. Fields, K. (2003) notes that tourists are often motivated by the desire to explore traditional cuisines as a gateway to understanding a destination's culture. This motivation is further reinforced by the emotional and sensory appeal embedded in culinary traditions. According to Timothy D. J., & Ron, A. S. (2013), the uniqueness of local food, its preparation methods, and the cultural narratives behind it deepen tourists' interest in gastronomy and inspire active engagement in culinary activities.



Hypothesis 2: Culinary heritage positively influences gastronomic motivation.

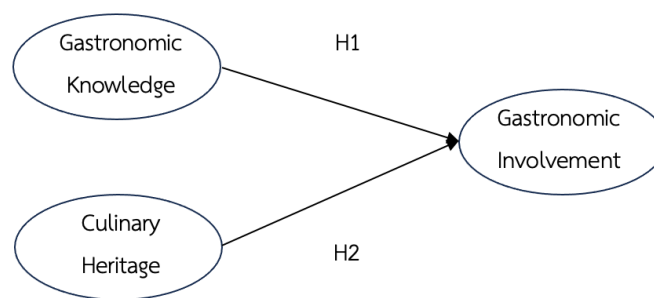


Figure 1 A conceptual model

H1: Gastronomic knowledge positively influences gastronomic involvement.

H2: Culinary heritage positively influences gastronomic involvement.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design grounded in the positivist paradigm, aiming to examine the relationships between gastronomic knowledge, culinary heritage, and gastronomic involvement among gastronomic tourists in Thailand (Creswell, , J.W. 2014; Kareem S. A., & Venugopal, P. 2023).

Sampling and Data Collection

The research target was Thai tourists who engage in food-related travel. Using convenience sampling, data were collected from 400 participants. Participants were recruited from four major gastronomic destinations in Thailand: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Pattaya, chosen for their culinary diversity and tourist appeal. To ensure data reliability and clarity, a pilot test was conducted with 30 participants who matched the study's target group. Feedback from the pilot informed adjustments to the survey instrument (Van Teijlingen, E., & Hundley 2001) The measurement model from the pilot test, which involved 30 participants, showed high reliability across most variables. Gastronomic knowledge scored 0.914, culinary heritage had a reliability score of 0.943. Finally, gastronomic involvement achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.946, indicating high reliability. To examine the proposed relationships, the study applies regression analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

Data Analysis



This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The data provide insight into participants' gender, age group, preferred travel companions, gastronomic preferences, and familiarity with gastronomic tourism. It also highlights who typically makes dining decisions and pays for dining expenses. These profiles help contextualize the analysis of the relationships between gastronomic knowledge, culinary heritage, and gastronomic involvement.

Table 1: Demographic

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	149	34.1
Female	282	64.5
Others	6	1.4
Age		
21-30	121	27.6
31-40	177	40.5
41-50	113	25.9
51 – 60	23	5.3
61 or above	3	0.7
Favorite Travel Companion		
Business partner	7	1.7
Husband/Wife	59	13.5
Family	230	52.6
Friends	129	29.5
Others	12	2.7
Gastronomic Preferences		
Fine dining	29	6.6
Casual dining	217	49.7
Local food	78	17.8
Street food	61	14
Café/Bistro	48	11
Others	4	0.9
Familiarity with Gastronomic Tourism		
Familiar with gastronomic tourism	76	17.4
Partially aware of gastronomic tourism	274	62.7
Not familiar with gastronomic tourism	87	19.9



The demographic results provide key insights into the profile of the respondents. The majority of participants were female (64.5%), followed by males (34.1%), with a small number identifying as others (1.4%). In terms of age, most respondents fell within the 31–40 age group (40.5%), followed by the 21–30 group (27.6%) and the 41–50 group (25.9%), indicating a strong representation of young to middle-aged adults. In terms of favorite travel companions, over half of the respondents (52.6%) preferred to travel with family, followed by friends (29.5%) and spouses (13.5%). This highlights the significance of social and familial relationships in travel behavior. In terms of gastronomic preferences, nearly half of the participants (49.7%) favored casual dining, making it the most popular choice. This was followed by a preference for local food (17.8%) and street food (14%), suggesting an interest in accessible and culturally immersive dining experiences. Regarding familiarity with gastronomic tourism, the largest group (62.7%) reported being partially aware of the concept, while 19.9% were not familiar at all, and only 17.4% considered themselves familiar. This indicates an opportunity for further education and promotion in this area.

Quantitative Analysis

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.741	0.55	0.547	0.47717

The regression analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between the independent variables gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage and the dependent variable, gastronomic involvement. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.741, indicating a high level of correlation between the predictors and the outcome variable. The model's R Square value of 0.550 suggests that approximately 55% of the variance in gastronomic involvement can be explained by the combined influence of gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage. The adjusted R Square, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, is 0.547, confirming the model's robustness. Additionally, the standard error of the estimate is 0.47717, indicating a reasonable level of accuracy in the model's predictions.



These results collectively demonstrate that the model offers a substantial and reliable explanation of the factors influencing gastronomic involvement.

Table 3: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	120.546	2	60.273	264.71	<0.001
Residual	98.82	434	0.228		
Total	219.366	436			

The ANOVA results indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant. The F-value is 264.71, with a significance level (p-value) of less than 0.001, confirming that the model as a whole reliably predicts gastronomic involvement. The regression sum of squares is 120.546, which reflects the variation explained by the two predictors gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage. In contrast, the residual sum of squares is 98.82, representing the unexplained variation. With a total sum of squares of 219.366, the model accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in the dependent variable.

The degrees of freedom (df) are 2 for the regression (number of predictors) and 434 for the residual (sample size minus predictors minus 1), totaling 436. The mean square for the regression is 60.273, significantly higher than the residual mean square of 0.228, which further confirms the model's strength.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.587	0.152		3.855	<0.001
Gastronomic Knowledge	0.381	0.035	0.385	10.872	<0.001
Culinary Heritage	0.502	0.036	0.492	13.89	<0.001

Constant (Intercept): The unstandardized coefficient for the constant is 0.587 with a t-value of 3.855 and a p-value < 0.001. This suggests that when both gastronomic knowledge



and culinary heritage are held at zero, the baseline level of gastronomic involvement is 0.587. Although the constant is not typically the focus in hypothesis testing, its statistical significance indicates that other unexplained factors may still contribute to a baseline level of involvement.

H1: Gastronomic knowledge positively influences gastronomic involvement.

The standardized beta coefficient for gastronomic knowledge is 0.385, with a t-value of 10.872 and a p-value < 0.001. This indicates a positive and statistically significant effect, confirming that individuals with greater gastronomic knowledge tend to show higher levels of involvement in food-related activities. Therefore, H1 is supported.

H2: Culinary heritage positively influences gastronomic involvement.

The standardized beta coefficient for culinary heritage is 0.492, with a t-value of 13.89 and a p-value < 0.001, also indicating a positive and statistically significant effect. This suggests that appreciation and connection to culinary heritage strongly encourage individuals' involvement in gastronomy. Hence, H2 is also supported.

Overall, the model shows that both predictors significantly contribute to gastronomic involvement, with culinary heritage having a greater influence than gastronomic knowledge.

Research Results

The study reveals significant relationships between gastronomic knowledge, culinary heritage, and gastronomic involvement. The regression model shows a strong overall fit, with a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.741 and an R^2 of 0.550, indicating that 55% of the variance in gastronomic involvement is explained by the two predictors. The adjusted R^2 of 0.547 and standard error of 0.47717 confirm the model's predictive accuracy. ANOVA results ($F = 264.71$, $p < 0.001$) indicate that the model is statistically significant. The constant value (0.587, $p < 0.001$) suggests a baseline level of involvement. Gastronomic knowledge has a standardized beta of 0.385 ($t = 10.872$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1 by confirming its positive influence. Culinary heritage has a stronger beta of 0.492 ($t = 13.89$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2 and highlighting its greater impact. Overall, culinary heritage is the more dominant predictor of gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists.

Summarize Discussion and Suggestions

Summarize



Results show that both gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage significantly and positively affect gastronomic involvement, with culinary heritage having a stronger impact. The model explained 55% of the variance in gastronomic involvement, highlighting strong predictive power. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural and cognitive factors in shaping tourist engagement. Practical implications suggest promoting traditional food practices and enhancing food education. Limitations include the cross-sectional design and focus on Thai tourists; future studies should adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches.

Conclusion. This study examined how gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage influence gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists. Regression analysis revealed that both factors significantly and positively affect involvement, with culinary heritage being the stronger predictor. These findings emphasize the role of cognitive and cultural elements in shaping tourist behavior. Practically, promoting Thai culinary heritage and enhancing food education through storytelling and traditional practices can deepen engagement. However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and focus on Thai tourists. Future research should consider additional factors and longitudinal approaches. Overall, preserving culinary traditions is key to fostering meaningful gastronomic tourism experiences.

Discussion

This study examined how gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage influence gastronomic involvement among tourists in the Thai context, aiming to identify key drivers of deeper engagement in food-related travel. The results support both hypotheses, confirming that knowledge and heritage significantly and positively affect involvement. In Thailand, gastronomic knowledge enhances tourists' appreciation of culinary practices, encouraging participation in authentic activities such as regional tastings of Isaan cuisine, cooking classes featuring dishes like Pad Thai and Tom Yum Goong, and interactions with local producers at floating or night markets (Richards, G. 2021; R., & Marshall, D. W. 2003). More notably, Thai culinary heritage emerged as the stronger predictor, underscoring the importance of cultural identity, authenticity, and storytelling embedded in Thai food traditions (Bessière, J. 1998; Timothy D. J., & Ron, A. S. 2013). The model explains 55% of the variance in gastronomic involvement, highlighting the combined influence of cognitive and cultural-emotional factors. These findings align with the growing demand for meaningful, immersive travel experiences in Thailand, where cuisine is a central part of national branding and destination appeal.



Ultimately, the study confirms that Thai food tourism involves more than consumption, it operates as a powerful medium of cultural connection and identity, reinforcing Thailand's position as a leading gastronomic destination.

Suggestions Implications for Practice

This study offers key practical implications for stakeholders in gastronomic tourism. First, the significant role of gastronomic knowledge suggests that destinations should embed educational elements into their offerings, such as cooking classes, food literacy workshops, farm visits, or chef-led tours. These experiences can enhance tourists' understanding and deepen engagement. Second, the stronger influence of culinary heritage highlights the importance of preserving and showcasing traditional food practices. Collaborations between tourism developers and local communities can promote regional dishes, customs, and heritage cooking methods, enriched through storytelling and intergenerational participation. Third, destination marketing organizations should position gastronomy as a cultural and immersive experience by linking cuisine to regional identity and traditions. Finally, policymakers should support local food producers and culinary professionals through training and capacity building, enabling them to share authentic knowledge with visitors. These strategies not only enhance tourist satisfaction but also promote sustainable tourism and cultural preservation through meaningful, knowledge-rich food experiences.

Limitations

This study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture behavioral changes over time or establish causality. Additionally, the use of convenience and quota sampling may affect generalizability, as the sample may not fully represent all gastronomic tourist segments, especially those visiting less prominent culinary destinations.

New Knowledge form Research

This study demonstrates that both gastronomic knowledge and culinary heritage significantly drive gastronomic involvement among Thai tourists, with culinary heritage exerting a stronger influence. The findings highlight that meaningful food tourism engagement arises from the integration of cognitive understanding and cultural identity, offering new insights into how local traditions and food education can jointly foster sustainable gastronomic tourism.



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