

Memorable Thai Food Experiences as Determinants of Tourist Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions

Article History

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Abstract

Memorable food experiences are increasingly recognised as a critical dimension of tourism, shaping visitor satisfaction and future behavioural intentions. Drawing on the experiential travel framework, this study examines how memorable Thai food experiences (MTFEs) influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions, thereby advancing understanding of food tourism and contributing to the broader experiential travel literature. Using a structured questionnaire and validated measurement scales, data were collected from 334 international tourists in Bangkok. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to assess the direct and indirect effects of four MTFE dimensions: culinary delight, culinary memory of youth, delightful culinary nostalgia, and culinary novelty. The results indicate that culinary delight significantly enhances both satisfaction and behavioural intention, while delightful culinary nostalgia influences satisfaction but not behavioural intention directly. Culinary memory of youth has a positive effect on behavioural intention but no significant impact on satisfaction, and culinary novelty demonstrates no significant effect. Satisfaction emerges as a strong predictor of behavioural intention and partially mediates the relationship between culinary delight and behavioural intention. These findings highlight the centrality of emotionally engaging culinary experiences and provide practical implications for destination marketers seeking to foster loyalty through culturally rich food tourism strategies.

Keywords: *Memorable Tourism Experience, Memorable Thai Food Experience, Satisfaction, Behavioural Intention, Emotion*

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Introduction

Thailand remains one of the world's leading tourist destinations, welcoming approximately 35.54 million international visitors in 2024 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2025b). In addition to its celebrated landscapes and cultural heritage, the country's diverse culinary sector has become an increasingly important motivator for travel. Recent statistics show that 86.33% of international tourists engage in food-related experiences, with street food (69.92%), Thai fine dining (40.55%), and local cuisine (40.30%) among the most popular choices (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2025a). As culinary tourism flourishes, its economic impact is also well documented (Choe & Kim, 2018; Mak et al., 2012). Food tourism therefore plays a critical role not only in shaping tourist behaviour but also in generating economic value.

Tourism studies demonstrate that visitors typically allocate over one-third of their total travel budget to food consumption (Correia et al., 2008; Henderson et al., 2012; Jeaheng & Han, 2020; Robinson & Getz, 2014). In 2022, tourists' food and beverage expenditures generated approximately 115,305 million baht for the Thai economy (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2024). Beyond financial outcomes, local cuisine contributes to destination image and serves as a strategic resource for differentiation in competitive markets (Hsu & Scott, 2020; Lai et al., 2018).

Culinary tourism research has expanded across themes to include food experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019), consumer behaviour (Hsu et al., 2018), risk perceptions (Choi et al., 2013), and market segmentation (Deesilatham, 2025; Hsu et al., 2023). However, most Thai studies focus narrowly on street food contexts (Chompupor et al., 2024; Jeaheng & Han, 2020; Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee, 2022; Torres Chavarria & Phakdee-auksorn, 2017). Few empirical studies have systematically examined how memorable Thai food experiences (MTFEs) influence satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

The aim of this study is therefore to examine how different dimensions of memorable Thai food experiences influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. To achieve this, the study applies partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse both direct and indirect effects, thereby contributing to theoretical advancement and offering practical implications for food tourism development in Thailand.

Literature review

Memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) have been widely recognised as crucial in enhancing destination competitiveness (Brochado et al., 2022; Sthapit et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). These experiences play a pivotal role in shaping tourists' future travel decisions and serve as key reference

points in destination choice (Brochado et al., 2022; Mak et al., 2012; Sthapit, 2017). MTEs are consistently identified as strong predictors of behavioural intentions, particularly revisit and recommendation, confirming their relevance for both theory and practice (Adongo et al., 2015; Brochado et al., 2022; Hosany et al., 2022; Lončarić et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Sthapit et al., 2020; Tsai, 2016). However, empirical evidence on these relationships in the domains of food, culinary, and gastronomy tourism remains limited.

The concept of gastronomic tourism has significantly evolved. It is often used interchangeably with terms such as culinary tourism, food tourism, wine tourism, and gourmet tourism, underscoring the sector's increasing focus on food-centred experiences (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). Food tourism is generally defined as travel motivated by food-related activities and emphasises cultural engagement and authentic encounters with destinations through their cuisine (Ellis et al., 2018). It integrates elements of authenticity, cultural heritage, and motivation, offering travellers distinctive eating and drinking experiences (Ellis et al., 2018; García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). More recently, gastronomic tourism has evolved beyond traditional food tourism approaches by placing greater emphasis on cultural identity, authenticity, and sustainability (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024; Liang et al., 2024). Clarifying these distinctions is essential because different types of food activities, from street food consumption to fine dining, may produce distinct emotional responses and levels of memorability. However, few studies have investigated how such activities translate into memorable food experiences and, in turn, shape satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

Recent research has explored memorable food experiences through qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory, interviews, and open-ended surveys, focusing on emotional and psychological dimensions (Adongo et al., 2015; Akhoondnejad, 2024; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Huang et al., 2019; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018; Tsai, 2016; Williams et al., 2019). These studies have provided valuable insights but often rely on small, site-specific samples, limiting generalisability. For instance, Goolaup and Mossberg (2017) examined a seasonal oyster bar, and Sthapit (2017) focused solely on visitors to Rovaniemi. In contrast, Stone et al. (2018) employed a broader cross-cultural design identifying physical, social, and psychological elements. Nonetheless, many of these works continue to face limitations such as recall bias and temporal distance (Williams et al., 2019).

Expanding this stream, more recent research in food tourism has emphasised segmentation based on motivations, demographics, and involvement (Hsu et al., 2023). Segmentation dimensions have included motivation (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016), service attributes (Ko et al., 2018), satisfaction (Martín et al., 2020), food involvement (Levitt et al., 2019; Stone & Castillo-Ortiz, 2025) and experiential value (Hsu et al., 2023). As scholars increasingly segment tourists based on

experiential preferences, there has been growing interest in understanding the experiential attributes that make food encounters memorable. Building on these developments in MTE, gastronomic tourism, and segmentation research, an emerging body of work has begun to conceptualise memorable food experiences (MFEs) as the food-specific extension of MTE theory.

Early studies approached MFEs qualitatively, identifying emotional, sensory, cultural, and social triggers (Adongo et al., 2015; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Stone et al., 2018). However, these studies did not operationalise food-related memorable experience constructs in a way that could be empirically tested using larger, more diverse tourist samples. Deesilatham (2025), building on Stone et al. (2018), applied memorable food experience constructs to segment international tourists and demonstrated the applicability of the MFE framework in Thai tourism settings. In the Thai context, Deesilatham (2025) further advanced this line of inquiry by developing four culturally grounded dimensions of Memorable Thai Food Experiences (MTFE)—culinary delight, culinary memory of youth, delightful culinary nostalgia, and culinary novelty—which capture the emotional, sensory, and autobiographical elements of Thai gastronomy. These four MTFE dimensions map directly onto established MTE constructs such as hedonism (culinary delight), meaningfulness and autobiographical memory (culinary memory of youth; delightful culinary nostalgia), and novelty and cultural engagement (culinary novelty) (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Gohary et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

Although Deesilatham (2025) demonstrated the usefulness of these four MTFE dimensions for segmenting international tourists, prior studies have not empirically examined how these dimensions influence satisfaction and behavioural intention. This gap is important because both MTE and gastronomic tourism literature emphasise emotional engagement, cultural authenticity, and sensory pleasure as core drivers of post-consumption behaviour. Accordingly, the present study extends previous research by validating the MTFE measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing its structural relationships with satisfaction and behavioural intention using PLS-SEM.

Research has revealed various MTE components that affect tourist satisfaction. Chen and Chen (2010), for example, found involvement, peace of mind, and education to be key predictors in heritage tourism. However, findings vary across contexts. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) reported that local culture, involvement, and knowledge were significant, whereas Gohary et al. (2020) emphasised hedonism, novelty, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. Oh et al. (2007) confirmed the positive effect of MTEs on satisfaction, although their second-order model exhibited

a poor fit. More recent studies (Keskin et al., 2024; Kim, 2018) reinforced this positive association. Extending these insights to food tourism, the present study hypothesises that:

H₁: Culinary delight has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction.

H₂: Culinary memory of youth has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction.

H₃: Delightful culinary nostalgia has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction.

H₄: Culinary novelty has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction.

In addition to satisfaction, MTEs strongly predict behavioural intentions, including revisit and word of mouth (WOM) behaviour (Adongo et al., 2015; Kim, 2018; Kim et al., 2010; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Kim and Ritchie (2014) identified five key components of MTEs, hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, and involvement, that significantly influence behavioural intentions such as revisiting and recommendation. Kim (2018) also confirmed direct effects of MTEs on revisit and WOM intentions. However, the evidence is far from consistent. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) reported significant effects for only four dimensions (hedonism, local culture, involvement, and knowledge), while Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) found novelty influenced WOM, but local culture shaped revisit intentions. Such inconsistencies highlight the contextual sensitivity of MTE dimensions and suggest that their predictive power is contingent on specific settings and tourist groups. Moreover, Triantafyllidou and Siomkos (2014) reported the reverse causal order, arguing that satisfaction with the consumption experience enhances nostalgia intensity, indicating that emotional responses may also condition behavioural outcomes. On this basis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₅: Culinary delight has a direct and positive effect on behavioural intention.

H₆: Culinary memory of youth has a direct and positive effect on behavioural intention.

H₇: Delightful culinary nostalgia has a direct and positive effect on behavioural intention.

H₈: Culinary novelty has a direct and positive effect on behavioural intention.

Satisfaction has also been consistently linked to behavioural intention (e.g., Chen & Chen, 2010; Gohary et al., 2020; Kim, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Hosany et al. (2017) demonstrated that satisfaction positively predicts recommendation intention, while Gohary et al. (2020) found its effect on revisit and WOM. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₉: Satisfaction has a direct and positive effect on behavioural intention.

Finally, several studies have suggested that tourist satisfaction may function as a mediator in the relationship between MTEs and behavioural intentions, although evidence remains mixed. Gao et al. (2020) demonstrated a full mediating effect of satisfaction between food and beverage experiences and customer loyalty, underscoring its central role in post-consumption behaviour. Similarly, Kim (2018) found that destination image and satisfaction jointly mediate this relationship.

Gohary et al. (2020) confirmed satisfaction's mediating effect for most MTE dimensions, except local culture. In contrast, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022) reported no significant mediation, suggesting contextual or cultural differences may shape these mechanisms. Given these inconsistent findings across settings and constructs, the present study formulates the following mediation hypotheses to test whether satisfaction mediates the link between memorable Thai food experiences and behavioural intentions.

H₁₀: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between culinary delight and behavioural intention.

H₁₁: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between culinary memory of youth and behavioural intention.

H₁₂: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between delightful culinary nostalgia and behavioural intention.

H₁₃: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between culinary novelty and behavioural intention.

Research methods

Sample and data collection

Convenience sampling was employed, which is common in tourism research but may limit the generalisability of findings. This sampling limitation is acknowledged in the discussion as a potential source of bias. All participants in the pilot test had previously consumed Thai cuisine, ensuring their suitability for evaluating memorable Thai food experiences. In the main survey, a screening question ("Have you previously consumed Thai food?") was used to verify eligibility, and only respondents answering "yes" were allowed to continue. The final sample consisted of 334 valid responses obtained through convenience sampling on Bangkok's Khao San Road, exceeding the minimum requirements suggested in the literature.

Following Levine, Stephan, and Szabat (2017), the required sample size for estimating a population proportion was calculated using the standard formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

where

n = required sample size

Z = Z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95.00% confidence)

p = estimated sample proportion from the pilot study

e = acceptable margin of error

A pilot test with 30 international tourists found that 24 had previously consumed Thai food, yielding an estimated proportion of $p = 24/30 = 0.80$. Using a 95.00% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$) and a 5% margin of error ($e = 0.05$), the required sample size was:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.08 \times (1 - 0.08)}{0.05^2} \approx 246$$

Thus, a minimum of 246 respondents was required to ensure statistical adequacy for estimating the proportion of international tourists who had experienced Thai food. The achieved sample of 334 respondents not only exceeds this requirement but also satisfies the 10:1 respondent-to-item guideline (Hair et al., 2019) for the 13 observed MTFE variables.

Questionnaire development

This study developed a structured questionnaire based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature to ensure conceptual clarity and content validity. The 13-item MTFE scale was adopted from Deesilatham (2025). These scales had previously been subjected to exploratory factor analysis and applied in a segmentation study. In the present study, the same dimensions are utilised for confirmatory factor analysis and structural model testing. This reuse is methodologically appropriate because exploratory factor analysis serves exploratory purposes, whereas confirmatory factor analysis and PLS-SEM are designed for validation and hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt & Liu, 2024). This progression from exploratory to confirmatory analysis enhances the MTFE construct's theoretical robustness and contributes to greater measurement precision. Tourist satisfaction with memorable Thai food experiences was measured using items from Stone et al. (2019) and Stone and Castillo-Ortiz (2025), and behavioural intention refers to intentions to revisit and recommend based on these experiences was assessed with items adapted from Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017), Di-Clemente et al. (2019), and Tsai and Wang (2017). Three academic experts reviewed the items, and the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) values exceeded 0.67. A pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to perform descriptive statistics. SmartPLS 4.0 was employed for PLS-SEM, which is appropriate for relatively small samples and complex models (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis followed the conventional two-step approach: first assessing the measurement model (CFA, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity) and

then testing the structural model. Convergent validity was confirmed when outer loadings exceeded 0.70, composite reliability exceeded 0.70, and AVE exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio, as recommended in recent guidelines (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Structural relationships were evaluated through bootstrapping with 10,000 subsamples (Becker et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2022), and mediation effects were examined following the procedure outlined by Hair et al. (2022). Finally, R^2 values were interpreted using the benchmarks suggested by Hair et al. (2022), namely 0.25 (weak), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.75 (substantial).

Results

Profile of the respondents

The sample consisted primarily of male respondents (55.00%), with the largest age group being those aged 26–35 years (40.00%), representing young to mid-career tourists. Most participants held higher-education qualifications, including undergraduate (50.80%) and postgraduate degrees (20.60%), and a majority were employed full-time (60.00%), indicating strong financial independence among travellers. European tourists formed the largest regional group (69.80%). Nearly half were first-time visitors to Thailand (45.00%), while 55.00% were repeat visitors. Participants most commonly travelled with a spouse or partner (27.60%) or with family members (17.40%), underscoring the predominance of leisure-oriented travel parties.

Measurement model

A preliminary assessment showed that most indicators exhibited acceptable skewness (± 2), with only minor deviations in four items, and kurtosis values were acceptable for 41 of the 56 items. As PLS-SEM is a variance-based and nonparametric technique, these small departures do not threaten result robustness (Hair et al., 2022). Reflective first-order constructs were assessed using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 1). Most loadings exceeded 0.70, and those slightly below 0.70 remained above the acceptable 0.60 threshold for exploratory research when CR and AVE are adequate (Hair et al., 2019; 2022). All loadings were significant ($p < 0.01$), and CR values were above 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). AVE values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT, was supported, with all HTMT values below 0.85 (Table 2).

Structural model and hypothesis testing

Structural relationships were evaluated using R^2 values, standardised path coefficients, and bootstrapped t statistics (10,000 subsamples) (Becker et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2022). The model explained 45.20% of the variance in satisfaction and 44.70% in behavioural intention, both above the recommended minimum, with acceptable model fit (SRMR = 0.076). Stone–Geisser’s Q^2 values (0.419 and 0.326) indicated adequate predictive relevance.

As summarised in Table 3, culinary delight was the strongest predictor, significantly influencing satisfaction ($\beta = 0.626$, $p < 0.001$) and behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.303$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_1 and H_5 . Culinary memory of youth was not related to satisfaction ($\beta = -0.030$), rejecting H_2 , but significantly predicted behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_6 . Delightful culinary nostalgia predicted satisfaction ($\beta = 0.109$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H_3 , but not behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.005$), rejecting H_7 . Culinary novelty was nonsignificant for both outcomes, rejecting H_4 and H_8 . Satisfaction strongly predicted behavioural intention ($\beta = 0.401$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_9 .

Mediating effect of satisfaction

Bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples and 95.00% confidence intervals tested mediation (Becker et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2022). The model explained 44.70% of behavioural intention. As shown in Table 3, H_{10} and H_{12} were supported, while H_{11} and H_{13} were rejected. Culinary delight showed strong partial mediation through satisfaction, and culinary nostalgia showed weak but significant mediation. Culinary memory of youth and culinary novelty did not yield significant mediation effects.

Table 1 Confirmatory factor analysis results

Memorable Thai food experiences	Mean	S.D.	Loadings	t-Value	CR	AVE
Culinary delight					0.88	0.540
I will remember many positive things about my Thai food experiences.	6.04	1.272	0.766	21.343		
During the trip, I enjoyed experimenting and tasting the variety of recommended Thai food.	5.81	1.282	0.723	16.268		
I enjoyed eating Thai dishes that locals eat too.	5.71	1.430	0.749	24.413		
I have wonderful memories of my Thai food experiences.	5.88	1.424	0.776	23.745		
I found Thai food to be delicious.	5.99	1.454	0.746	18.324		
I will not forget my Thai food experiences.	6.02	1.320	0.627	9.666		
Culinary memories of youth					0.927	0.863
During this trip, eating Thai food makes me think about my childhood memories.	2.65	1.971	0.910	32.361		
My Thai food experiences remind me of something from when I was young.	2.86	2.055	0.948	52.140		
Delightful culinary nostalgia					0.941	0.888
Thai food experiences during this trip are a pleasant reminder of my past memories.	4.24	2.111	0.943	85.931		
Eating Thai food makes me think about good times from my past.	4.06	2.150	0.941	66.936		
Culinary novelty					0.865	0.762
It is my first time trying Thai food.	3.40	2.444	0.867	5.883		
Having Thai food during my trip to Thailand is a new experience.	4.46	2.306	0.879	8.069		
Satisfaction					0.880	0.56
Thai food experiences are important to the overall satisfaction of my trip.	5.88	1.394	0.730	16.511		
When I think back to trips I have enjoyed, food experiences are an important part of the memories.	5.72	1.423	0.730	16.942		

Table 1 Confirmatory factor analysis results (Cont.)

Memorable Thai food experiences	Mean	S.D.	Loadings	t- Value	CR	AVE
Having positive Thai food experiences on a trip makes me more likely to return to the destination.	5.75	1.294	0.814	25.281		
Having positive Thai food experiences on a trip make me more likely to recommend the destination.	5.87	1.294	0.819	33.400		
Eating authentic, local food at a travel destination helps create a lasting impression of a destination.	5.85	1.274	0.810	31.476		
Behavioural intention					0.892	0.541
I intend to buy local Thai food products that I tasted during my trip.	4.65	1.852	0.659	15.462		
I would encourage friends and relatives to buy products from Thailand.	5.09	1.525	0.754	25.444		
If a retailer suggests a food product from Thailand to me, I would buy it.	4.89	1.568	0.760	25.922		
If I can't find food products from Thailand in my usual store, I will look for them in another store.	4.65	1.809	0.658	15.946		
If a friend or relative recommends a food product from Thailand, I would buy it.	5.11	1.523	0.741	21.182		
I would say positive things to other people about food products from Thailand.	5.84	1.259	0.743	27.153		
I would recommend Thai food products to others.	5.72	1.449	0.804	33.103		

Note: All t values are significant at the 0.01 level; all items were measured on a 7-point scale
CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted

Table 2 Discriminant validity: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – matrix

Constructs	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Culinary delight	1.000					
(2) Culinary memory of youth	0.112	1.000				
(3) Culinary novelty	0.136	0.156	1.000			
(4) Delightful culinary nostalgia	0.269	0.397	0.212	1.000		
(5) Intentions	0.605	0.263	0.122	0.274	1.000	
(6) Satisfaction	0.774	0.048	0.195	0.298	0.671	1.000

Note: (1) Culinary delight; (2) Culinary memory of youth; (3) Culinary novelty; (4) Delightful culinary nostalgia; (5) Intentions; (6) Satisfaction

Table 3 Summary of the structural model results

Hypothesis	Direct effect		Supported?
	β	t-value	
H ₁ : Culinary delight -> Satisfaction	0.626	14.455***	Yes
H ₂ : Culinary memory of youth -> Satisfaction	-0.030	0.685	No
H ₃ : Delightful culinary nostalgia -> Satisfaction	0.109	2.545*	Yes
H ₄ : Culinary novelty -> Satisfaction	-0.074	1.725	No
H ₅ : Culinary delight -> behavioural intention	0.303	5.140***	Yes
H ₆ : Culinary memory of youth -> behavioural intention	0.196	5.263***	Yes
H ₇ : Delightful culinary nostalgia -> behavioural intention	0.005	0.098	No
H ₈ : Culinary novelty -> behavioural intention	0.026	0.526	No
H ₉ : Satisfaction -> behavioural intention	0.401	6.596***	Yes
Hypothesis	Indirect effect		Supported?
	β	t-value	
H ₁₀ : Culinary delight -> Satisfaction ->behavioural intention	0.251	5.444***	Yes
H ₁₁ : Culinary memory of youth -> Satisfaction -> behavioural intention	-0.012	0.785	No
H ₁₂ : Delightful culinary nostalgia -> Satisfaction -> behavioural intention	0.044	2.510*	Yes
H ₁₃ : Culinary novelty -> Satisfaction ->behavioural intention	-0.030	1.720	No

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

In response to the intensifying competitiveness of global tourism, particularly in gastronomic tourism, memorable food experiences have garnered growing scholarly attention (Akhoondnejad, 2024; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017; Huang et al., 2019; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018; Tsai, 2016;

Williams et al., 2019). Prior research emphasises the strategic importance of delivering emotionally engaging experiences to strengthen destination competitiveness. This study contributes by testing an integrated model of MTFEs and examining their effects on satisfaction and behavioural intention in the Thai context, thereby extending the literature beyond exploratory and qualitative approaches.

Among the MTFE dimensions, culinary delight emerged as the most influential, exerting a strong positive effect on satisfaction and behavioural intention (supporting H_1 and H_5) and showing a significant mediating effect through satisfaction (H_{10}). These findings reinforce the established view that emotionally pleasurable food experiences enhance post-visit behaviours (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Gohary et al., 2020; Kim, 2018; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tsai, 2016). The findings revealed that satisfaction significantly mediated only the relationship between culinary delight and behavioural intention, underscoring its role as a pivotal post-consumption mechanism (Gao et al., 2020; Kim, 2018; Gohary et al., 2020). This suggests that while culinary delight generates sufficient emotional intensity to translate into satisfaction-driven loyalty behaviours, other MTFE dimensions may not consistently trigger this pathway, thereby challenging assumptions of universal mediation and aligning with evidence of contextual contingencies (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

Delightful culinary nostalgia significantly influenced satisfaction (H_3), aligning with Keskin et al. (2024), but did not significantly impact behavioural intention (H_7). Moreover, satisfaction did not significantly mediate the relationship between culinary nostalgia and behavioural intention (H_{12}). This pattern suggests that nostalgia may enhance emotional evaluation but is insufficient to trigger post-visit behaviours without overall satisfaction. Notably, this study suggests nostalgia may act as a psychological antecedent to satisfaction, in contrast to Triantafyllidou and Siomkos (2014), who argued that satisfaction enhances nostalgia. This reversal highlights the role of sensory triggers, taste, smell, and ambience, as activators of nostalgia in gastronomic contexts.

Culinary memory of youth and culinary novelty did not significantly affect satisfaction (rejecting H_2 and H_4). However, culinary memory of youth positively influenced behavioural intention (supporting H_6) whereas culinary novelty had no significant impact (rejecting H_8). This result contrasts with some prior studies (Gohary et al., 2020; Kim, 2018) but supports Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) and Rasoolimanesh et al. (2022), suggesting that personal memory can motivate behaviour even when it does not raise satisfaction. Importantly, satisfaction significantly predicted behavioural intention (H_9), confirming its central role in post-consumption behaviour and supporting prior findings (Gohary et al., 2020; Kim, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

The weak relationships observed among certain MTFE dimensions, particularly culinary novelty, may reflect the characteristics of the data collection site. Khao San Road, though a lively international backpacker district, is not primarily a culinary destination. While authentic Thai flavours

can be found, they are not prominently showcased; most food offerings cater to convenience and globalised tastes rather than culturally immersive Thai gastronomy. Consequently, tourists there may not experience the level of culinary novelty or cultural connection proposed in the MTFE framework. This contextual factor likely contributed to the weaker empirical results and helps explain why some findings did not fully align with theoretical expectations.

Conclusion and suggestions

This study extends the literature on memorable food experiences by empirically examining how specific MTFE dimensions influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Findings underscore the significance of emotionally evocative culinary experiences, particularly culinary delight and nostalgia, in shaping satisfaction. Culinary delight was the strongest predictor of satisfaction and behavioural intention, whereas nostalgia enhanced satisfaction but not intention directly. The results also validate satisfaction as a robust predictor of behavioural intention. Overall, the findings clarify which memorable drivers matter most in the Thai food tourism context and highlight where prior assumptions may not hold.

Theoretical implications

Theoretically, this research expands the MTE framework in the context of food tourism in a Thai cultural setting. It offers empirical evidence on how discrete MTFE components function as antecedents to satisfaction and post-visit behavioural outcomes. The findings highlight the role of hedonic pleasure, represented by culinary delight, as a core affective dimension of memorable food experiences. In addition, the results challenge prior assumptions that satisfaction triggers nostalgia (Triantafyllidou & Siomkos, 2014), by suggesting instead that nostalgia, activated through sensory cues, can serve as a precursor to satisfaction in gastronomic contexts. This reversal of causal order not only nuances the conceptualisation of nostalgia in tourism research but also highlights the need to reconsider how affective triggers shape satisfaction across different cultural and experiential settings.

Practical implications

For tourism stakeholders, the findings provide actionable insights. Tourism marketers should prioritise emotionally rich food experiences, including food tastings, culturally embedded food storytelling, and immersive local dining environments, that foster deeper emotional engagement and reinforce satisfaction and loyalty. Although nostalgia deepens the emotional layer of experiences, it must be paired with overall satisfaction to drive behavioural intentions. Novelty alone

was insufficient, suggesting that experiences should align with cultural expectations and emotional memories rather than relying on innovation alone.

Limitations and future recommendations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The data were collected from a specific urban tourist area in Bangkok, which, while popular among international visitors, may not fully represent the diversity of food experiences found across Thailand. Future research should consider expanding data collection to a wider range of culinary contexts—such as Thai food festivals, regional gastronomic centres, or local markets—to capture better variations in memorable Thai food experiences (MTFEs). The use of a convenience sample and a moderate sample size ($n = 334$), though methodologically acceptable, may limit generalisability. Researchers should broaden the sample to include diverse international tourists across multiple Thai regions. Given mixed results compared to earlier studies, further refinement and validation of the MTFE scale are warranted. A mixed-methods approach is recommended, beginning with qualitative inquiry to capture experiential nuances, followed by quantitative validation. Comparative research across Thai regions may also reveal how local culture shapes culinary experiences, enriching the understanding of food tourism's role in destination branding.

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