

Chapter 6

Exploring the Causal Relationship Model of Foreign Tourists' Behavior and Soft Power Creation in Gastronomy Tourism: A Case Study in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the causal relationship model between foreign tourists' behavior and the creation of soft power in gastronomy tourism with a focus on a case study of Ayutthaya World Heritage, Thailand. The research investigates the factors that would influence foreign tourists' behavior and their impact on soft power creation in the context of gastronomy tourism. Using quantitative data collected through surveys of 400 samples and analysis relationship between international tourists' behavior and the creation of soft power, the findings revealed that international tourists' behavior was influenced by various factors, such as travel motivation, cultural interest, Thai cuisine, and destination image. These factors significantly affected the tourists' decision-making process. This research provides insights into the causal relationship model between foreign tourists' behavior and the creation of soft power in gastronomy tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital disruption era, power is becoming increasingly the most significant important driving force for the transformation and moving toward to the new paradigm of living in modern society. In particular, tourism has become a significant industry, which is a crucial component of the socio-economic driving forces of countries globally, as it generates employment and business opportunities (Suanpang et al., 2021; Suanpang et al., 2021c). This has resulted in the tourism industry contributing to high economic growth that has been pragmatic in several countries. Gastronomy tourism refers to a travel experience that centers around exploring the unique culinary offerings of a particular country and/or region. This involves recreational activities, such as visiting primary or secondary food producers, participating in gastronomic events, exploring rural markets, attending culinary festivals, and engaging in quality tastings of local delicacies. Essentially, any activity related to food and its cultural significance in the destination is encompassed within gastronomy tourism (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Suanpang et al., 2022; Van Westering, 1999). Moreover, gastronomy tourism has emerged as a captivating and culturally immersive travel trend, which has attracted a growing number of foreign tourists seeking unique culinary experiences (Choi & Leong, 2022; Hall & Sharples, 2021). Additionally, in the context of cultural tourism, gastronomy tourism is regarded as a manifestation of a destination's cultural identity, as it emphasizes food as an integral part of the local culture and heritage. Gastronomy tourism activities include visiting food producers, taking part in gastronomy festivals, dining at restaurants known for their special local dishes, savoring distinctive delicacies, observing food production and preparation processes, and even exploring the culinary techniques employed by renowned chefs (Hall & Mitchell, 2007; Hall et al., 2003). Hence, these experiences offer tourists insights into the cultural essence and traditions of a destination through its cuisine.

The popularity of gastronomy tourism has increased worldwide and has now become a soft power to influence tourists to travel to the destination. The definition of the term 'power' can be categorized into two forms: soft power and hard power. According to Nye (2009), power refers to the ability to influence others' behavior to achieve one's objectives. Soft power relies on attraction to achieve the desired outcomes, while hard power involves coercion and payment. In the realm of international geopolitics, coercive powers have historically been employed to control the politics and economies of other nations or to assert dominance for economic and political gains. However, in the evolving landscape of world politics, the effectiveness of hard power has diminished leading powerful countries to adopt a soft power approach for fostering economic prosperity and development within their borders (El Massah, 2015; Hussin, 2018; Nye, 1990). Soft power, a concept popularized by Nye (2008) in international relations, has garnered significant attention in the field of tourism due to its potential to influence and attract visitors through noncoercive means. In the context of tourism, soft power refers to a destination's ability to leverage its cultural, historical, and experiential assets to create a positive image and allure for tourists (Wang & Ap, 2023).

Viewed through the lens of soft power, tourists assume a dual role as both geopolitical objects and subjects (Ooi, 2016). Within this framework, certain key resources play a central role in promoting and transmitting values or exerting influence on global audiences, who are represented by the tourists themselves. These essential resources comprise national institutions responsible for the promotion, developmental aid initiatives, international media channels, and the dissemination of global pop cultures. Consequently, among these resources, tourism has emerged as a particularly effective conduit for soft power, as it operates internally and unconsciously, seamlessly intertwining with the various aspects of

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