

INVESTIGATION OF INFLUENCING GASTRONOMIC TOURISM “LOCAL ISAN SAUSAGE”, KHON KAEN, THAILAND

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Abstract: The present study sought to analyze factors influencing gastronomic tourism “Local Isan Sausage” in terms of tourism products and tourists’ needs as crucial aspects for determining tourism strategies in neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen. It examined the characteristics of gastronomic tourism in relation to Isan sausages in Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen. The sample of the study included 400 tourists visiting the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen. The results demonstrated that three factors, namely motivation for gastronomic tourism, the value chain for gastronomic tourism, and the Isan sausage product development, significantly affected the holistic gastronomic tourism development of local Isan sausages. The present study sheds light on the tourists’ needs in relation to gastronomic tourism in the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen, and shows that the results derived from an analysis of tourists’ responses in questionnaires are reliable. Consequently, it offers suggestions for the improvement or adaptation in different aspects, such as Isan sausages, packaging, and distribution, and consistency with the tourists’ needs, enabling the locals to recognize the significance and value creation of the wisdom of local Isan cuisine in their own community.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism, Isan sausage, Mueang Kao, Isan local wisdom

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of gastronomic tourism in Thailand, in 2021, the Michelin Guide and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) jointly signed an agreement to extend their partnership for an additional 5-year period from 2022 to 2026, with the intention to provide support to the restaurant and hospitality industries during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as to contribute to the recovery of Thailand’s tourism as the pandemic began to subside (Matichon Online, 2021). This is the Michelin Guide’s determination to promote perception and in turn sustainable development in those sectors. In respect of gastronomic tourism in the Isan region, many organizations have acknowledged the importance of the identity of Isan cuisine, hence publishing the sixth edition of the Michelin Guide Thailand 2023, spanning Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani and Khon Kaen, to drive gastronomic tourism and portray the culture of Isan cuisine with unique identity (Bangkokbiznews, 2022). Among an array of innovative ideas are Turning Local into Lavish by Suthipong Suriya, a renowned Thai food stylist at Life Community Museum Bueng Kan, and Creative Economy Villages both of which have been distinguished with prestigious awards in the institution category from Gourmand World Awards, known as the Oscars of Gastronomy; local cuisine from the museum has received a Gourmand Award as well.

With this in mind, this study recognized the significance of drawing on the identity of Isan cuisine, notably Isan sausages in Khon Kaen, to create values, promoting its recognition, in combination with the longstanding architecture in the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen. Additionally, the so-called sausages are regarded as the local Isan culinary culture in Khon Kaen. With their diversity and captivating characteristics inherited through generations, this intangible cultural heritage should be conserved to create job opportunities, distribute incomes within the communities, and promote sustainability among small-scale businesses within the communities in Khon Kaen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Value Chain and Motivation for Gastronomic Tourism, Product Development (4P’s), Motivations of Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomic tourism is a form of travel activity centered on experiences of cuisine and different activities during traveling. In addition to experiences of creating or cooking traditional local cuisine, this type of tourism may be concerned with other activities, such as exploring local lifestyles, joining food festivals, and attending local cooking classes. Food is derived from the unique history of different regions, along with products/ingredients, social norms, and traditions of those particular regions (ASEAN Tourism Forum, 2019). The processes for food production, consumption, and the food itself are embedded with

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social and cultural capital (Berno, 2017). The value chain for gastronomic tourism comprises five activities, namely the production of ingredients, distribution, recipe development, provision of services, and information (UNWTO, 2022).

Tourism marketing involves creating focused interventions, marketing plans, or regulations to cater to the varied requirements and interests of various age groups (Chamboko-Mpotaringa and Tichaawa, 2023). The four Ps of marketing are place (distribution), product, promotion, and price. These are the variables that are most frequently used when creating a marketing mix. McCarthy (1960) states that while creating a marketing strategy and a marketing plan, marketers can fundamentally rely on these four criteria. The Marketing mix 4 P's (product, price, place or distribution, and promotion) are the primary components of the marketing mix, which consists of numerous components that can be tailored to the organization's primary aim. The marketing mix can also increase consumer satisfaction levels (Thabit and Manaf, 2018).

The motivation for gastronomic tourism encompasses pleasurable experiences, curiosity, grounded, self-expression, (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2019) and anxiety or health concern (Ellis et al., 2018) In addition, memorable dining experiences encourage visitors to suggest the location and share their own experiences (Frost et al., 2017) Food preferences vary among individuals. A person's eating habits and preferences can be influenced by a variety of factors, including gender, age, and culture. However, preferences can often take precedence over a person's true nutritional needs (Leite-Pereira et al., 2023).

4. Holistic Gastronomy Tourism Development

Gastronomy and tourism comprise an integrated, networked and holistic approach to food and food culture that spans the continuum from production through post-consumption. This includes landscapes, place, agriculture and food production, food traditions, food presentations, hospitality, eating, culture and heritage, lifestyle, destination development, sustainability and importantly, their synergistic relationship between gastronomy as an expression of the culinary arts and creativity, innovation and design. The criteria for ASEAN Gastronomy Tourism Development encompass four pillars: farming systems and organic ingredients, story of food, creative industries and creative culture and sustainable tourism (ASEAN Tourism Forum, 2019).

5. General Background of Isan Sausages

The term ‘sausage’ originates from the Latin word ‘salsus’, which refers to “the preservation of meat with salt” or is derived from the German word ‘wurst’, which translates to “finely ground meat mixed with salt and spices, packed in fillings” (Bureau of Quality and Safety of Food, 2018). Simply put, Isan sausages can be described as a product made of pork, beef, chicken, fat, cooked glutinous or sticky rice, spices, herbs, and flavorings, which are blended, tied into pieces, and undergo fermentation to achieve a sour flavor with microorganisms producing lactic acid and saltiness; they need to be fully cooked before consumption (Thai Industrial Standards Institute, 1994). This form of fermentation is attributed to the transformation of glutinous or sticky rice or certain compounds, such as flour mixed with other ingredients, into monosaccharide which subsequently changes into lactic acid through lactic acid bacteria genera. In fact, *P. cerevisiae* strains are typically prevalent in the initial stage of this process and tend to grow best at temperatures of 37-45°C, while *Lactobacillus* sp. commonly emerges in an air-free state during the subsequent stage of fermentation at which the sausages reach a pH level of 5 or lower, with a moisture content of 51-74%.

METHODS

1. Sampling: The individuals involved with the sustainable development of gastronomic tourism “Local Isan Sausage” in Mueang Kao Sub-district, Mueang District, Khon Kaen, were chosen as the sample for data collection. Specifically, a questionnaire was administered among the tourists traveling to the community in Mueang District, Khon Kaen, chosen through accidental sampling to obtain quantitative data regarding their behaviors and needs. Given the infinite population, the sample size could be determined using Cochran’s formula for unknown population size (Cochran, 1953) with a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 5 percent. Based on the calculation of the sample size, the sample must comprise no fewer than 384 individuals to facilitate the calculation of percentages with a margin of error of less than 5 percent and at a confidence level of 95 percent. Accordingly, the sample was determined to include 400 tourists to facilitate the measurements and data analysis.

2. Measurements: In this study, the software Amos Graphics was employed to determine the relationship between structural equation modeling (SEM). The initial step entailed analyzing the reliability of factors and variables prior to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to classify variables with close factor loading values. Subsequently, the factors and variables were incorporated in the development of a measurement model to measure statistical values and “verify” whether the classification of the variables attained a model fit. They were further employed in the development of a structural model to demonstrate influences between factors and latent variables on other factors derived from collected empirical data. The factors and items of Investigation of Factors Influencing Gastronomic Tourism Local Isan Sausage are listed in Table 1.

3. Data Analysis: Regarding the model development, the results of the exploratory factor analysis showed that the fundamental factors were categorized into three groups based on factor loading values as follows: 1) the first group comprising P4, V5 M1 V3 M2, and M3 was named “VM1” (value chain for gastronomic tourism 1 and motivation for gastronomic tourism 1); 2) the second one including P1, P3 V4 P2, and M5 was named “Pro” (the Isan sausage product development), considering that the variables were notably concerned with the development of local Isan sausages; and 3) the final group consisting of V2 V1 and M4 was named “VM2” (value chain for gastronomic tourism 2 and motivation for gastronomic

tourism 2). With the measurement of the confidence level among different factors, the results showed a **Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of .824 (KMO>0.5) and a p-value of 0.000 (Sig.)**, with the **Cronbach's α** of .863, as illustrated in Table 2.

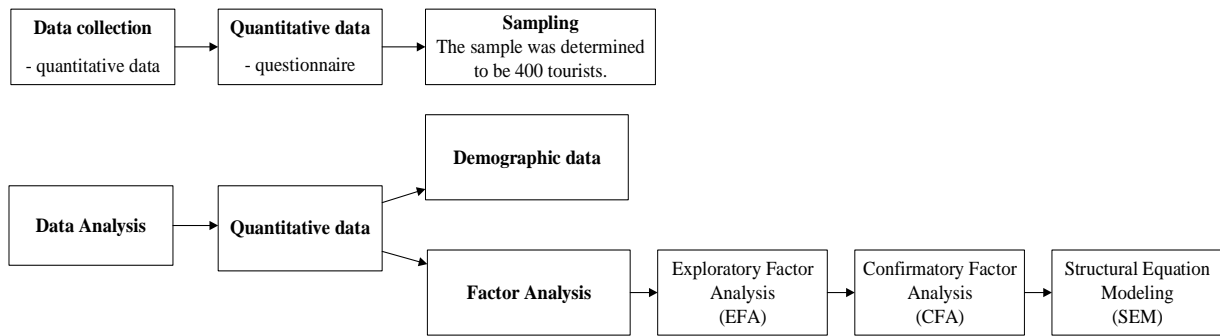


Figure 1. Methodology of Investigation of Influencing Gastronomic Tourism “Local Isan Sausage”, Khon kaen, Thailand

4. Reliability, validity, and common method bias analyses

Considering its reliability for the analysis of the relationship between different factors influencing one another, the software Amos Graphics was utilized in this study to analyze structural equation modeling. Initially, the exploratory factor analysis was conducted to classify variables, as displayed in Table 1. Afterward, statistical measurements were carried out to determine a model fit of those groups of factors and variables. As a result, the model achieved a good fit as shown in Figure 2, with Chi-square = 21.289, *df* = 14, *p* = .0094 (>.05), CMIN/DF = 1.521, GFI = .985, RMSEA = .036 (<.08).

Table 1. Factors and Items

Factors	Item
1. Motivations of Gastronomy Tourism	M1 : Pleasurable Experience
	M2 : Curiosity
	M3 : Grounded
	M4 : Self-Expression
	M5 : Anxiety
2. The value chain for gastronomy tourism	V1 : Production of ingredients
	V2 : Distribution
	V3 : Recipe development
	V4 : Provision of services
	V5 : Information
3. product development (4P’s)	P1 : Product
	P2 : Price
	P3 : Place
	P4 : Promotions
4. Holistic Gastronomy Tourism Development	GT1 : Farming Systems and Organic Ingredients
	GT2 : Story of Food
	GT3 : Creative Industries and Creative Culture
	GT4 : Sustainable Tourism

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = .824 (KMO>0.5), P-value = 0.000 (Sig.)

Topic	Factor			Cronbach's α	
	1	2	3		
P4	.913	.115	-.010	.875	.863
V5	.806	.127	.001		
M1	.805	.228	-.099		
V3	.739	.068	.047		
M2	.705	.187	-.068		
M3	.690	.093	.098	.913	
P1	.368	.877	.034		
P3	.008	.863	.014		
V4	.366	.837	.063		
P2	.032	.832	.034		
M5	.647	.669	.033	.712	
V2	-.002	.012	.821		
V1	-.064	.092	.799		
M4	.063	-.003	.764		

5. A measurement model is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the first measurement model to verify that all three groups of the variables, namely motivation for gastronomic tourism, the value chain for gastronomic tourism and the Isan sausage product development, achieved a model fit. The results demonstrated that the model was not fit, so that necessitated refining the model. Considering modification indices (MI), it was shown that certain pairs of the variables in

the model yielded correlated and redundant results. Those producing redundant results were excluded, including V4 V5 M1 M2 M3 M5 and P1. Consequently, the model achieved a good fit, with Chi-square = 21.289, df = 14, p = .094 (>.05), CMIN/DF = 1.521, GFI = .985, RMSEA = .036 (<.08), (Arbuckle, 2011), as depicted in Figure 2.

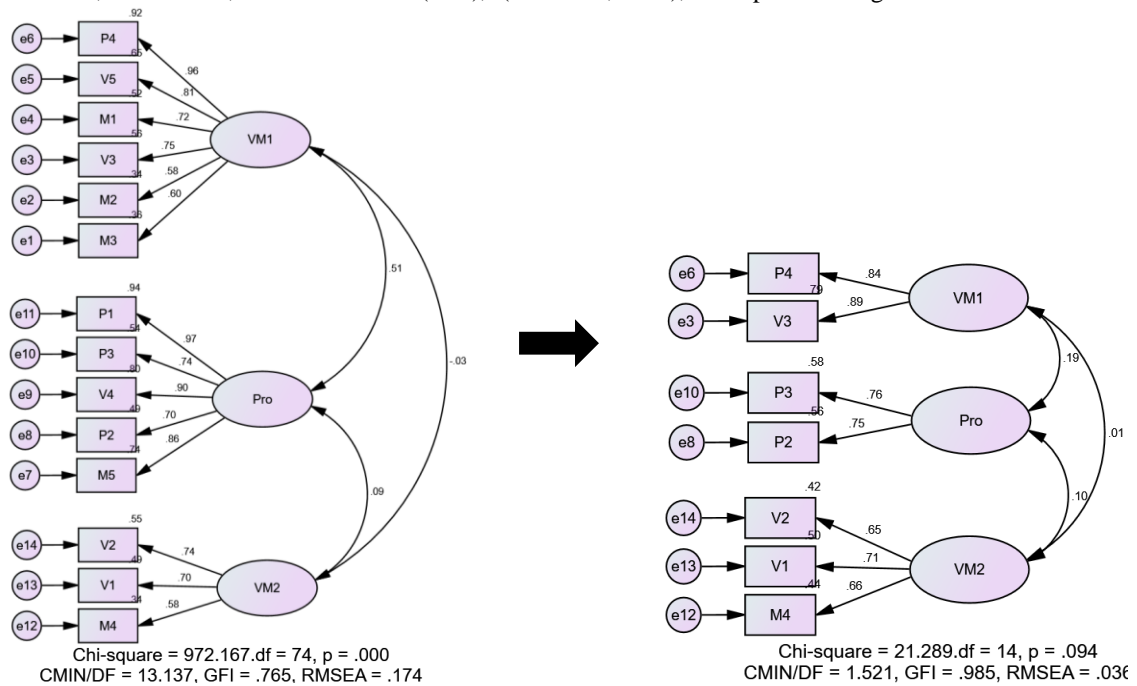


Figure 2. The first measurement model of the development of gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”, Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen (refined model)

6. A structural model serves to illustrate influences between factors or latent variables on other factors derived from empirical data obtained from the sample. Specifically, this model is compared with a conceptual model to determine whether it achieves a model fit. The results indicated that the model attained a good fit, with Chi-square = 9.374, df = 9, p = .403 (>.05), CMIN/DF = 1.042, GFI = .992, RMSEA = .010 (<.08), (Arbuckle, 2011), as illustrated in Figure 3.

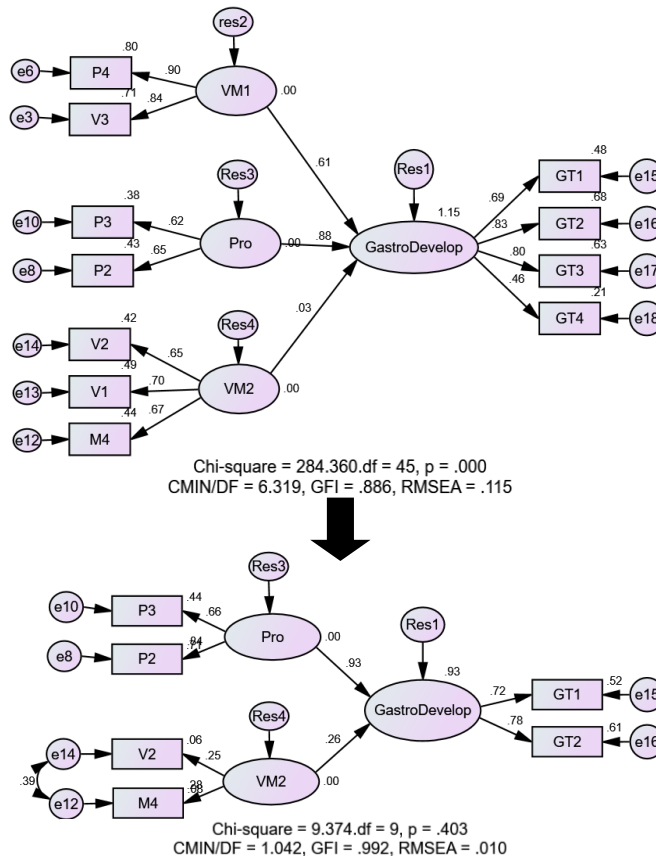


Figure 3. The structural model of the development of gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”, Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen (refined model)

Table 3. Regression weights and significant values of the structural model of the development of gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”, Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen*** P<0.001

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
GastroDevelop	←	Pro	1.000			***	accepted
GastroDevelop	←	VM2	1.000			***	accepted
P2	←	Pro	1.318	.094	14.082	***	accepted
P3	←	Pro	1.000			***	accepted
M4	←	VM2	1.000			***	accepted
V2	←	VM2	1.000			***	accepted
GT1	←	GastroDevelop	1.000			***	accepted
GT2	←	GastroDevelop	.980	.066		***	accepted

In Table 3, it was discovered that all of the factors and variables had reciprocal influences on one another in consistence with the hypothesis at a significance level of 0.05. ($p < 0.001^{***}$).

RESULTS

As depicted in Table 4, the results found that regarding demographic data of 400 tourists visiting the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Mueang District, Khon Kaen, the majority of the tourists were female (68.25%), with the rest being male (31.75%), and a good share of them were aged 30-39 years (31.25%) and 40-49 years (29%). In addition, a fair number of the tourists completed a vocational certificate or a high vocational certificate (30.25%), followed by a bachelor’s degree (27.5%). Regarding careers, some of them were company employees (27.5%) and government officials (24.5%), with average monthly incomes of 10,001-15,000 baht (28%) and above 20,000 baht (26.75%), respectively, as illustrated in Figure 4.

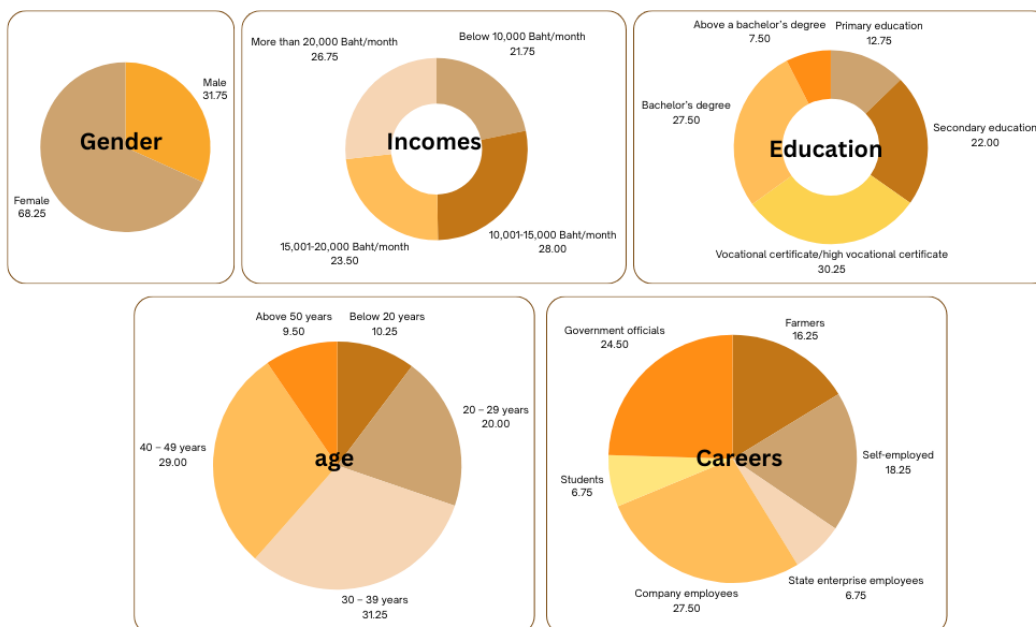


Figure 4. Demographic data of the respondents

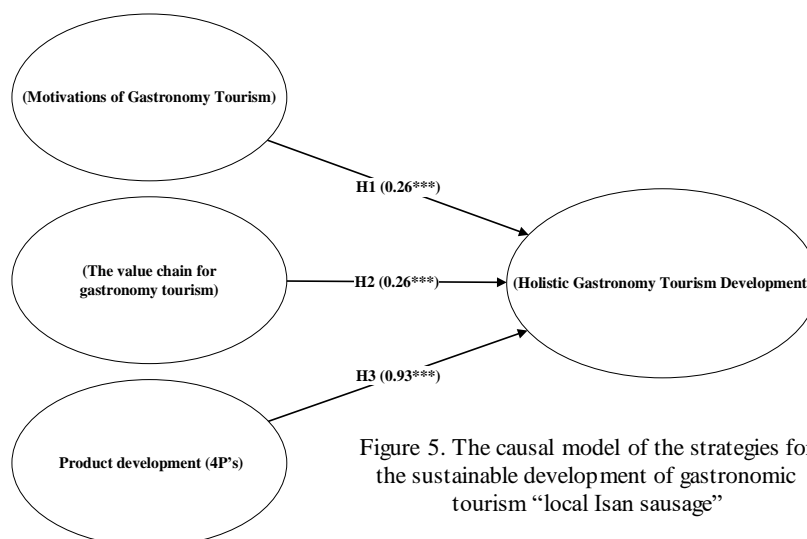


Figure 5. The causal model of the strategies for the sustainable development of gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”

Table 4. Demographic data of the respondents

Demographic data of the respondents	Number of the respondents	
	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Gender		
1.1 Male	127	31.75
1.2 Female	273	68.25
Total	400	100
2. Age		
2.1 Below 20 years	41	10.25
2.2 20 – 29 years	80	20
2.3 30 – 39 years	125	31.25
2.4 40 – 49 years	116	29
2.5 Above 50 years	38	9.5
Total	400	100
3. Education		
3.1 Primary education	51	12.75
3.2 Secondary education	88	22
3.3 Vocational certificate/high vocational certificate	121	30.25
3.4 Bachelor's degree	110	27.5
3.5 Above a bachelor's degree	30	7.5
3.6 Etc.	0	0
Total	400	100
4. Careers		
4.1 Farmers	65	16.25
4.2 Self-employed	73	18.25
4.3 State enterprise employees	27	6.75
4.4 Company employees	110	27.5
4.5 Students	27	6.75
4.6 Government officials	98	24.5
4.7 Etc.	0	0
Total	400	100
5. Incomes		
5.1 Below 10,000 Baht/month	87	21.75
5.2 10,001-15,000 Baht/month	112	28.00
5.3 15,001-20,000 Baht/month	94	23.50
5.4 More than 20,000 Baht/month	107	26.75
Total	400	100

In respect of structural equation modeling, the present study examined factors affecting gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”. In particular, a structural equation model was developed to describe behaviors of the participants, encompassing motivation for gastronomic tourism, the value chain for gastronomic tourism, and the Isan sausage product development, affecting the holistic development of gastronomic tourism. The analysis yielded the factor loadings which portray the influences of different factors as shown below.

Hypothesis 1: Motivation for gastronomic tourism affected the holistic development of gastronomic tourism, with a factor loading of 0.26 (H1 accepted).

Hypothesis 2: The value chain for gastronomic tourism affected the holistic development of gastronomic tourism, with a factor loading of 0.26 (H2 accepted).

Hypothesis 3: The product development (4P's) affected the holistic development of gastronomic tourism, with a factor loading of 0.93 (H3 accepted).

Based on the analysis of the refined causal model of the strategies for the sustainable development of gastronomic tourism “local Isan sausage”, the results are described below.

1) The factors related to motivation for gastronomic tourism were reduced to only one factor, namely self-expression (M4 = 28). It comprised three indicators as follows: 1) local cuisine could contribute to tourists discovering their culinary preferences; 2) exploring local cuisine could enable them to share their experiences or provide recommendations for others; and 3) local cuisine could portray tourists' eating preferences.

2) Similarly, the factors pertaining to the value chain for gastronomic tourism were reduced to merely one factor, particularly distribution (V2 = 25) with three indicators as follows: 1) there was a need for different distribution systems for Isan sausages; 2) high-quality packaging for the sausages suitable for transportation should be used; and 3) a variety of delivery options were needed, such as self-pickup, home delivery, and shipping to different provinces.

3) The factors in respect of the Isan sausage product development were reduced to two factors, namely price (P2 = 71) and place (P2 = 66). The former comprised three following indicators: 1) the price was reasonable for the product quality; 2) the price remained stable; and 3) clear information of the price was provided. The latter, on the other hand, consisted of five indicators as follows: 1) there were a variety of distribution channels; 2) the location of the store allowed for ease of travel; 3) the store's cleanliness; 4) the operating hours were suitable; and 5) the store was well-decorated.

4) The factors regarding the holistic development of gastronomic tourism were reduced to two factors, namely farming systems and organic ingredients (GT1 = 72), and stories of food (GT2 = 78). In particular, the former featured three indicators: 1) there was a need for the incorporation of safe agricultural products for the Isan sausages production; 2) chemical-free ingredients available in local areas should be utilized to produce the sausages; and 3) healthy and high-quality ingredients should be used to produce the sausages. On the contrary, the latter was composed of four indicators as follows: 1) the culture of eating local cuisine should be shared; 2) sharing the story of the food itself could contribute to creating the value of local cuisine; 3) local cuisine could portray culture and lifestyles of the locals; and 4) the presentation of local cuisine should be given more attention.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study show the important factors for developing the strategies for gastronomic tourism, i.e., local Isan sausages which are viewed as the local wisdom of people in Northeastern Thailand. Regarding motivation for gastronomic tourism, specifically anxiety, the tourists sought relaxation, needed to distance themselves from their typical life, and craved exotic dishes to satisfy their personal culinary experiences. With regard to distribution classified under the value chain for gastronomic tourism, there was a need for various distribution channels, the use of appealing and high-quality packaging, and home delivery to satisfy hectic lifestyles. Additionally, under the Isan sausage product development, the price was reasonable and clearly displayed, while the store was easily accessible by travel, clean, had appropriate operating hours, and was well-decorated. Finally, in terms of the holistic gastronomic tourism development, farming systems, and organic ingredients were deemed crucial; particularly, chemical-free and safe agricultural ingredients with high quality and health benefits produced by farmers in communities should be used to produce Isan sausages, and the tourists gave precedence to the story of food in that culinary culture and the origin of Isan sausages should be shared by the locals.

Theoretical implications

The findings of this study provided three implications. Regarding motivation for gastronomic tourism, it was discovered that the tourists placed emphasis on self-expression; specifically, local cuisine allows them to recognize their culinary preferences (Prasongthan and Silpsrikul, 2022). As a result, this enables the tourists to become more inclined to explore new dishes, unlike their typical foods, which they have not experienced (Hu et al., 2022). In addition, exploring local cuisine allows them to earn new experiences which can be shared or recommended to their friends or other people (Cavicchi et al., 2022). Additionally, local food can reflect culinary inclinations among tourists. To illustrate, experiencing exotic dishes can portray a person's sense of openness to novelties. The value chain for gastronomic tourism was also found to affect the holistic development of gastronomic tourism. Particularly, the tourists attached importance to distribution channels, different distribution systems, and the use of high-quality packaging (De La Torre et al., 2016), along with a readiness to deliver the products without any damage or contamination during shipping. More importantly, a variety of shipping options were needed for customers or tourists nearby; to exemplify, customers can purchase Isan sausages from the store and are freely allowed to opt for home delivery or self-pickup or order them via food delivery applications with services available in a particular area (Chen et al., 2020). Finally, in relation to the Isan sausage product development, the location of the store should be accessible via Google Maps to enable ease of travel, and at the same time, the store should be clean, elegantly decorated, and operate at appropriate opening and closing hours.

Limitations and future research

There were several limitations in the present study. In respect of the promotion of gastronomic tourism in the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, Khon Kaen, which could potentially shape the lifestyle of people in the community, the project operators are required to earn acceptance and endorsement from the involved individuals in the community before carrying out any activity and collaborate with relevant organizations on funding for the development of scenery, cleanliness, public utilities and other structures in the neighborhoods of Mueang Kao Sub-district, allowing for cleanliness and safety. Concerning suggestions for further studies, people in the community, organizations, and concerned individuals should be involved in the development of the community of Mueang Kao Sub-district, and future research should examine the appropriate and beneficial type of tourism for these neighborhoods.

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