

Tourist Attitudes, Satisfaction, and Advocacy in Local Food Tourism: Examining Gender's Moderating Role

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Abstract

Given the increasing significance of food experiences in contemporary tourist destinations, this research examines the relationships among subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, health beliefs, attitude formation, tourist satisfaction, and advocacy behavior in the context of local food tourism. Using data collected from 300 Thai tourists in Phuket, structural equation modeling reveals a significant relationship among perceived behavioral control, health beliefs, and the formation of attitudes toward local food. Tourist satisfaction predicts advocacy behavior in local food destinations, while gender influences the relationship between tourist satisfaction and advocacy behavior, with such a relationship being marginally stronger among male tourists. Meanwhile, subjective norms do not significantly affect tourists' attitude formation, indicating that social influence mechanisms may vary across contexts. These findings emphasize the need to improve tourists' perceived control over their local food selections and effectively convey the health benefits of these selections to consumers. This study contributes strategic insights for destination stakeholders and marketing practitioners striving to enhance tourists' local food experiences and stimulate their endorsement within gastronomic tourism settings. This study also provides practical recommendations for designing comprehensive food information systems that can enhance the present understanding of the role of tourist behavior in local food tourism.

Keywords: Local Food Tourism, Tourist Advocacy Behavior, Theory of Planned Behavior, Tourist Satisfaction, Gender

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1. Introduction

As gastronomic tourism has evolved into a significant component of modern tourism experiences (Richards, 2021), many global destinations have changed their positioning in the tourism market (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020; Vuksanović et al., 2024). This shift reflects tourists' desire for authentic, immersive cultural experiences where food is used both as a main attraction and a tool for cultural communication (Chirita & Chirita, 2023). The positive effects of food on the socio-cultural and environmental aspects of tourism have been widely documented in the literature (Baysal & Bilici, 2024; Samaddar & Mondal, 2024; Tahiri et al., 2022). For instance, as a valuable instrument for destination marketing, local food positively contributes to sustainable tourism, which in turn is a critical element of destination development (Gupta et al., 2023; Stalmirska, 2024). Such alignment of food tourism with sustainability and cultural authenticity highlights the increasing focus of tourism and food tourism research on tourists' own perspective (Park & Widyanta, 2022).

Southeast Asian destinations have experienced a significant growth in culinary tourism (Putra et al., 2023), with Thailand being a prime example of a destination where food tourism is a crucial aspect of its soft power and destination branding (The Government Public Relations Department, 2024). Although international tourists regard Thailand tourism as a luxury and despite the significant seasonality in international tourist arrivals, the price responsiveness for tourism in Thailand does not vary between peak and off-peak periods (Untong & Khao Sa-ard, 2011). In 2024, Thailand earned about 1.8 trillion baht from 35 million international tourists, who have spent 20% to 25% of their budget on food, particularly Thai cuisine, thus emphasizing the importance of gastronomy in Thai tourism (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2024). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, international tourism has experienced a slower recovery than domestic Thai tourism, especially among high-end tourists with strong purchasing power (Lee-Anant et al., 2024). As a result, the Thai government has launched several programs that promote regional culinary experiences among Thai nationals, acknowledging this group of domestic tourists as an essential and stable market segment (Muangasame & Park, 2019). The Thai tourism industry should therefore create premium domestic offerings that meet the expectations of affluent domestic tourists and generate sustainable economic value (Lee-Anant et al., 2024).

Earning 497.5 million THB (14 million USD) in tourism revenues in 2024 alone, Phuket has established itself as Thailand's highest-earning province (The Government Public Relations Department, 2025). Apart from being ranked as one of the 10 most visited destinations worldwide, Phuket is also recognized by UNESCO as a "City of Gastronomy" within ASEAN in 2015 (UNESCO, 2015), and such recognition has further cemented Phuket's status as a key food tourism destination. Thai domestic tourists have also differentiated Phuket cuisine from those of central, northern, northeastern, and eastern Thailand due to its unique regional ingredients, multicultural influence, and preparation methods (Soonsan et al., 2024).

Given the rising economic and cultural importance of food in tourism, understanding those factors that influence the local food consumption behavior of tourists has become a vital topic in hospitality, tourism, and consumer behavior research (Akoğlu & Selçuk, 2024; Soltani et al., 2021; Wani et al., 2024). Previous research has primarily focused on behavioral intentions as a determinant of local food consumption (Lin et al., 2023; Soltani et al., 2021) and has largely confirmed the assumptions of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). The characteristics of tourists participating in

local food experiences (Badu-Baiden & Kim, 2022; Soltani et al., 2021; Sthapit et al., 2023), including those personal factors that influence their local food consumption (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020; Vanany et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020), have also received extensive scholarly attention.

Nevertheless, those factors that influence the local food consumption behavior of tourists remain unknown (Lin et al., 2023; Xu & Zeng, 2022). While prior studies on local food tourism have examined the influence of subjective norms on attitude formation and the relationship between perceived behavioral control (PBC) and attitudes toward local food consumption, they have produced inconsistent findings across various cultural contexts (Balıkçioğlu Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Hasan & Suciarto, 2020; Palau-Saumell et al., 2021; Peral-Peral et al., 2022; Sogari et al., 2023). The attitudes of domestic tourists toward regional, local food in Thailand have also been overlooked.

In addition, studies that explore the influence of health beliefs on the development of attitudes in the food consumption context have produced diverse outcomes (Hussain et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2022; Testa et al., 2019), and these tourists' health beliefs have been primarily investigated across separate domains of health behavior research (Denovan et al., 2025; Kroke & Ruthig, 2022; Sloan, 2024). Incorporating health beliefs into the TPB framework can shed more light on the formation of attitudes toward local food. Specifically, by merging social-cognitive factors (Kumar et al., 2021) with individual health motivations (Kirmani et al., 2022), the TPB framework illustrates how such attitudes are formed through a combination of social validation, perceived capability, and health concerns. The interrelation among tourists' local food consumption value, attitudes toward local cuisine, and behavioral intentions (Choe & Kim, 2018; Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020), especially the complex psychological processes that drive their actual consumption and subsequent advocacy behaviors, also remains largely unknown, and only a few studies have explored how tourists assess their local food experiences across different destinations. Given the significant differences in the food consumption experiences of tourists between their travel destinations and home countries (Kim et al., 2022), the behavioral intentions and dining satisfaction of these tourists in a specific destination warrant further exploration.

The development of effective destination management strategies also calls for an improved understanding of those mechanisms that relate local food satisfaction to tourist advocacy. When tourists are satisfied with their experiences in a destination, their word-of-mouth directly impacts the reputation and competitive standing of such a destination (Saini & Arasanmi, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, exploring the relationship between favorable local food experiences and tourist advocacy behaviors, which can lead to positive destination recommendations (Ali et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2022), can yield important insights.

Although gender differences in tourist behavior, food consumption, and satisfaction–loyalty relationships have been recognized in the literature (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Suki, 2014; Zhu et al., 2024), only a few studies have directly examined the moderating role of gender in the satisfaction–advocacy relationship within the local food context. This gap is particularly evident in Thailand, thereby highlighting the need for targeted studies on how gender shapes advocacy behaviors in Thailand's local food tourism. Exploring these gaps is theoretically and practically significant, as previous evidence suggests that males and females process and respond to culinary experiences in distinct ways (Chen & Huang, 2018; Kim et al., 2009; Nejati & Parakhodi Moghaddam, 2012; Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015).

To fill these gaps, this study uses the TPB framework and the satisfaction–advocacy linkages to examine the effects of subjective norms, PBC, and health beliefs on

tourists' attitudes, satisfaction, and advocacy behavior along with the moderating role of gender. This study contributes to the extant literature by analyzing the complete behavioral process of tourists from their attitude formation to their post-consumption advocacy. This study also expands intention-based models by including actual consumption results and by considering tourists' health beliefs in local food tourism contexts. The results carry several implications that can aid in the formulation of destination marketing strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Local Food and Food Tourism

The term "local food" places great emphasis on the use of locally obtained and manufactured ingredients in its preparation. "Local food" echoes the term "terroir," which describes the inextricable link between food and its geographical origin and suggests that the environmental circumstances, soil attributes, culinary techniques, and local organizational practices in a destination can shape its cuisine (Alderighi et al., 2016). The term "local food" in this study refers to both "organic" and "green" food given the similarities in their characteristics and the motives of customers who seek out these food items. Specifically, green food emphasizes minimal processing and ecological sustainability, while organic food promotes sustainable farming (Boye & Arcand, 2013). Meanwhile, consumers who seek out organic and green food are self-transcendent, favor healthy dietary behaviors (Gauthier et al., 2022), and are particularly concerned about the environmental effects and regional traceability of their food. The consumption of organic and green food thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding sustainable food behaviors in tourism contexts (Scalvedi & Saba, 2018). Previous studies indicate that health consciousness significantly influences tourists' local food choices, especially in destinations renowned for their fresh and ingredient-rich cuisines (Baby & Joseph, 2023; Khayyam et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022).

Tourists experience diverse local cuisine and cultural traditions when traveling to different destinations (Park & Widyanta, 2022). "Local cuisine" here includes fruits, meats, beverages, and pastries purchased from farm shops, local markets, and artisanal retailers. Food tastings, cooking classes, and food pairings can also expose these tourists to regional cuisine, and local food allows them to experience regional customs and lifestyles beyond basic nutritional necessities. Gastronomy tourism relies on this approach to boost a destination's appeal and enrich the cultural and sensory aspects of travel (Baysal & Bilici, 2024; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mora et al., 2021). Consequently, regional cuisine fosters tourism, economic growth, and diversification.

2.2 Theory of planned behavior

TPB (Ajzen, 1991) provides a framework for analyzing tourists' intentions to consume local cuisine during their travels. This theoretical model has been extensively used in several research areas, especially food consumption behavior research (Dowd & Burke, 2013; McDermott et al., 2015). As its core tenet, TPB posits that behavioral intentions emerge from individuals' motivation to perform certain actions and from their confidence in their ability to carry out such actions (Testa et al., 2019).

TPB treats behavioral intention as the foremost predictor of actual behavior or the primary impetus for individuals to engage in action. Ajzen's theoretical framework (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen et al., 2011) posits that behavioral intentions are shaped by three primary determinants. First, behavioral attitudes reflect an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of performing a specific behavior. Second, subjective norms

capture the perceived social pressure and expectations from important others that may influence one's decision to engage in a given behavior. Third, PBC replicates an individual's assessment of his/her ability to successfully perform a behavior by considering his/her past experiences and the factors that facilitate or hinder such behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

TPB suggests that individuals with positive attitudes toward a behavior, supportive social norms, and high PBC have stronger intentions to engage in such behavior (Ajzen et al., 2011; Estrada et al., 2024; Testa et al., 2019). Therefore, this theoretical framework offers important insights into the psychological mechanisms that influence tourists' decisions to engage in traditional culinary experiences while traveling.

2.3 Interplay Among Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Attitude

The cognitive–affective–behavioral model defines attitude as a 3D construct that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). The cognitive component refers to an individual's beliefs and perceptions regarding an object, the affective component pertains to his/her emotional responses and feelings, and the behavioral component represents his/her past actions, tendencies, and behavioral intentions related to the object (Ajzen, 2014).

Subjective norms can enhance tourists' positive views of local food through social expectations and moral obligations. Khan et al. (2023) established a relationship among subjective norms, attitude, PBC, purchase intention, and purchase behavior. Roh et al. (2022) argued that consumers' attitudes and perceived social norms significantly and positively shape their purchase intentions. Shin & Hancer (2016) found that subjective norms reinforce positive attitudes and moral standards and ultimately influence the local food purchase intentions of consumers in the US. According to Banerjee & Quinn (2022), consumers associate local food with social pride and responsibility, with subjective norms enhancing the emotional and moral attitudes that drive these consumers' purchasing behavior.

Meanwhile, studies on food waste behavior suggest that subjective standards may insignificantly affect the purchase intentions of customers with well-established attitudes, thereby suggesting that the effects of social pressure depend on attitude strength and behavioral context (Anjaka, 2022). This finding supports the conclusions of other research indicating that social influence does not substantially affect individuals' views toward organic food purchases (Testa et al., 2019), thereby implying that personal beliefs might override social expectations in specific consumption scenarios.

PBC affects attitudes by increasing individuals' confidence in their capacity to perform food-related behaviors, thereby facilitating the translation of their positive attitudes into intentions and actions (Fischer & Karl, 2022; Hagger et al., 2022). PBC functions as a direct predictor of behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 2015; Didarloo et al., 2022; Hardin-Fanning & Ricks, 2017) and a moderator that enhances the effect of attitudes on intention. Specifically, when individuals perceive high control over their behavior, their attitudes exert a greater influence on their intentions. Conversely, low PBC can weaken this relationship even in the presence of positive attitudes (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2020). However, some studies suggest that a stronger PBC may promote consumers' positive attitudes toward organic purchases (Testa et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the relationship among subjective norms, PBC, and attitudes toward local food warrants further investigation across diverse cultural contexts, including local food settings. To fill this gap, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Subjective norm has a positive effect on attitude toward local food consumption.

H2. PBC has a positive effect on attitude toward local food consumption.

2.4 Effect of health belief on attitude

Health belief refers to an individual's perception and attitude toward health, which in turn influences his/her health-related actions (Daniati et al., 2021). These behaviors can be explained by individual beliefs and attitudes as described in the 1950s Health Belief Model (HBM) (Devi et al., 2022), which has been applied in nutrition (Sasanfar et al., 2022), food safety (Soon et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021), and travel health research (Alhemimah, 2024; Martey, 2025). HBM outlines four primary beliefs that affect preventive health behaviors: perceived susceptibility, which refers to one's sense of vulnerability to a health issue; perceived severity, which refers to the perceived seriousness of a condition's consequences; perceived benefits, which relate to the perceived advantages of taking preventive action; and perceived barriers, which refer to the perceived obstacles that might hinder such action (Kim et al., 2022). HBM is grounded on the assumption that individuals tend to implement prevention measures when they perceive a significant risk of contracting a disease or condition (perceived susceptibility) (Champion & Skinner, 2008; Kim et al., 2022; Skinner, 2024). Accordingly, this model has been used in previous studies to effectively predict and analyze tourist behaviors in health-related contexts (Ban & Kim, 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Mirakzadeh et al., 2021; Zhao & An, 2021).

Health beliefs significantly influence individuals' attitudes and behaviors within health-conscious tourism environments (Suess et al., 2022). Previous research indicates that consumers who are interested in sustainability and are able to engage with sustainable concepts typically approach sustainable dieting primarily from a human health perspective (Kenny et al., 2023). Pelletier et al. (2013) supported this conclusion by demonstrating that young adults who prioritize organic, local, and sustainable food practices exhibit healthier dietary behaviors, thereby confirming that positive health beliefs about food effectively translate into improved attitudes and healthier eating behaviors. Seng (2025) found that health motivation and the mediating effect of attitude could influence consumers' intentions to purchase dietary supplements. Empirical evidence from diverse cultural contexts also reveals that health beliefs shape attitudes (Oliveira et al., 2026; Shah & Thanki Joshi, 2024) and subsequently influence consumers' behavioral intentions to purchase food (Gong et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2022).

Health benefits are important food tourism values (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020), with many tourists prioritizing health considerations over food taste and value. To make their culinary experiences enjoyable, tourists must be protected from health risks, particularly those related to food safety and hygiene (Choe & Kim, 2018). These arguments imply that beliefs about the health benefits of local food, such as their freshness and minimal chemical content, can positively influence tourists' attitudes and allow them to develop more favorable evaluations. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Health belief has a positive effect on attitude toward local food consumption.

2.5 Effect of Attitude and Subjective Norm on Tourist Satisfaction

Tourist satisfaction refers to the degree of fulfillment and contentment experienced by tourists (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Dmitrović et al., 2009) across several aspects, such as services (Giao et al., 2021), cultural interactions (Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023), and local cuisine (Estrada et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2022; Piramanayagam et al., 2021).

Tourists seek food to fulfill their emotional and nutritional needs, and they tend to develop positive feelings when choosing local dishes that contrast their usual eating patterns (Choe & Kim, 2018). The quality of tourists' culinary experiences, especially in terms of flavor, sensory attributes, and service quality, plays a key role in shaping their

positive attitudes (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020), and favorable assessments of authentic local food can elevate their overall trip satisfaction (Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Previous research indicates that tourists' satisfaction with local culinary experiences significantly improves their satisfaction with the whole destination (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2020; Nematzadeh et al., 2024). Subjective norms can also have significant effects on tourists' intentions and satisfaction regarding food consumption (Canova et al., 2020) given that social expectations help shape their satisfaction and behavioral intentions toward food services (Soltani et al., 2021). Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4. Attitude toward local food consumption has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

H5. Subjective norm has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

2.6 Effect of Satisfaction on Tourist Advocacy

Tourist advocacy refers to the proactive actions taken by tourists to promote, recommend, and defend a tourism destination or experience (Saini & Arasanmi, 2021). This behavior is typically reflected in tourist loyalty and satisfaction, which impact the reputation and competitiveness of the destination being promoted or defended.

Personal attitudes have a greater influence on tourists' behavioral intentions compared with other metrics (Biswas & Roy, 2015a, 2015b), with consumers' attitudes regarding specific food items directly affecting their purchase decisions and word-of-mouth recommendations (Choe & Kim, 2018). Positive attitudes toward food have also been consistently linked to positive behavioral intentions that influence tourists' destination choices and revisit intentions (Balıkcıoğlu Dedeoğlu et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2023; Soltani et al., 2021). Tourists who are satisfied with local culinary experiences are more likely to revisit a particular destination (Ali et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Nematzadeh et al., 2024; Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020; Safian et al., 2021), thus highlighting the significant role of food tourism in promoting destination loyalty. Tourists' behavioral objectives encompass visiting food tourism destinations and recommending local cuisine to others (Piramanayagam et al., 2021; Soltani et al., 2021). Previous research demonstrates that positive sentiments regarding food can significantly promote travel to destinations (Choe & Kim, 2018), while satisfaction with local food affects destination advocacy behaviors (Hossain et al., 2022). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Tourists' satisfaction has a positive effect on their advocacy.

2.7 Moderating Role of Gender on the Effect of Tourist Satisfaction on Advocacy

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors (Holbrook, 1986) and functions as a valuable market segmentation criterion (Kim et al., 2007; Tosun et al., 2024). Agency–communion theory reveals gender variations in consumer purchase and consumption behaviors (Joe & Choi, 2019), with males seeking independence and uniqueness and females seeking social connections (Kurt & Frimer, 2015). Meanwhile, empathizing–systemizing theory indicates that females are driven by emotions while males are driven by cognition (Greenberg & Baron-Cohen, 2020).

Hedonic–utilitarian consumption theory helps explain gender differences in consumer behavior (Lim et al., 2017) by defining utilitarian consumption as functional, practical, and efficiency-oriented and defining hedonic consumption as pleasure-seeking, emotion, and experience-oriented (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). According to this theory, females focus on the consumption process, while males focus on the outcomes of their service consumption (Boo et al., 2013), thereby highlighting a hedonic emphasis on experience consumption against utilitarian goal achievement.

Hedonic wants are experienced and tied to consumption with emotional rather than rational evaluations (Liao, 2021; Wang & Jia, 2023). Previous research shows that females consume more hedonic substances than males, which matches their emotion-driven behavior and community orientation (Govind et al., 2020). Meanwhile, due to their cognition-oriented and agentic tendencies, males tend to adopt a utilitarian, logic-based approach that prioritizes task-oriented and functional value (Wang, 2010; Yang & Lee, 2010).

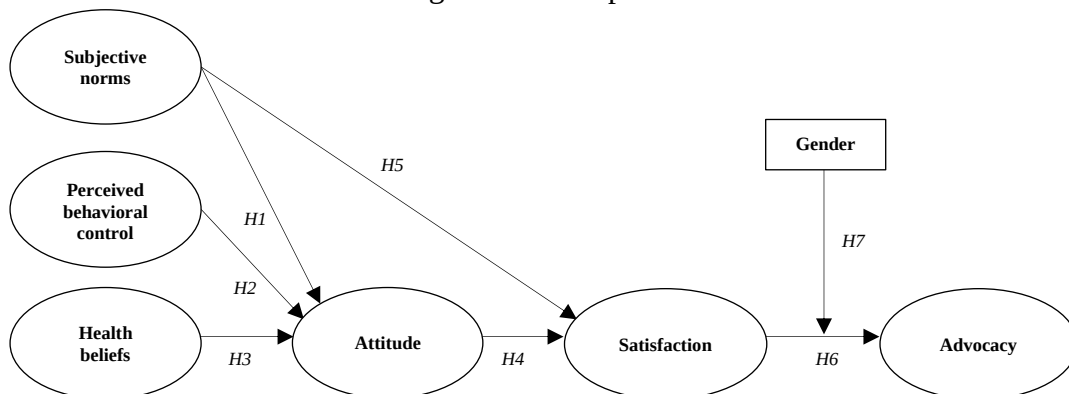
These tendencies have been verified in previous tourism research. For instance, Suki (2014) found that reliability and responsiveness tend to affect female satisfaction, thereby highlighting a hedonic emphasis on service experience and emotional connection. In line with the utilitarian emphasis on physical and functional benefits, tangible factors greatly affect male pleasure. Dedeoğlu et al. (2019) found that quality value perception predicts the intentions of females to visit a destination more than their behavioral price value perception, thereby confirming gender-based differences in tourist behavior and decision-making and aligning with hedonic versus utilitarian consumption motivations.

However, the moderating effect of gender has been rarely explored in the local food tourism context. Apart from the contradictory findings reported in the literature, differences in the culinary tourism habits of males and females remain unclear. Kim et al. (2009) found that females tend to try local food, while Chen & Huang (2018) revealed that females value local culinary experiences when traveling. By contrast, Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo (2015) observed no gender differences in tourists' gastronomic motivation for visiting two destinations, while Nejati & Parakhodi Moghaddam (2012) observed that gender has no moderating impact on tourists' hedonic and utilitarian values, which in turn influence their fast-casual restaurant behavior. To clarify gender's moderating effect on the relationships of tourist satisfaction with local food and advocacy behavior, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Gender moderates the relationship between local food satisfaction and tourist advocacy.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Source: Authors' own work.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Measurement Development and Questionnaire Design

All measurement scales were developed based on their corresponding theoretical frameworks. The questionnaire comprised three sections, namely, project introduction, construct measurement items, and demographic information. The measurement items for all constructs were rated on five-point Likert-type scales with varying response anchors. Subjective norm and PBC were rated from 0 (not at all) to 4 (frequently, if not always); health belief, tourist satisfaction, and tourist advocacy were rated from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); and attitude was rated from 0 (most negative) to 4 (most positive) with bipolar adjectives (e.g., very harmful–very beneficial, very unhealthy–very healthy).

The measurement instruments were adapted from established research. Subjective norm and PBC were measured using six and seven items adapted from Peral-Peral et al. (2022) and Testa et al. (2019), respectively; attitude was measured using five items adapted from Peral-Peral et al. (2022); health belief was measured using three items adapted from Testa et al. (2019); and tourist satisfaction and tourist advocacy were measured using five and three items adapted from Estrada et al. (2024), respectively.

3.2 Data Collection and Research Instrument

Data were collected from Thai tourists dining at local restaurants in Phuket from March to April 2025. These tourists were selected via random sampling across popular spots in Phuket to ensure equal participation possibilities for all potential participants. This objective selection strategy also eliminates systematic biases during the recruitment process, thereby enhancing sample quality (Ahmed, 2024).

Self-administered questionnaires in Thai were used for the data collection as they require less administrative effort than interviews (Sudman et al., 1965). Apart from presenting the research overview and indicating the estimated time of completing the questionnaire, the Introduction part of the questionnaire assured the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and informed them about the voluntary nature of their participation. Before answering the questionnaire, these participants were given a summary of local food tourism that highlights authentic Thai culinary experiences, traditional cooking techniques, and locally sourced products. To ensure relevance, each potential participant was asked whether s/he is a Thai tourist visiting Phuket and whether s/he has already dined at local food establishments on the island or sampled traditional Phuket cuisine. Only those participants who answered affirmatively to both questions were allowed to proceed with the survey. Among the 620 distributed questionnaires, 372 were returned, yielding a 60% response rate. After eliminating incomplete responses, 300 questionnaires were retained for the analysis. This sample size exceeds Hoe's (2008) recommended threshold of 200 responders, thereby confirming its appropriateness for structural equation modeling (SEM).

3.3 Analysis Method and Process

The model was analyzed using SEM in Mplus 7.3, which is widely recognized as an excellent tool for assessing relationships between manifest and latent variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2015), especially when analyzing complex psychological constructs that are not directly measurable or observable. SEM can also be used to test theory-based complex models (Martens, 2005).

The two-step SEM separately evaluates each measurement model before estimating the structural models simultaneously, thus enhancing model fit and maintaining causal conclusions (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was initially performed to test the measurement model, and then the hypotheses were tested via measurement model path analysis. A multiple-group moderation analysis was eventually conducted to determine how tourists' gender affects their pleasure and advocacy.

3.4 Supplementary Data Analysis

The variance inflation factor for the latent variables ranged between 1.104 and 1.442, which were below the threshold of 3, thereby confirming the absence of multicollinearity concerns in this study (Kock, 2025). Harman's single-factor test was then performed to evaluate common method variance bias. The component analysis identified many factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, which explained 62.922% of the variance across 26 items, with the primary component accounting for 22.209% of the variance. Given that the initial component did not exceed 50% of the variation, common method variance bias was predominantly absent in the study (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Among the 300 participants, 45% were male and 55% were female, and the majority were aged 31–35 years (43%), followed by over 35 years (29%), 26–30 years (15%), 21–25 years (12%), and under 20 years (1%).

In terms of education, the majority of the participants held a bachelor's degree (65%), followed by a diploma (18.7%), a master's degree (9%), a doctorate degree (2%), and certificates for secondary (4.3%) and primary education (1%). Meanwhile, in terms of occupation, the majority of the participants were employees (accounting for 78.3%), followed by students (12.3%), unemployed (8%), and retirees and homemakers (0.7% each). This distribution reflects a highly educated sample that primarily comprised working-age professionals.

4.2 Measurement Model

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with 29 observed items was conducted to identify the underlying structure of the research model. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.820, which suggests that the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Meanwhile, the Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a significant result ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlations among items were adequate for EFA.

CFA was performed following Hair et al. (2010) to evaluate the measurement model. Each latent construct was evaluated to verify the links between the indicators and latent variables. During this process, those items with insufficient factor loadings were eliminated, leaving 16 items that were distributed across 6 constructs, namely, subjective norm (2 items), PBC (4 items), health belief (2 items), attitude (3 items), tourist satisfaction (2 items), and tourist advocacy (3 items). The model fit was then evaluated using the following criteria: chi-square (χ^2) with a significant p-value, a comparative fit

index (CFI) greater than 0.920, a Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) greater than 0.920, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) less than 0.078, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) less than 0.080.

Table 1: CFA Results

Variables Items	Factor Loadings	t-value	CR	AVE
<i>Subjective norm ($\alpha = 0.683$, Mean = 2.785)</i>			0.693	0.533
Most of my family believes that the right thing is to buy local products.	0.811	9.624**		
My workmates believe that the right thing is to buy local products.	0.640	8.760**		
<i>Perceived behavior control ($\alpha = 0.939$, Mean = 2.950)</i>			0.939	0.794
The decision to buy local products depends on me.	0.929	82.268**		
The decision to buy local food products is under my control.	0.884	58.717**		
It's easy for me to buy local products.	0.877	55.591**		
I believe that I'm able to buy local products if I want to.	0.874	53.712**		
<i>Health belief ($\alpha = 0.859$, Mean = 3.081)</i>			0.869	0.770
Physical and psychological well-being are related.	0.957	16.678**		
Having a healthy diet is important for me.	0.791	15.223**		
<i>Attitude: For me, having local food in Phuket while traveling is... ($\alpha = 0.768$, Mean = 2.581)</i>			0.770	0.527
Healthy	0.731	19.553**		
Safe	0.724	19.143**		
Tasty	0.724	19.132**		
<i>Tourist satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.700$, Mean = 2.925)</i>			0.714	0.560
Overall, I was satisfied with this trip.	0.843	11.109**		
My feelings about this destination were very positive.	0.640	9.738**		
<i>Tourist advocacy ($\alpha = 0.932$, Mean = 2.992)</i>			0.932	0.821
I will try to convince my family and friends to visit this destination.	0.930	74.480**		
My expectations of this destination were met.	0.897	60.867**		
I will recommend this destination to others.	0.892	58.902**		

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability, and ** = $p < 0.001$.

Source: Authors' own work.

Table 1 presents the validity and reliability results. The CFA fit indices indicated a satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2 = 142.223$ ($p = 0.000$), $df = 89$, CFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.974, RMSEA = 0.045, and SRMR = 0.027. The Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranged from 0.683 to 0.939, indicating an acceptable to excellent internal consistency. The composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.693 to 0.939, which exceeded the 0.600 threshold (Hair et al., 2010). The average variance extracted (AVE) scores ranged between 0.527 and 0.821, thereby satisfying the criteria for convergent validity.

Table 2 presents the discriminant validity of the measurement framework as evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), where the square root of AVE (indicated by diagonal bold values) was compared with the correlation coefficients among the constructs. These correlation coefficients ranged between 0.044 and 0.437, whereas the square root of AVE for each construct (0.726–0.906) exceeded the respective correlation values. Discriminant validity was also assessed using the CICFA (sys) technique-based classification method due to its superiority over the traditional heterotrait-monotrait ratio. The threshold was set to 0.900 to identify problematic correlations (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). The upper off-diagonal coefficients at the 97.5% upper bound varied between 0.195 and 0.555 and consistently remained below the threshold, thereby confirming the absence of excessive inter-construct correlations. Overall, these results confirmed the suitability of the data and the constructs for the structural model analysis.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity Assessment

Variables	SJN	PBC	HBE	ATT	SAT	ADV
SJN	0.730	[0.136, 0.407]	[0.030, 0.309]	[0.108, 0.195]	[0.149, 0.441]	[0.025, 0.300]
PBC	0.271	0.891	[0.102, 0.339]	[0.325, 0.549]	[0.088, 0.359]	[0.144, 0.370]
HBE	0.170	0.221	0.877	[0.307, 0.555]	[0.004, 0.277]	[0.026, 0.267]
ATT	0.044	0.437	0.431	0.726	[0.271, 0.545]	[0.301, 0.530]
SAT	0.295	0.223	0.140	0.408	0.748	[0.069, 0.341]
ADV	0.162	0.257	0.147	0.415	0.205	0.906

Note: The square roots of AVE are denoted by the bold numerals on the diagonal, the correlations between the constructs are represented by the values on the lower diagonal, and the correlations of the constructs at the 97.5% confidence interval are represented by the values on the upper diagonal. SJN = Subjective norm, PBC = perceived behavioral control, HBE = health belief, ATT = attitude, SAT = tourist satisfaction, ADV = tourist advocacy

Source: Authors' own work.

4.3 Structural Model

The structural model demonstrated acceptable fit indices: $\chi^2 = 176.259$ ($p = 0.000$), $df = 95$, CFI = 0.970, TLI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.053, and SRMR = 0.071. Table 3 and Figure 2 present the hypothesis testing results. PBC and HBE demonstrated notable direct effects on ATT (H2: $\beta = 0.391$, *** $p < 0.001$, H3: $\beta = 0.351$, *** $p < 0.001$), but

SJN did not demonstrate such effects (H1: $\beta = -0.119$, $p > 0.050$). Meanwhile, ATT and SJN exerted direct effects on SAT (H4: $\beta = 0.439$, *** $p < 0.001$, H5: $\beta = 0.286$, *** $p < 0.001$), while SAT exhibited a notable direct effect on ADV (H6: $\beta = 0.290$, *** $p < 0.001$).

Table 3: Structural Model

Hypothesis	Path	β (Beta)	t-value	Result
H1	SJN $\rightarrow$ ATT	-0.119	-1.651	Not Supported
H2	PBC $\rightarrow$ ATT	0.391	6.412***	Supported
H3	HBE $\rightarrow$ ATT	0.351	5.619***	Supported
H4	ATT $\rightarrow$ SAT	0.439	6.380***	Supported
H5	SJN $\rightarrow$ SAT	0.286	3.908***	Supported
H6	SAT $\rightarrow$ ADV	0.290	4.163***	Supported

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, SJN = Subjective norm, PBC = perceived behavioral control, HBE = health belief, ATT = attitude, SAT = tourist satisfaction, ADV = tourist advocacy

Source: Authors' own work.

4.4 Multiple-Group Analysis

Multiple-group analysis was performed to test H7. Before conducting the path analysis, multiple-group CFA was performed to establish measurement model invariance. The participants were divided into two groups based on their gender, with the male and female groups comprising 135 and 165 participants, respectively. The group component equivalency was assessed following the approach of Byrne (2004). An adequate model fit confirmed equivalent component structures between both groups (male: $\chi^2 = 124.277$ ($p = 0.008$), $df = 89$, CFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.965, RMSEA = 0.054, SRMR = 0.039; female: $\chi^2 = 141.344$ ($p = 0.000$), $df = 89$, CFI = 0.964, TLI = 0.951, RMSEA = 0.060, SRMR = 0.037).

Table 4: Measurement Model Invariance Across Groups

Invariance test	χ^2	df	p-value	CFI	Δp -value	Δ CFI
Baseline (a)	265.621	178	0.000	0.969		
Metric invariance (b)	273.168	188	0.000	0.970	(b) - (a) = 0.673	(b) - (a) = 0.001
Scalar invariance (c)	281.666	198	0.000	0.970	(c) - (a) = 0.713	(c) - (a) = 0.001

Note: CFI = Comparative fit index

Source: Authors' own work.

Table 4 displays the invariance testing results for the measurement model between the groups through an examination of the changes in CFI and χ^2 . The insignificant differences among the configural, metric, and scalar models validated the measurement model invariance (Hair et al., 2010). The testing included comparisons between the baseline model (a) and metric model (b) and between the baseline model (a) and scalar model (c). Furthermore, the CFI differences across all model comparisons

remained below 0.01 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), thereby confirming that the questionnaire was interpreted consistently between the two groups. Given these satisfactory results, multiple-group path analysis was conducted.

The path coefficients between the two groups were then compared based on a significant change in the χ^2 value (Hair et al., 2010; Schumacker & Lomax, 2015). Adhering to the parameter constraints, a significant change in the χ^2 value confirmed the substantial impact of the moderator ($*p < 0.05$). Figure 2 and Table 5 display the hypothesis testing results of the multiple-group analysis. For H7, the male group demonstrated significantly greater effects ($\beta = 0.277$, $**p < 0.010$) compared with the female group ($\beta = 0.226$, $*p < 0.050$), which suggests that male tourists reported a more significant influence of SAT on their ADV compared with female tourists, thereby confirming H7.

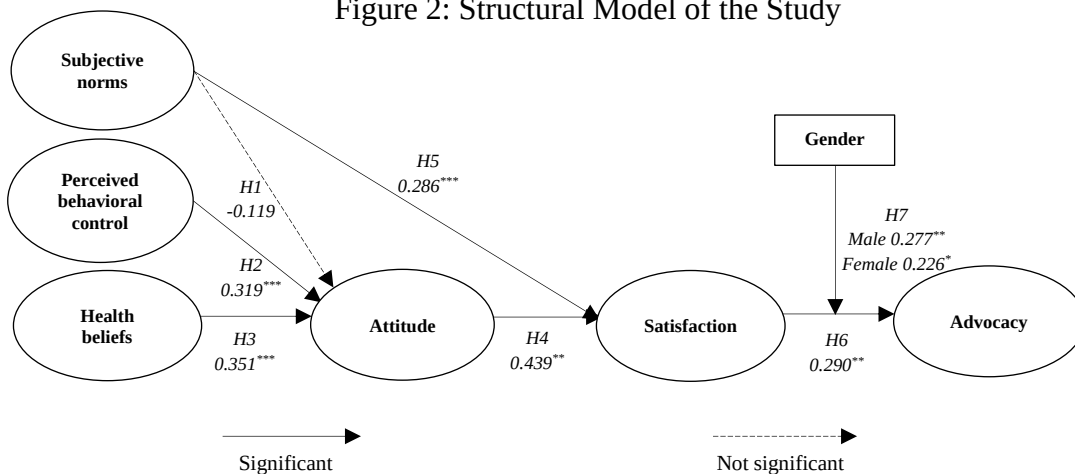
Table 5: Hypothesis Testing for Multiple-Group Analysis.

Hypothesis	Result	Tourist groups		Unconstrained model χ^2 (df = 210)	Constrained model χ^2 (df = 211)	$\Delta \chi^2$	Δp -value
		<i>b</i> Male	<i>b</i> Female				
H7	Accepted	0.277**	0.226*	371.893	379.236	7.343	0.007**

Note: *b* = Path coefficient, * = $p < 0.050$, ** = $p < 0.010$

Source: Authors' own work.

Figure 2: Structural Model of the Study



Source: Authors' own work.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This research investigated the direct influences of subjective norms, PBC, and health beliefs on tourists' attitudes toward local food, the direct impacts of subjective norms and attitudes on tourists' satisfaction with local food, and the direct effect of satisfaction on tourists' advocacy behavior. The findings not only provide important insights into the dynamics of local food tourism and its effects on consumer behavior but

also highlight the significance of behavioral and attitudinal elements in influencing tourist satisfaction and advocacy intentions.

Subjective norms exerted an insignificant effect on attitudes toward local food (H1: $\beta = -0.119$, $p > 0.050$), which contradicts the findings of previous research (Banerjee & Quinn, 2022; Shin & Hancer, 2016) but matches the conclusions of Testa et al. (2019). This insignificant association indicates that compared with social forces, tourists' personal preferences and judgments have a greater influence on their attitudes toward local food tourism.

Consistent with theoretical predictions, PBC exerted a significant direct impact on tourists' attitudes toward local food. The notable correlation between these variables (H2: $\beta = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$) corroborates the arguments of previous studies suggesting that a greater perceived control promotes the development of positive attitudes (Fischer & Karl, 2022; Hagger et al., 2022). This finding indicates that tourists who are confident in their capacity to participate in local food experiences tend to cultivate more positive attitudes toward these activities.

The significant positive correlation between health beliefs and attitudes toward local food (H3: $\beta = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with the findings of previous studies showing that health-related beliefs affect attitudes across diverse cultural contexts (Oliveira et al., 2026; Shah & Thanki Joshi, 2024). When tourists view local food as good for the health, they tend to develop more favorable attitudes and improve their overall assessment of local dining experiences.

The significant positive correlation between attitudes and satisfaction with local food (H4: $\beta = 0.439$, $p < 0.001$) corroborates the arguments of previous studies regarding the essential role of attitudes in influencing tourist satisfaction. These studies suggest that contentment with local culinary experiences considerably enhances overall destination satisfaction (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2020; Nematzadeh et al., 2024). When tourists cultivate positive perceptions of local cuisine, their favorable assessments increase the pleasure they derive from their gastronomic experiences.

Subjective norms had a significant direct effect on tourist satisfaction with local food (H5: $\beta = 0.286$, $p < 0.001$), which is consistent with the findings of previous works (Canova et al., 2020; Soltani et al., 2021). Tourist attitudes toward local food are not swayed by subjective norms, which implies that their initial assessments are defined by their individual preferences and not by social influences. Nevertheless, their genuine satisfaction with local food experiences may still be impacted by these norms.

Tourist satisfaction with local food exerted a significant direct impact on tourist advocacy behavior (H6: $\beta = 0.290$, $***p < 0.001$), which suggests that satisfied tourists tend to endorse local food destinations. This finding supports the arguments of previous research indicating that culinary satisfaction influences destination advocacy behaviors and enhances revisit intentions (Ali et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2022), thereby confirming satisfaction as a crucial driver of tourist advocacy in the local food tourism context.

Gender slightly moderated the relationship between tourist satisfaction and advocacy (H7: male $\beta = 0.277$, $**p < 0.010$; female $\beta = 0.226$, $*p < 0.050$). Although both coefficients were positive and statistically significant, they showed a minor numerical difference ($\Delta\beta = 0.051$), thereby indicating a tendency, rather than a clear distinction, in how satisfaction translates to advocacy between genders. This finding partially supports the conclusions of Dedeoğlu et al. (2019), who observed gender-based differences in tourist behavior and decision-making concerning hedonic and utilitarian consumption motivations. Nevertheless, these findings contradict the arguments of other studies that did not reveal any gender differences (Nejati & Parakhodi Moghaddam, 2012; Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015) and those studies suggesting that females demonstrate higher levels of local food trial (Kim et al., 2009) and valuation

(Chen & Huang, 2018) compared to males. Such inconsistency, along with the modest effect size noted in this study, highlights significant within-gender differences and stresses the necessity of refraining from overgeneralization.

The hedonic and utilitarian framework provides a novel perspective for understanding the slight variation in satisfaction–advocacy relationships between males and females despite their significant overlap. Male tourists may be slightly inclined toward straightforward satisfaction-advocacy pathways, while female tourists might participate in intricate evaluative processes. The variation among individuals within each gender group is likely greater than the average differences observed between these groups. This intricate pattern points to the nuanced impacts of gender on tourist behavior that depend on the context being studied, thereby underscoring the necessity for future research to investigate intersectional factors and individual differences that could explain the significant variability reported within these gender categories.

5.2 Practical Implications

This research offers practical recommendations for destination management organizations, local restaurant entrepreneurs, and policymakers. First, stakeholders should develop focused marketing strategies that highlight tourists' ability to make informed decisions about local food options by offering detailed information regarding local cuisine, restaurant locations, and food safety standards. This approach involves crafting comprehensive online local food guides that showcase restaurant locations and menus, designing mobile applications that offer local food maps accompanied by real-time reviews, implementing clear local food safety certifications, and supplying multilingual resources regarding local ingredients and their cultural importance. Second, policymakers should establish safety and quality standards for local food to enhance tourist confidence, while local eateries should enhance tourists' PBC by offering clear food item descriptions on their menus (including information on their ingredients) and training their staff on how to help tourists make informed choices.

The gender-specific satisfaction–advocacy conversion patterns detected in this study can guide the formulation of strategies for promoting tourists' revisit intention to enjoy a destination's local cuisine. These strategies should combine quick fulfillment with useful advantages by providing straightforward incentives, such as loyalty points, discounts for repeat customers, and previews of new menu items, which emphasize immediate rewards and tangible benefits given that males are more likely to convert their satisfaction into recommendations. This straightforward strategy takes advantage of males' preference for explicit value propositions and effective incentive schemes that offer immediate satisfaction in addition to tangible dining benefits. However, this approach may not be effective for females, who tend to support local food destinations in a more complex way. By acknowledging that female tourists need engagement that extends beyond transactional benefits to encompass cultural immersion, storytelling, and social belonging, this multifaceted approach ultimately cultivates long-term loyalty through meaningful experiential connections. Strategies tailored to female tourists should thus emphasize relationship building through personalized cultural experiences, invitations to seasonal events, and establishing emotional connections within the community that make these tourists feel valued as members rather than as mere visitors.

6. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has multiple limitations that open new avenues for future research. First, the sample was predominantly composed of tourists aged 31 years and older (72%),

and further analysis verified the absence of any notable age-related bias in the results. Future research should utilize stratified sampling to investigate potential age-specific patterns. Second, the absence of a significant effect from subjective norms to attitudes toward local food also warrants further examination. Future research should investigate alternative conceptualizations and measurement methods for subjective norms and analyze specific reference groups (such as family, friends, and travel companions) individually or explore cultural contexts where social influence may be more significant. Qualitative research methods can be used to elucidate the manifestation of social pressures in tourists' local food decision-making processes.

Third, this study investigated gender as a moderator of the satisfaction–advocacy relationship; however, future research should examine additional demographic variables (e.g., age, education level, income, cultural background) and psychographic characteristics (e.g., food neophobia and environmental consciousness) as potential moderators to enhance the present understanding of the conditions under which satisfaction influences advocacy behaviors. More extensive measurement scales that are specifically designed for local food tourism contexts should also be created to improve construct validity. Examining seasonal fluctuations in tourist reactions and evaluating the influence of travel intent, length of stay, and previous destination experience may also enhance the current understanding of the contextual elements that influence local food consumption behaviors.

Fourth, focusing on a single destination can restrict the generalizability of the results, thereby highlighting the need for future studies to replicate the findings of this work across various cultural and geographical contexts. Comparative investigations of different regions of Thailand (e.g., northern, southern, central, and northeastern Thailand) may reveal considerable differences in local food attitudes and behaviors. Longitudinal research designs can more effectively capture the temporal dynamics of attitude formation and behavioral intentions, and developing more comprehensive measurement scales tailored for local food tourism contexts may enhance construct validity. Analyzing seasonal variations in tourist responses and assessing the impact of travel purpose, duration of stay, and prior destination experience may also improve the present understanding of the contextual factors affecting local food consumption behaviors.

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AI declaration

Artificial intelligence tools were utilized exclusively for grammatical verification and linguistic refinement to enhance the clarity and readability of this manuscript. All substantive content, analysis, data interpretation, results, and conclusions are the original work of the authors

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