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*Article*

# The Influence on Local Gastronomy of the Michelin Guide Assessment Criteria: A Case study in Phuket Old Town, Thailand.

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**Abstract:** The present study took into account the influence of local cuisine in the restaurants awarded Michelin stars in Phuket Old Town, influenced by Chinese cultural diffusion to other cultures contributing to a unique culture in the Malay Peninsula. It sought to investigate components of local gastronomic tourism and perceived value towards the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town, delving into the relationship between these two factors. In particular, a structural equation model (SEM) was adopted to explore such a relationship, with an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess a measurement model of latent variables and accuracy and reliability of the structure. The study was conducted in the context of Phuket Old Town, Phuket Province, Thailand, renowned as a City of Gastronomy. The results demonstrated that the phenomenon of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town embodied the perceived value of local cuisine, origins, history, traditions, rituals, and unique lifestyles; particularly, the components of local gastronomic tourism reflected the significance of food products in the food industry, together with the organization of local cuisine activities and festivals. This finding contributed to an understanding of the reasons behind the perceived value among consumers traveling to this town to gain experiences of local cuisine in the restaurants awarded with Michelin stars. It could serve as a policy for improving food establishments' quality and standards based on the specified criteria to foster sustainable gastronomic tourism in Thailand.

**Keywords:** gastronomy's components; Michelin Guide; Perceived value

## 1. Introduction

Food production is associated with food products, food policies, nutritional therapy, food preservation, transportation, food preparation, cooking, meals, table etiquette, and traditions [1]. Food security across different levels, namely personal, household, national, regional and global levels, is attained through physical and economic access to an adequate, hygienic and nutritious food supply, fulfilling dietary needs and food preferences among individuals for a healthy life [2]. Additionally, food itself is intertwined with the science of food which portrays the cultural values, heritage, traditions, and engagement of communities of each locality, contributing to the development of modern tourism through gastronomic tourism with its crucial roles in protecting and conserving food cultural heritage, creating job opportunities, and distributing income within communities [3]. In 1990, "food" was viewed as a component of tourism for tourists to consume at restaurants, hotels or resorts, complemented by additional services to ensure the convenience and comfort among them [4]. Nevertheless, food prices have become increasingly affordable, and food has been seen as playing an essential role in portraying society. More importantly, gastronomic tourism has been regarded as an integral experience attributed to a combination of the environment, nature, culture, services, amenities, accessibility, being a good host, and the identity of a particular area. All of these constitute an experience which tourists will gain from such a place especially through tasting the food and learning the culinary processes in each area [5]. Hence, gastronomic

tourism has influences on culture, society, the environment and economy and is of great importance for modern tourism which is a foundation of strategies and policies of each country in the tourism and hospitality industry [6,7].

The Michelin Guide, also referred to as the “Red Guide”, serves as an influential and powerful guide in the world of fine dining. To put it differently, it acts as a certification of standards for the fine dining experience and as an award which many renowned chefs worldwide wish to achieve. In addition, the Michelin Guide is used as a reference or support by consumers, essentially acting as proof of the premium ingredients used in fine dining as well as the presentation of distinction in terms of culinary excellence [8,9]. Without the need for fixed recipes representing the customer satisfaction standards, the Michelin places its focus on quality, techniques, flavors, the chefs’ personality, the guests’ participation, and financial aspects [10].

The Michelin Guide entered Thailand in 2017 in collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), marking the 6th country in Asia to have its own Michelin guide with the hope that this guide would act as a strong stepping-stone to establishing the country’s global recognition in the tourism sector. Specifically, it was pioneered in Bangkok, being a destination for gastronomic tourists and providing them with unique experiences. The very first guide was published in 2018 with the name “Michelin Guide Thailand 2018”, which contained a list of restaurants in Bangkok [11,12]. These joint efforts were made to promote and advertise Thailand’s gastronomic tourism, and recommendations of restaurants in Bangkok through the cooperation between state agencies and the Michelin guide have become a standard for Thai restaurants and chefs to achieve global recognition. Furthermore, the restaurants awarded by Michelin can attract tourists around the globe to visit a particular place as their destination; hence, the Michelin-awarded restaurants in Thailand play a crucial role in the development of the national and international economy [13–15].

Thailand is one of the countries in Asia with the development of marketing, tourism, and the hospitality industry under the slogan “The Land of Smiles”, and it is renowned for its cuisine, excellent infrastructures, and reasonable prices for amenities [16]. Additionally, it was the very first country to implement culinary diplomacy, also referred to as food diplomacy, in 2002 under the “Global Thai” campaign to illustrate its role as the Kitchen of the World and establish Thai restaurants worldwide as representative through culinary diplomacy [17]. Its tangible culture has contributed to the increasing popularity of Thai cuisine across the globe, cultivating a sense of pride in the national image; this enables the government to endorse Thainess in fostering the tourism industry and promoting Thai cuisine on a global level [18]. One of the popular destinations in Thailand is Phuket, located in Southern Thailand. It is characterized as the largest island in the Andaman Sea and is markedly influenced by China, reflected in its highly distinctive culture, traditions, and food. Apart from the Chinese, other ethnic groups live in this island [19]. However, Phuket is Thailand’s first province and one of the 18 cities worldwide declared by UNESCO as a “City of Gastronomy” in 2015, portraying its cultural heritage and local cuisine [20]. This illustrates the culinary prowess transforming into a soft power, reflecting identity [21] through traditional recipes and practices which have been inherited from generation to generation within families. This inheritance is contributed by a commitment to preserving and promoting traditions in annual festivals to revitalize the role of knowledge of traditional cuisine, craftsmanship, and local arts [22]. Culinary culture stemming from cultural diffusion and multiculturalism can reflect the uniqueness and identity of the community’s way of life in Phuket. Given the entry into social dynamization and the trend of globalization, tourism serves as a means to access a variety of cultural resources, learning, and cultural exchanges, with food utilized as an instrument in presenting diverse cultural images. Moreover, the preservation of local cuisine to ensure sustainability can be practiced in parallel with gastronomic tourism; this is aimed at promoting local cuisine at a global level through the collaboration with the Michelin Guide, creating the trend of gastronomic tourism in line with the government’s policy to promote local cuisine as the Kitchen of the World and employ food as a representative of diplomacy for Thailand through the presentation of soft power.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Local food

There has not been a legal or universally accepted definition of local food. Still, it is acknowledged to be associated with geographical characteristics and is described in relation to social aspects and supply chains [23]. Initially, the development of local food did not witness any increase, largely attributed to stagnant consumer demand. However, with the efforts of state agencies to promote local economies [24], the increased momentum stemming from their promotion of local food has enabled the market to grow and achieve wider recognition, emerging as a choice for consumers. In the United States, for example, state agencies implemented the initiative to support small-scale local farmers, promote the marketing of products produced within the state, and establish the relationships between producers and consumers to raise awareness among consumers about upstream food ingredients. While the development of local agricultural markets in the United States reached its peak in 1990, it continued to grow in Europe in the following decade [25]. In respect of politics and quality, local cuisine serves to support farmers and conserve resources; it acts as a link to the policy to foster local economies and provides benefits to the local environment, thereby instilling positive attitudes into consumers [26]. Nevertheless, local cuisine can be typically regarded as food cultivated in the areas close to consumers, and there has been a global growth in consumption of locally sourced food, commonly referred to as “local food” [27].

Local food is described as food the locals cook from locally available ingredients, namely plants and animals, and is commonly consumed among a particular group of people. It is cooked through various cooking methods inherited within families or typically preferred within communities. Local food varies by geographical features and the environment. However, consumption of food cooked with natural ingredients is simply a means of human survival through repeated trial and error to ensure satisfaction before inheriting knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation; this has developed into the culture or identity of the locals, in turn emerging as local food [28,29]. In addition, local food derived from local wisdom in using locally available resources is seen to be associated with two aspects of wisdom as follows: 1) wisdom in the use of natural food resources entails searching for ingredients within the local area and processing them into food; and 2) wisdom in the use of non-local food resources involves adapting or mixing non-local ingredients with local ones to create flavors which are not only palatable but also suitable for the local area with inherited wisdom, reflecting its way of life and identity [30]. National dishes are cooked using the local ingredients of each country. Additionally, culinary heritage is relevant to table etiquette, including drinking or dining, creating social and cultural value for different or unequal culinary inheritance; hence, it is characterized as a combination of different components, including society, inheritance, identity, traditions, and evolution [31–34]. Simply put, local food is concerned with the consumers' engagement in geographical areas, traditions, or the food consumed by individuals with economic and social backgrounds [35]. Two significant trends with characteristics in future development include consumer preferences for organic plant-based food and locally produced food, shaped by various factors contributing to interests in organic products, and consumption of local produce or food with the aim of reducing carbon footprints [54]. Those in the latter group are referred to as “Locavores”; despite no official definition given, it is widely acknowledged that this group predominantly purchases locally grown or produced products, as well as local cuisine. Still, the Oxford University Press introduced this term in 2007 [36].

Food has been acknowledged as playing a crucial role in shaping tourism and hospitality factors [37]. In addition, it is part of destination management for development by showcasing local cuisine and food; this entails establishing the collaboration between organizations and local communities in presenting and enhancing the image of tourist destinations [38]. It has been found that one-third of tourist's travel expenses is spent on food, reflecting the importance placed on food consumption during their travels. In particular, local food acts as an integral component during leisure travel or business trips in the tourism industry, and eating can stimulate all five senses, including vision, tactile, auditory, taste, and olfaction [39]. Based on Cohen's phenomenological method (1994),



gastronomic tourists can be classified into four groups, namely, existential, experimental, diversionary, and recreational. Among all types, existential gastronomic tourists are most associated with local cuisine; in fact, they tend to consider that culinary knowledge can be enriched through local food and beverage experiences. Additionally, indulgence in local food allows them to experience a sense of gaining comprehensive cultural knowledge of each destination, and they are typically averse to expensive food owing to the atmosphere of the establishments. Hence, the perception of the effects of local food varies according to motivation, which is a prominent factor in the tourists' experiences [40]; some consumers place importance on locally grown agricultural products with qualities, such as freshness, eco-friendliness, and other forms of beliefs [60].

## 2.2. *Perceived Value*

The concept of perceived value was a key business issue in the 1990s and has continued to attract attention up to the present. During 2006-2008, the Marketing Science Institute gave precedence to the issue of perceived value in its research. The continuous development has contributed to the emergence of 'value creation' among academics and different industries, and various organizations which have recognized the significant role of perceived value in strategic management [41,42]. Increasing value can be attained through a combination of economics, time cost, physical attributes, and spiritual benefits [43]. Moreover, the concept of perceived value exhibits differences in structural aspects, such as value, utility, prices, and quality. Notwithstanding a considerable number of related studies, there exists no clear relationship between purchasers and sellers [44-46]. Specifically, in marketing research, 'value' and 'values' are essentially similar concepts, regardless of notable differences. Specifically speaking, value stems from evaluation and indicates the trade-off between benefits, illustrating the interaction between consumers and products or services, whereas values are concerned with the standards, rules, evaluation criteria, norms, goals, or ideals used in those evaluations. More importantly, values are characterized as the individuals' beliefs in their goals and self-esteem, and they serve as each individual's criteria in determining their preferences, reflecting ultimate end-states of existence [47-49].

Perception can be described as a process of selection, processing, evaluation, and interpretation of meaning and visual content through stimuli to articulate meanings in the verbal and non-verbal languages of individuals. In general, each individual's process of perception is derived from sensations triggered by exposure or reaction to stimuli, including visual, auditory, olfactory, taste, and tactile sensations through various bodily organs, such as eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin; subsequently, these sensations are transmitted to the brain for further interpretation [50]. Nonetheless, customer perceived value suggests consumers' awareness of the quality of products and utility of those products or services; specifically, this is determined by processing the perception of what is received and consumers' reception as well as assessing the overall benefits of the product. This constitutes the components of "receiving" and "giving" products with remarkable value compared to consumer expectations and their true benefits [51,52]. Evidently, perceived value is a broad and comprehensive concept going beyond the exchange of utility and prices [53]. Specifically, Zeithaml has categorized value into four aspects as follows: 1) value as low price; 2) value as whatever the consumer wants in a product; 3) value as the quality given from the price the customer pays; and 4) value as what is gained for what is given.

Organizations or companies differ in their strengths determined by the value of the product delivered to consumers and their ability to address consumer needs. These differences in value lead to competition across different industries. The overall value of the product's utility is determined based on what consumers receive (get) and lose (give) in respect of the product's worth; if the value exceeds what they give, they will be able to recognize or perceive the product's value [51,54]. However, perceived value entails recognizing the components of value through consumers' experiences in making purchasing decisions drawing upon their knowledge, thoughts, and positive or negative attitudes towards businesses [55]. It indirectly shapes consumers' purchasing behavior through expectations and satisfaction before and after the purchase of products or services and simultaneously has direct and indirect influences on businesses [56]. It can be stated that perceived

value is intertwined with the relationship between customers and products, along with utility or benefits gained in exchange for money or other forms of expenses incurred, including cognitive and affective [51,57]. Thus, in certain instances, perceived value is set as the primary goal, followed by consumer loyalty, since it is viewed as the behavioral intention towards the service providers. With the emergence of an exchange in that particular manner, perceived value is of paramount importance [58].

### 2.3. *Michelin Guide*

The Michelin Guide is a well-recognized and influential guide with restaurant recommendations [59]. The first guide was published in France in 1989, with the aim of increasing tire sales [1], a product manufactured by two brothers Andre and Eduard Michelin, by encouraging more road trips [60]. The Michelin Guide is accompanied by restaurant maps and awards for excellent restaurants competing across the globe in other guidebooks. Among the many thousands of restaurants, only 500 are selected to be included in the category of excellent restaurants. It is a compact and portable printed booklet with 400 pages, containing information about car maintenance. Information about restaurants was published in 1992, with details exclusively about large cities. Initially, a 3-star rating system was implemented before adopting a 5-star rating system, equivalent to the standards of the hotel industry. The system gives precedence to comfort, and the 5-star restaurant is distinguished as "Grand luxe" [61]. The Michelin Red Guide which was acknowledged as the definitive reference for the quality of French restaurants published more than 800,000 copies per year. In fact, it is comparable to a guidebook which spans ten countries in Europe; with the new guide published each season, restaurant critics will compile a list of the favorite restaurants which should be featured in the guide [62,63].

During the initial period, its mission was to promote the culture of tourism and eating out as well as providing assistance to individuals with suitable choices. It was founded on six core values, namely anonymity, independence, expertise, reliability, passion, and quality [64]. The guide provided recommendations about accommodation and restaurants selected by a team of 120 experts in evaluating those establishments. The recommendations contained in the guidebook are determined by product quality, expertise in taste and culinary skills, the chefs' personality, value for money, and consistency in flavor and services. The Michelin's star rating-based system is broadly recognized [65]. Still, it is assumed that 1-star awarded restaurants are considered of relatively good quality; those awarded with 2 stars offer excellent cooking or food preparation and are worth visiting, while those with 3 stars are considered of the highest quality and worth a special visit. Additionally, the fork and spoon symbol represents different aspects of amenities or conveniences or quality, such as décor, facilities, and services, with ratings ranging from 1 described as relatively comfortable to 5 labeled as luxurious. The Michelin Guide also gives Big Gourmand awards to restaurants which have not been awarded any star but are

The Thailand Michelin Guide first appeared in 2017 in collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). They combined their efforts in carrying out The Michelin Guide Thailand project, spanning five years from 2017-2022, aimed at supporting and producing a guide recommending Thai restaurants selected by Michelin and encouraging tourists worldwide to explore culinary and travel experiences in Thailand. In particular, this project entailed developing a guide for restaurants and accommodation in Bangkok, thereby establishing Thai restaurants and tourist attractions as travel destinations [69]. In fact, Thailand is the 6th country in Asia to have its own guide, with the expectation that this guide would serve as a strong foundation for achieving global renown in the tourism sector. Specifically, it was initiated in Bangkok, a destination for gastronomic tourists, with the aim of offering them distinct experiences. In 2018, the very first guide was produced, named "Michelin Guide Thailand 2018". Inside the guide, restaurants in Bangkok were ranked; in fact, the Michelin 1-star award was given to seven restaurants in Thailand for the first time, including Jai Fai, Bo lan, Saneh Jan, Sra Bua by Kiin Kiin, Chim by Siam Wisdom, Paste, and Nahm. Later in 2019, the Michelin Guide published another guide for Thai restaurants titled "Michelin Guide Thailand 2019", featuring an additional list of restaurants and accommodation in Phuket and Phang-nga, and the

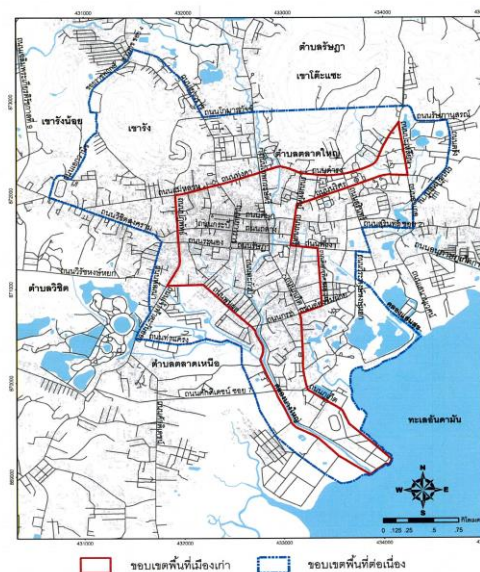
guide “Michelin Guide Thailand 2020” published in 2020 expanded its list to include Chiang Mai, a major city in Thailand’s northern region. In 2022, the Michelin Guide made further efforts to feature destinations in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in its guide entitled “The MICHELIN Guide Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai, Phuket & Phang-Nga 2022”. Recently, the Michelin Guide Thailand has selected four provinces in the northeastern region, namely Nakhon Ratchasima, Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Kaen, and Udon Thani, as new destinations featured in the 6th guide with the title of “Michelin Guide Thailand 2023” [12,70,71].

### 3. Study Area

The present study was carried out in the context of Phuket Old Town, situated in Phuket Province in Thailand. In fact, the province is renowned for its economic impact, contributing to the country’s revenue through tourism and hospitality industries. Each year, a tremendous number of tourists visit Phuket for its image and fame fostered through public relations and the promotional activities of state agencies. Furthermore, Phuket is regarded as a crucial destination among tourists when thinking of Thailand; the province features multicultural diversity, living cultural heritage, and scenic nature.

Phuket was declared as a City of Gastronomy by UNESCO in 2018, being one of the 18 countries worldwide in its Creative Cities project carried out in parallel with its declaration of the World’s natural and historical heritage sites. In particular, the project in question was associated with intangible cultural heritage, with the incorporation of modernity in creativity or innovation with its original identity. Given the organizations’ evaluation through cultural diversity stemming from a pluralistic society of diverse ethnic groups, it contributes to the incorporation of culture, traditions, beliefs, rituals, and the traditional way of life. Consequently, it leads to the emergence of culture derived from the unique traits and identity of traditional culture, and in turn cultural dynamics arise from convergence with the pluralistic society of the area.

The present study was intended to strengthen agencies in the food business sector in Phuket by devising strategies to enhance the capacity for expanding gastronomic tourism to other provinces in Thailand; this involved showcasing culinary identity certified by the Michelin Guide’s assessment criteria. It was also aimed at encouraging operators of food and beverage establishments, private agencies, local communities, and tourism-related agencies to organize food exhibitions or festivals. This would foster wide recognition of local cuisine, raise it to international standards, enhance chefs’ skills and food quality, and increase the nutritional benefits. Moreover, it would contribute to distributing income to the agricultural industry which grows a variety of vegetables, fruits, and spices in different regions across Thailand (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Phuket Old Town, Phuket, Thailand. **Source:** Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, (2017).

#### 4. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted using a deductive theoretical approach. In particular, a mixed-method approach was adopted. The quantitative research was carried out through cross-sectional research, utilizing a survey to collect the data and statistical tools to analyze relevant factors and variables. A questionnaire had been designed to investigate factors or variables used in studying local gastronomic tourism in a similar manner; it was adapted to the context of Phuket Old Town, Phuket, Thailand. The chosen factors and variables underwent the review of literature and instrument validation performed by experts in local gastronomic tourism, with the aim of assessing the relevance to the questions about each factor or variable in the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the qualitative research focused on examining policies for the development of tourism in Phuket, together with the current tourism situation. It was conducted in conjunction with the use of the questionnaire to analyze the results related to the development of tourism in Phuket Old Town. In particular, a focus group discussion was held, with 8 tourism experts invited to partake in a discussion aimed at seeking appropriate practices. Initially, the researchers presented them with the results of problems and threats from internal and external factors arising since the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the tourism and hospitality industry in Phuket. The opinions shared in the discussion were drawn upon to determine appropriate guidelines for the development of local gastronomic tourism which fulfills the Michelin Guide's 5 rating criteria in Phuket Old Town. Simultaneously, the data was analyzed through descriptive analysis and content analysis in order to gain in-depth insights and identify the stakeholders. The data was further classified and interpreted to identify components and uncover relationships within the data.

The questionnaire consisted of five parts in correspondence with the hypotheses or the proposed model. Part I contained seven questions to describe demographic characteristics, followed by Part II with five questions to gather data regarding travel behavior, Part III with 34 questions about the components of gastronomic tourism, Part IV with 41 questions concerned with perceived value, and Part V with 20 questions related to the Michelin Guide assessment. Statistical analysis was conducted using ordinal-type data to assess the questions through the 5-point Likert rating scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to implementation, the questionnaire was piloted with 40 tourists in an area with a close resemblance to Phuket Old Town; the area selected was Yaowarat, Bangkok. The pilot study was aimed at measuring the reliability and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. Subsequently, the questionnaire was revised to ensure ease of understanding among the tourists.

This questionnaire was designed to survey the tourists visiting Phuket Old Town during December 2022 and January 2023. Specifically, it took into consideration the initial inquiries regarding dining at the Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants in Phuket Old Town. As a result, the sample included domestic and international tourists with dining experiences at those restaurants. In terms of the population and sample size calculation, Cochran W. G's formula for an unknown population size was employed with a confidence level at 95 percent and a margin of error at 5 percent, and the sample was chosen by convenience sampling. Consequently, 400 questionnaires represented the sample of the tourists and would be employed for data analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed to determine and classify variables with correlated results; these variables were referred to as factors or dimensions. Moreover, the analyses were conducted to assess accuracy and a model fit of the grouping in relation to gastronomy components and perceived value. After the data collection through the questionnaires, the data was tabulated and analyzed using SPSS Version 26 and AMOS Version 23 to assess the model.



**Table 1.** Details about variables. Source: Author’s elaboration.

Factors	Variables	Labels	(References)
Gastronomy’s Components	Gastronomic heritage	GASHER	[72–78]
	Gastronomic products, producers and food industries	GASPRO	[72–78]
	Hospitality sector	HOSSEC	[72–78]
	Specialist trade	SPETRA	[72–78]
	Events and activities	EVENAC	[72–78]
	Venues for gastronomic education and research	VEGAS	[73–78]
Perceived Value	Product Value	PROV	[79]
	Service Performance Value	SERV	[79,80]
	Personal Value	PERV	[79]
	Image Value	IMAV	[79]
	Social Value	SOCV	[55,79,81,82]
	Functional Value	FUNC	[55,81,82]
	Emotional Value	EMOV	[80–82,82]
	Marketing Value	MARV	[80,82]
Michelin Guide’s 5 Assessment Criteria	The quality of ingredients	QUAIN	[83]
	Mastery of cooking techniques	MASTEC	[83]
	The chef’s personality	CHEPER	[83]
	Value for money	VAMO	[83]
	The consistency of cooking	CONCOO	[83]

5. Results

Prior to conducting the exploratory factor analysis, the frequency analysis was carried out to examine various data aspects, namely missing values, atypical values, correlations between variables, univariate normality, and a multivariate normal distribution. However, based on the analysis, no values were found beyond a 5-point scale, while the missing values for the variable did not exceed 5%.

5.1. Study Sample

Demographic characteristics are regarded as a significant context for understanding attitudes and the perceptions of consumers or tourists that influence gastronomy components and perceived value derived from dining experiences at Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants. As illustrated in Table 2, the results demonstrated that the total number of the respondents was 400 individuals, with 67.75% (n = 271) being female and 32.25% (n= 129) being male. In addition, a good share of them were aged 31-40 years (30.75%, n = 123), followed by 21-30 years (29.75%, n = 119), 51-60 years (13.75%, n = 55), 41-50 years, (12.75%, n = 51), above 61 years (10.25%, n = 41), and below 20 years (2.75%, n = 11) respectively. In respect to education, the majority of the respondents completed a bachelor’s degree (58%, n= 233), while a relatively small number of them held a degree higher than a bachelor’s degree (23.50%, n = 94) and lower than a bachelor’s degree (18.25%, n = 73). Regarding occupations, a considerable number of the respondents were employed (87.25%, n = 349), students (17%, n = 4.25), and unemployed (8.5%, n = 34).

Table 2. Results of demographic characteristics.

Variables	Categories	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	271	67.75
	Male	129	32.25
Age	Below 20 years	11	2.75
	21 – 30 years	119	29.75
	31 – 40 years	123	30.75
	41 – 50 years	51	12.75
	51 – 60 years	55	13.75
	Above 61 years	41	10.25
Education	Under bachelor’s degree	94	23.50
	Bachelor’s degree	233	58
	Higher than bachelor’s degree	73	18.25
Occupation	Students	17	4.25
	Employed	349	87.25
	Unemployed	34	8.50

5.2. Results of the questionnaire

The results displayed in Table 3 showed a high mean score, suggesting a correlation with local cuisine in Phuket Old Town among the respondents. Based on the analysis, it was uncovered that gastronomic heritage obtained a mean score of 4.02 (S.D. = .873), while gastronomic products, producers and food industries reached a mean score of 3.86 (S.D. = .894). The mean score of the hospitality sector was 3.79 (S.D. = .881), and that of specialist trade was 3.91 (S.D. = .875), with events and activities at 3.79 (S.D. = .900) and venues for gastronomic education and research at 3.93 (S.D. = .864). The overall mean score was 3.88 (S.D. = .881).

With reference to Table 3, it can be inferred that the respondents had positive attitudes towards the perceived value of local food in Phuket Old Town. In particular, considering each variable, product value reached a mean score of 3.79 (S.D. = .941), and service performance value attained a mean score of 3.99 (S.D. = .898). The mean score of personal value was 3.92 (S.D. = .894), while that of image value was 4.02 (S.D. = .876). Moreover, social value had a mean score of 4.04 (S.D. = .825), and functional value obtained a mean score of 4.09 (S.D. = .831), with emotional value at 4.00 (S.D. = .881) and marketing value at 4.14 (S.D. = .817). Considering all variables, the overall mean score was 3.88 (S.D. = .881).

Table 3. illustrates mean scores and standard deviations of each variable.

Factors	Variables	Mean	S.D.
Gastronomy components	Gastronomic heritage	4.02	.873
	Gastronomic products, producers and food industries	3.86	.894
	Hospitality sector	3.79	.881
	Specialist trade	3.91	.875
	Events and activities	3.79	.900
	Venues for gastronomic education and research	3.93	.864
	Overall	3.88	.881
Perceived value	Product value	3.79	.941
	Service performance value	3.99	.898
	Personal value	3.92	.894
	Image value	4.02	.876
	Social value	4.04	.825
	Functional value	4.09	.831

Michelin Guide's 5 Assessment Criteria	Emotional value	4.00	.881
	Marketing value	4.14	.817
	<b>Overall</b>	4.00	.870
	The quality of ingredients	3.78	.912
	Mastery of cooking techniques	3.68	.930
	The chef's personality	3.67	.892
	Value for money	4.14	.809
	The consistency of cooking	4.19	.774
	<b>Overall</b>	3.89	.863

The analysis of the mean score of the variables under the factor 5 Michelin Guide Assessment criteria for restaurants and local cuisine in Phuket Old Town showed that the quality of ingredients reached a mean score of 3.78 (S.D. = .912), while mastery of cooking techniques obtained a mean score of 3.68 (S.D. = .930), with the chef's personality at 3.67 (S.D. = .892). Additionally, value for money had a mean score of 4.14 (S.D. = .809), and the mean score of the consistency of cooking was 4.19 (S.D. = .774). The overall mean score was 3.89 (S.D. = .863).

This finding underscores the necessity for continuous efforts in promoting local food in Phuket Old Town according to the Michelin Guide's rating criteria; it would enable local cuisine to be widely recognized and globally accepted through gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town.

Based on the results presented in the table, it can be noticed that the respondents exhibited a relatively high level of opinion about the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, with the highest mean score of 4.19 (S.D. = .774) and 4.14 (S.D. = .809), respectively. This finding suggests that the value for money and the consistency between visits are of importance for perceived value and gastronomic components, in that they can contribute to promoting the sustainability of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town.

On the contrary, the lowest mean score of the variable was 3.67 (S.D. = .892), which is still relatively high. This implies that the respondents recognized the chef's personality portrayed in his/her cuisine and were able to remember the similar types of dishes with distinctive qualities, setting them apart from those of other chefs. The overall mean score was 3.89 (S.D. = .863); this suggests that the respondents express a high level of satisfaction with the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, making local food or restaurants appealing for a return visit.

The results point out that gastronomic components, perceived value, and the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria in promoting local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town can draw more tourists largely owing to their favorable impressions of local food, service, and the valuable experiences received from dining at Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants. Accordingly, it can be anticipated that they will revisit in the future.

### 5.3. Measurement Model Validity—Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA)

The confirmatory factorial analysis can be described as a statistical technique employed to measure statistical values and "verify" model fit, ensuring the variable classification yields a good fit. This can be done by entering data into the software package [84]. Furthermore, this method of analysis is performed to validate accuracy of theoretical constructs or hypotheses by defining a group of observation variables and assessing the extent to which they correspond to the proposed theoretical concept. Confirmatory factorial analysis is aimed at identifying a dataset of items which can account for the constructs or factors hypothesized to be investigated through path loading. The results of the analysis can be utilized to test the accuracy of the conceptual framework in order to enhance the measurement standards. In the present study, the conceptual framework or the construct stemmed from exploratory factor analysis, and each construct must be improved and validated through confirmatory factorial analysis before constructing a measurement model. The measurement model can define the relationship between observable variables, latent variables, or the hypothesized construct, and can address issues of reliability and accuracy before the structural equation model attains a good fit.

Table 4 displays all three factors, including gastronomic components, perceived value, and 5 Michelin Guide assessment criteria; loading values in the table will indicate loading values of each variable in question.

**Table 4.** illustrates loading values for the study of variables through confirmatory factorial analysis.

Factors	Items	Gastronomy's Component	Perceived Value
	GASHER	.819	
	GASPRO	.855	
	HOSSEC	.908	
	SPETRA	.901	
	EVENAC	.861	
	VEGAS	.818	
	PROV		.849
	SERV		.870
	PERV		.677
	IMAV		.788
	SOCV		.910
	FUNC		.832
	EMOV		.905
	MARV		.783

Gastronomic components consisted of the following items, namely GASHER, GASPRO, HOSSEC, SPETRA, and EVENAC with factor loading values of .819, .855, .908, .901, .861, and .818, respectively. In the meantime, perceived value encompassed eight items, including PROV, SERV, PERV, IMAV, SOCV, FUNC, EMOV, and MARV with factor loading values of .849, .870, .677, .788, .910, .832, .905 and .783, respectively. In addition, the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria comprised five items, namely QUAIN, MASTEC, CHEPER, VAMO, and CONCOO.

High factor loading values indicate the degree to which each item is associated with the factors, utilized to measure each group or the construct. The finding suggests that all three factors, namely gastronomic components, perceived value and the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria, are unlike and can be drawn on to investigate different aspects of tourists' experiences from exploring local cuisine in Phuket Old Town during their travels.

Through the use of SPSS 26.0 to analyze Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values of each factor, the measurement of reliability and validity for three factors, including gastronomic components, perceived value and the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria showed that Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values were in the range of .811, .672, and .845 and the KMO values of those factors were .811, .672, and .845 respectively.

#### 5.4. Model Fitness

The collected data was computed with maximum likelihood estimation through Amos 26.0, and the following indices were obtained: Chi-square = 28.220, df = 19, CMIN/df = 1.486, GFI = .983, and RMSEA = .035. This suggests that the model was suitable with the data [85]. The results of the analysis of the hypotheses using the structural equation model are shown in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Hypothesis 1: Gastronomic components positively influence the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria. In testing this hypothesis, the analysis of paths directly affecting the assessment criteria was conducted. As shown in Figure 2 and Table 5, the results of the path analysis showed the statistically significant and robust correlation between gastronomic components and the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria. Their path coefficient was .10, showing a consistent relationship between the two variables, while the p-value was 0.00, demonstrating a strong and consistent correlation between both variables.



A high level of gastronomic components was correlated with events and activities, along with gastronomic products, producers and food industries. This had a positive influence on the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria. To put it differently, high-quality food produced from fresh ingredients rich in nutritional value and hygienic, as well as local food, clearly portrays the traditional and local identity of Phuket's cuisine. In particular, this is showcased through events and activities, food festivals, exhibitions, and night markets. This serves to enable tourists to discover local food in Phuket Old Town and encourage the locals to preserve their traditional food culture relevant to culture, traditions, and rituals. Apart from that, incorporation of the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria into establishing acceptable criteria can not only enhance the potential of food effectively but also elevate global recognition of local food. This finding has contributed to a better understanding of the role of gastronomic components, positively influencing the Michelin Guide's assessment, in defining the role of Phuket Old Town's local food. It is aimed at fostering and developing sustainable gastronomic tourism under its multiculturalism and it's renowned as a City of Gastronomy.

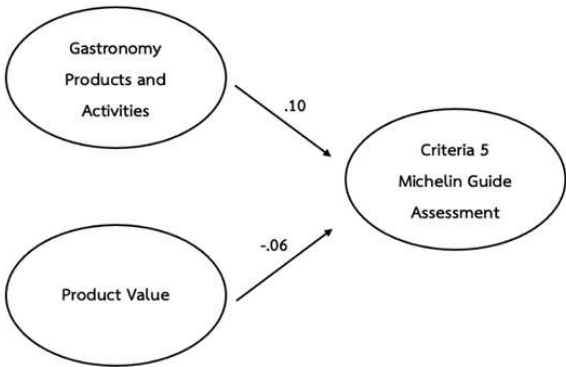
Hypothesis 2: Perceived value positively influences the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria. In testing the hypothesis, the path analysis was performed to establish the correlation between the two variables. The results showed that perceived value and the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria obtained a path coefficient of -.06 and a p-value of 0.00, illustrating a strong and consistent correlation between these two variables.

A high level of perceived value was correlated with the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria in terms of product value of local cuisine, service value of Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants, functional value through engagement and applications related to local food, and the development of quality standards for food production and service. In particular, the consistent correlation of two variables highlights that these aspects serve a crucial role in conserving and promoting local food in Phuket Old Town. Additionally, neighboring communities may exhibit an appreciation of the value of local cuisine. With improved knowledge, the communities are more likely to join efforts in preserving and safeguarding living culture, which shapes their way of life. In addition, it would enable them to prepare food for sale while adhering to the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria to raise various aspects of the standards for accommodating tourists who come to enjoy local cuisine. Moreover, they can serve to share knowledge with others or tourists interested in Phuket's local food culture, leaving them with memorable travel experiences. The results can be used to develop strategic plans, policies, and strategies which align with popular tourist attractions in Phuket. It would help promote local gastronomic tourism and preserve cultural heritage stemming from multiculturalism.

**Table 5.** shows the results of the structural equation.

Hypotheses Paths	Std.	S.E.	P	C.R.	Hypotheses
H <sub>1</sub> Gastronomy Products and Activities ---> Criteria 5 Michelin Guide Assessment	.10	.032	0.26	2.220	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> Product Value ---> Criteria 5 Michelin Guide Assessment	-.06	.032	***	15.599	Supported

Remark: (1) S.E. = Standard error; Std. = Standardized coefficient; CR = Composite reliability, and \*\*\* p < 0.001, \* p < 0.05.



**Figure 2.** shows the results of the path analysis of the equation based on standardized regression loading values.

5.5. Guidelines for the Development of Local Gastronomic Tourism

A mixed-method approach was used to investigate the policies for the development of tourism in Phuket. It was adopted as a guideline for qualitative research in combination with the questionnaire to analyze the results related to the development of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town. Specifically, it was carried out through a focus group discussion in which 8 tourism experts were invited to participate to discuss suitable guidelines. At the beginning, they were shown the results concerning problems and threats from internal and external factors emerging since the COVID-19 pandemic, having impacts on the tourism and hospitality industry in Phuket. In addition, the researchers proposed ideas for the development of gastronomic tourism using the Michelin Guide’s assessment criteria as a measure to foster the entrepreneurs’ capabilities in showcasing local cuisine and elevating it to an international level; their ideas were also concerned with preservation and sustainable tourism promotion. These stemmed from exchanging ideas with the experts on different topics to establish guidelines for the development of local gastronomic tourism, with the aim of delivering value and fulfilling consumer expectations to create memorable travel experiences in Phuket, thereby inspiring a potential revisit. Specifically, the opinions shared in the focus group discussion were used to establish appropriate guidelines for the development of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket in conjunction with descriptive analysis for quantitative data and content analysis; in doing so, this would provide in-depth insights and specify the stakeholders. Afterwards, the data was organized and interpreted to determine components and establish the relationships between the data.

Based on the focus group discussion, the guidelines for the development of local gastronomic tourism based on the Michelin Guide’s assessment criteria consisted of eight aspects as detailed below.

5.5.1) Research and Development: Research conducted by various agencies in relation to local cuisine could be built on towards tangible development. This can ensure that research is carried out in the right direction, and the insights can be further analyzed to foster, develop, or enhance weaknesses and, at the same time, increase strengths. This can be achieved by utilizing opportunities and challenges to formulate strategic plans, strategies, or policies for Phuket. Additionally, research and development of local gastronomic tourism according to the Michelin Guide’s assessment criteria is aimed at exploring food culture inherited from generation to generation, transforming it into a restaurant business. Notably, some of these establishments have been awarded by the Michelin Guide, resulting in a positive trend of local gastronomic tourism. This encourages tourists to travel to savor or experience local gastronomic tourism through the Michelin Guide-awarded establishments. The benefits derived from research can be built on to establish and develop travel routes; these can be integrated with other forms of tourism, which will in turn contribute to a rise in market shares. Moreover, the benefits from research can be used for research and development of local cuisine into ready-to-cook food, ready-to-eat food, sauces, or seasonings for sale as local

souvenirs and export, thereby promoting the image of Thai cuisine and in turn enabling its wider recognition. Research can also point out weaknesses which can be addressed and improved; consequently, this would enhance the quality of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town, in turn enabling the delivery of value in various aspects and the development of gastronomic products, producers and food industries through events and activities.

5.5.2) Financial: The regulation of prices for products and services in Phuket Old Town and the province itself is necessary to ensure that the prices are reasonable and commensurate with the quality of the products or services delivered to tourists. Hence, relevant agencies are required to regularly inspect different businesses in Phuket Old Town and Phuket Province; this is aimed at preventing them from exploiting tourists during festive seasons or peak tourist seasons by excessively inflating prices above the normal rates, which could result in negative attitudes among tourists. As can be seen, nowadays tourists can access feedback and criticisms through the Internet, online social platforms, and other channels; as a result, this has resulted in a negative image or reputation of Phuket among tourists. Thus, the control of prices for products, goods, and services necessitates collaborative efforts among various agencies in overseeing and regulating them to promote sustainable tourism. Financial development can also be applied to local restaurants in Phuket Old Town, whether or not they have been awarded by the Michelin Guide, for their financial management to maintain liquidity, considering the current economic conditions in Thailand. Specifically, this financial management strategy aims to enable entrepreneurs to safeguard their establishments' financial stability and to formulate financial contingency plans for emergency scenarios, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial contingency plans serve to sustain the business and allow entrepreneurs to delve into their income, expenses, and profits to ensure that their establishments can continue to operate in face of unpredictable external challenges. Furthermore, state agencies must be involved in providing support for allocation of tourism budgets for public relations and promotional activities to attract tourists to Phuket. This can be attained by implementing policies to support entrepreneurs, which will in turn foster Phuket's economic growth; at the same time, taxes collected from a business can be invested in managing agencies and promoting local gastronomic tourism with transparency.

5.5.3) Operation Strategy: The operation and management of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket is derived from the collaboration between various agencies in formulating plans and operating in accordance with policies for the development of gastronomic tourism in Phuket. Regarding local gastronomic tourism, various agencies are involved in promoting food festivals and street food to enhance Phuket's culinary recognition among Thai and international tourists. At the same time, they have made attempts to elevate its local gastronomic tourism to an international level by coordinating with the Michelin Guide to assess restaurants in Phuket, inspiring tourists to travel and experience local food. This initiative has been built on the recognition received from UNESCO, declaring Phuket as a City of Gastronomy; as a result, Phuket has been established as a significant destination which tourists should visit to savor its local food which has been recognized by the Michelin Guide. It has contributed to instilling confidence and trust into tourists, assuring them that the food is of excellent taste, hygienic, and affordable; this offers them with choices for their culinary experiences between Phuket Old Town and the province, promoting sustainability. Apart from that, the operational development encompasses ingredients and food preparation processes before delivery to consumers; this necessitates establishing hygienic and safety standards through the processes for food in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) to ensure the growth of safe food products. This offers a promising opportunity to drive Thailand into become the Kitchen of the World in accordance with the government's policy, and it supports the development plans for tourism in Phuket, such as Convention Centre and Exhibition (MICE), the promotion of a medical hub, healthcare services and international health tourism, and an international shopping center (Shopping Paradise, OTOP Bazaar). In addition, it involves implementing culinary diplomacy through local cuisine to attract visitors.

5.5.4) Purchasing: Restaurant operators are required to purchase and import local ingredients for cooking, kitchen equipment, cover rental expenses for their premises, manage decoration, and

carry out public relations and promotional activities; these purchasing processes must be carried out meticulously. More importantly, regarding ingredients and kitchen equipment, the operators need to check or verify the prices and quality of ingredients in accordance with the Michelin Guide's standards; this lies in the fact that in each season, festival, or emergency situations arising from various disasters, there may be changes in the prices of ingredients compared to the market's usual prices, or the prices of imported ingredients may rise owing to depreciation of the Thai baht. All of these require the operators to exercise their discretion to evaluate the choice of ingredients, especially local ingredients with geographical indications, and seek alternative ingredients to increase the value of local ingredients through cooking. Furthermore, the sources of ingredients must ensure that the quality is in accordance with the Thailand Food Charter, under the National Charter, and the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria to cook and deliver quality, hygienic food to customers or tourists whose visit is to savor and explore the local culinary experience. Particularly, the restaurants with recognition from the Michelin Guide face far higher expectations from tourists, compared to others. Hence, fulfilling their satisfaction with gastronomic products, producers and food industries, in which taste is derived from cooking processes and ingredients, is crucial in the purchasing process. In addition, the purchase of local ingredients or those with geographical indications contributes to fostering and driving the growth of the local economy and local businesses in line with the government's BCG model, which is intricately related to the bio-economy, circular economy, and green economy. Therefore, choosing to use or procure domestic or local ingredients serves as a means to promote Thailand's role as the Kitchen of the World and strengthen its food security. This also guarantees that when these ingredients are cooked using the recipes of the operators in Phuket Old Town, the food is delicious, hygienic, and safe for tourists seeking a cultural experience by enjoying local food; such an experience is obtained through product value, which is intangible culture.

5.5.5) Logistic: The very first aspect is concerned with the transportation of passengers or tourists across land, water, and air routes to facilitate the implementation of a Transport Management System based on tourists' travel patterns. This is carried out to ensure ease of travel planning, enabling them to choose the most comfortable route or their preferred routes. It involves producing positive results in transport management for tourists seeking flexibility in each of their trips. In addition, it serves to increase efficiency and the potential of tourist transportation – transport optimizer. The other aspect is associated with the restaurant business; the business owners can enhance the convenience of parking for tourists. This lies in the fact that the roads in Phuket Old Town and the province itself are relatively narrow, and at times vehicles must be parked on sidewalks, causing inconvenience on pedestrian paths and affecting the overall landscape in Phuket. As for promoting transportation, the business operators can collaborate with other service providers to offer food delivery from restaurants to tourist's accommodation or other places for tourists or customers who are unable to visit the restaurants themselves. This form of collaboration will lead to a rise in sales for the business owners. Still, food delivery services must be carried out promptly to ensure that the food remains fresh and retains its taste as if it were freshly served from the kitchen to the customers. The food delivery staff should offer service with politeness at all times. Apart from that, transportation covers local resources or ingredients with geographical indications which must undergo food production or cooking processes. In particular, transportation needs to flow smoothly to ensure the transport of ingredients to the restaurants, thereby preventing production interruptions as a result of ingredient shortages. Additionally, contacting transportation companies for importing ingredients is deemed necessary; having contingency plans for the transportation in place can allow the business operators to access transportation services for their operation in case the primary transport company encounters interruptions regardless of the reason. The procurement of ingredients must be carried out carefully; this entails sourcing and preparing ingredients for transport to the restaurant to be cooked and deliver culinary value to customers or diners, which is considered intangible culture.

5.5.6) Human Resources: The business operators are required to choose employees with the potential to perform their tasks effectively, particularly in the service sector, which serves a crucial role in welcoming customers or tourists whose visit is to savor and experience the Michelin Guide-recognized local restaurants. In fact, personnel selection necessitates a comprehensive evaluation in



various aspects, namely reception and service, behavior in service delivery, verbal communication in service, language proficiency, and the ability to accommodate needs, provide convenience to tourists, and solve on-the-spot problems potentially arising during service. Although the staff may lack expertise in any specific area, the business operators can provide them with training programs to cultivate service skills among them; in doing so, this will not only enable them to perform their tasks effectively but also enhance the restaurant's potential to attract tourists. Regarding the kitchen, chefs or kitchen staff must strictly adhere to international standards which place emphasis on cleanliness, the use of fresh ingredients, and following the restaurant's special recipes. Additionally, kitchen operations must be carried out in accordance with the quality and hygiene standards. The business operators are required to conduct monthly assessments of human resources in various aspects to ensure that the staff are adequately capable of providing quality service to customers, particularly in the Michelin Guide-recognized restaurants facing higher expectations from tourists than other local restaurants in Phuket Old Town and the province.

5.5.7) Information Technology: Information and tourism statistics necessitate recording and documentation, including categorization into subcategories for gathering and utilizing relevant statistical data in the context of tourism. Specifically, the data can be drawn upon to formulate plans, develop strategies, policies, or strategic plans with the aim of attracting and encouraging tourists to visit Phuket. In addition, the development of tourism in tandem with information technology can lead to search engine marketing (SEM), content optimization, and search engine optimization (SEO). This encompasses the development of user experience/user interface (UX/UI) to promote tourism-related websites or applications, with the aim of ensuring their high visibility in search results, such as Google and Yahoo, by using relevant keywords for searches. What's more, currently online social media enable destination searches through users' location check-ins using images or comments. Evidently, technology and innovation provide ease of travel planning, such as searching for flight tickets, cruise tickets, accommodation, and the ability to combine them into travel packages to secure the best prices; all of this can be done through mobile devices or smartphones, tablets, computers, and laptops along with the Global Distribution System (GDS), which links airline and accommodation businesses to find suitable prices for tourists.

In developing the application for local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town, Phuket Province, based on the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, the application encompasses the following features: 1) basic information about the Michelin Guide-recognized local restaurants in Phuket Old Town; 2) maps displaying those establishments in Phuket Old Town (see Figure 3); and 3) essential information about tourism-related businesses, including accommodation, food and beverage establishments, transportation providers, souvenir shops, and tour operators in Phuket Old Town. This will contribute to providing a seamless experience, driving economic growth, and offering virtual tourism as an alternative to raise expectations among tourists, enabling them to make decisions and plan their visits to Phuket Old Town and Phuket Province. This application is designed to offer convenience to both Thai and international tourists across different age groups; it provides ease of access and efficiency usability in order to meet tourists' expectations.



**Figure 3.** displays a map of the Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants in Phuket Old Town.

5.5.8) Product Strategies: Product strategies serve a prominent role in generating motivation and attracting tourists to embark on local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town, Phuket Province. Effective marketing can enable an increasing number of general and niche tourists to increase their spending and extend their vacation periods, contributing to Phuket's higher revenue and economic growth. Driving its tourism by promoting its position as a City of Gastronomy in concerted efforts with the Michelin Guide-award restaurants can advance the soft power of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town, resulting in wider recognition. Given its status as a destination among tourists worldwide, the promotion and enhancement of local cuisine are paramount. Implementation of Thailand's policy on the Kitchen of the World can contribute to enhancing the country's food security and fostering recognition for its diversity of local cuisine attributed to cultural diffusion in the Malay Peninsula. Marketing promotion in different aspects can serve to attract more tourists based on their expectations of a rewarding travel experience and aspirations to revisit for a memorable travel experience, especially related to local cuisine in Phuket. Even if Thailand has not been chosen to host the Specialized Expo 2028 under the theme "Future of Life: Living in Harmony, Sharing Prosperity" featuring Phuket as a global tourist destination, the trend of tourism in Phuket continues to receive positive feedback from tourists visiting this province. Attracting tourists can also be achieved through the development plans for tourism in Phuket, such as the Convention Centre and Exhibition (MICE), the promotion of a medical hub, healthcare services and international health tourism, and an international shopping center (Shopping Paradise, OTOP Bazaar), in conjunction with integration of local cuisine. In the same manner, the Michelin Guide-recognized restaurants will serve to promote culinary diplomacy to illustrate its recognition as the Kitchen of the World while Thai restaurants worldwide are established as a representative through culinary diplomacy. This will contribute to the growing global popularity of Thai cuisine, thereby cultivating a sense of pride in "the national image". Additionally, the use of food as soft power will portray the identity through traditional recipes, processes, and practices, inherited from generation to generation within families with the commitment to preserving and promoting traditions sustainably. This will essentially lead to value creation in various aspects, encompassing product value, service performance value, personal value, image value, social value, functional value, emotional value, and marketing value; consequently, all of this will serve to elevate Thailand's local cuisine to a global level and enable it to act as a hub of food security in accordance with the country's plan.

## 6. Conclusion and Discussion

The present study seeks to investigate the role of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town, focusing on components of gastronomic tourism and perceived value towards the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria. It is aimed at enhancing the potential of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town to accommodate tourists by creating value of local ingredients and incorporating it into gastronomic tourism within the province. This is intended to establish the unique presentation of information, covering the processing of the produce and the design of packaging which prolongs shelf life. It will contribute to establishing the entire supply chain, from upstream to downstream of the local gastronomic tourism industry in Phuket Province [86]. Consequently, this will instill the motivation in tourists to experience the lifestyle and cultural identity through food culture or cuisine, which creates a travel experience through stories, unique flavors born from locally sourced ingredients, cultural exchange and learning about food culture among tourists [87].

It has been found that the participants or tourists give precedence to gastronomy components. Specifically, they are associated with gastronomic products, producers and food industries which portray the traits and identity of local cuisine stemming from multicultural convergence, leading to the emergence of co-culture; consequently, this has brought about distinct qualities in the food, and the locals have still adhered to and preserved the original qualities of local cuisine, namely appearance, smell, flavors, and texture. In addition, this entails presenting local food through collaboration between organizations in organizing events and activities of the restaurant proprietors

with the aim of driving economic opportunities, mitigating management risks, and developing the customer-oriented market of the proprietors. It also encompasses the development of local food innovations as a means to deliver value and values to customers [15], aimed at elevating local cuisine in Phuket Old Town to an international level after receiving the City of Gastronomy Award. The involvement of the Michelin Company has resulted in a growing trend of traveling to savor and obtain culinary experiences in Phuket Old Town.

Delving into the crucial information pertaining to strategies associated with food products and events and activities, the strategies encompass three following aspects: 1) promoting agricultural products, identifying plants, and the processing of agricultural products as quality ingredients for cooking; 2) encouraging the restaurant proprietors in Phuket Old Town and Phuket Province to prepare high-quality food by adhering to the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, with the aim of delivering remarkable and satisfying experiences in service and local food products; and 3) fostering the development of the City of Gastronomy to elevate local food to an international level, showcase cultural diversity, and create value for local food for Phuket and the country itself.

The study also points out that the products value, analyzed and adapted from perceived value, is considered crucial among the participants. This encompasses product value, service value, and functional value. This finding indicates that customers give significance to local cuisine which portrays the traditional identity arising from multiculturalism inherited up to the present; simply speaking, it is associated with sentimental value among customers whose visit is to seek unique experiences. Additionally, hospitable service, coupled with unique flavored food, provides them with memorable experiences. This serves as a word-of-mouth marketing strategy and, in turn, promotes revisits for enjoying food with a delightful taste and consistency in service; as one of the Michelin Guide's criteria, these qualities leave a consistent impression on customers with each visit in line with other studies [41,47,88,89].

Put differently, despite the significant relationship between such value and local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town, it is undeniable that other types of value, including personal value, image value, social value, emotional value and marketing value, constitute integral components in the creation of holistic value, which is an intangible emotional factor. Additionally, the significance of value is dependent on individual experiences and satisfaction. Thus, consistency and low variations underscore that these factors contribute to enhancing local cuisine by using the Michelin Guide's criteria as a recognized standard for tourists visiting Phuket Old Town.

In addition, the results of the hypothesis testing illustrate a strong, positive consistent correlation between gastronomy components and products value, analyzed and adapted from perceived value. In fact, these factors are correlated with the Michelin Guide's 5 assessment criteria. A high level of correlation shows that gastronomy components, including events and activities, exhibit a relationship in promoting the recognition of gastronomic products, producers, and food industries at national and international levels. What's more, this enhances the quality of local food in Phuket Old Town in accordance with the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria. Despite not receiving certification or stars from the Michelin Guide, it can be assured that the quality of food served to customers is value for money and hygienic, contributing to customer satisfaction in line with the expectations of tourists visiting Phuket. Moreover, food festivals are intended to ensure that the local cuisine of Phuket reaches consumers of all backgrounds, thereby leading to a growing trend of food culture in society. The promotion of local gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town essentially contributes to driving the economy in accordance with the government's policies, pertaining to the Bio, Circular, and Green Economy (BCG).

The BCG policy is also concerned with agriculture which encourages farmers to produce high-quality agricultural products and understand the procedures of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), the processes for food in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP); this is intended to foster the growth of safe food products and presents a promising opportunity to drive Thailand towards becoming the Kitchen of the World. In addition, it is associated with advancing Thailand's food security and encouraging the business operators to use ingredients from farmers, fostering a circular economy. However, it should be

highlighted that the quality of ingredients is crucial in cooking since it helps create value for the business operators through gastronomic products, producers, and food industries which portray uniqueness and the identity of Phuket. In addition, exhibitions in various events will contribute to creating lasting impressions of local food and increasing the global reputation of Thai food.

Moreover, the study found a positive consistent correlation; specifically, there exists a high degree of correlation between the products value and the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria. This finding indicates that the Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants play a crucial role in presenting local food products, and it is likely that the value delivered to customers will create a memorable experience during their visits to Phuket Old Town, leading to a trend of gastronomic tourism and fostering revisits to enjoy its local food. This highlights the customers' positive attitudes towards the Michelin Guide in relation to perceptions, attitudes, and the intention to visit the recognized restaurants [8]. The study also suggests that promoting local food products can serve as an effective strategy to enhance perceived value, such as product value, service value and functional value, through events and activities or food festivals; this will in turn empower society to promote and enhance global recognition of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town. This finding underscores the significance of establishing the standards of local restaurants in Phuket Old Town to be in line with the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, leading to a rise in sales after being awarded Michelin stars. Furthermore, it will urge various agencies to encourage other local restaurants to operate in line with the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria, potentially enabling them to be awarded Michelin stars annually. Ultimately, it promotes food culture deeply ingrained in culture, traditions, and rituals, with the intention of preserving local cuisine among young people and sharing it at a global level.

However, the indirect impact of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town cannot be labeled as an imitation of local food; given that cultural diffusion has spanned much of the Malay Peninsula, which has led to substantial resemblances in food culture, lifestyles, arts, and culture. Consequently, advancing innovations in food products or processed food can serve as a means to establish a distinct identity for presenting the image of local food in Phuket Old Town. This should be achieved in parallel with maintaining the quality standards based on the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria to demonstrate the standards of restaurants and food products in this neighborhood. The present study is intended to depict the relationship between products and perceived value of local cuisine in the Michelin Guide-recognized restaurants in Phuket Old Town, which has cultivated perceptions among tourists visiting Phuket through public relations and promotional activities under the Michelin Guide's reputation for gastronomic success. This serves as a model for investigating the assessment criteria to enhance local restaurants' ability to meet the standards of food product quality and service, thereby promoting consumer awareness. Additionally, collaborative efforts between the Michelin Guide and Thailand's organizations have led to the preservation of local food and its further development to foster uniqueness and novelty in cuisine in particular areas; this has contributed to raising the culinary standards within society.

The recent display of readiness in hosting the Specialized Expo 2028 – Phuket Thailand highlights Phuket Province and Thailand's preparedness to host this particular event with the intention of showcasing their potential and stimulating the economy which is largely driven by tourism and the hospitality industry. In particular, its focus is placed on three dimensions of sustainability, including sustainable people, sustainable world, and sustainable prosperity, in harmony with Phuket's strategic plans and policy for developing the area based on cultural identity into a global tourist attraction [90]. Culinary diplomacy or food diplomacy as a tool for soft power is typically employed among medium-sized countries to establish their position in the international arena, allowing them to engage in diplomatic negotiations and empower themselves to attain global acceptance and recognition [21]. It can also spark an interest among tourists to visit destinations, such as Phuket renowned as a prime destination for relaxation. More importantly, in an effort to foster and support local food, the collaboration with the Michelin Guide has spurred economic development as tourists travel to experience local cuisine in line with Thailand's strategic plans and Phuket's policy.



In conclusion, the study has found that food products and service awarded Michelin stars serve a crucial role in influencing tourists' decisions to seek culinary cultural experiences in Phuket Old Town, particularly for well-known local food in that area. It also underscores product value, namely food and service, as well as functional value which consumers can perceive; simply put, they can recognize and appreciate the significance of local cuisine with distinct attributes derived from co-culture in the Malay Peninsula, demonstrating cultural diffusion which has led to multiculturalism portrayed through local food. Moreover, the collaboration between the Michelin Guide and the Tourism Authority of Thailand has spurred the economy through gastronomic tourism; this form of tourism appeals to tourists with culinary interests, drawing them to visit Phuket to explore its unique local cuisine. Such collaboration has raised the international quality standards of local cuisine.

Generally, the popularity of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town is driven by trends and the perceptions of consumers regarding local cuisine and is linked to value for money. That is, food products must be produced from high-quality ingredients through hygienic cooking processes and possess a unique flavor, and the flavor should resonate with consumers from all walks of life or of all age groups, allowing them to recognize cultural value through the local food products of Phuket, in tandem with the renowned Michelin Guide stars or awards presented to restaurants fitting its criteria in terms of food quality, service quality, hospitality, atmosphere, decoration, and perceived value [91]. Hence, creating perceptions through public relations and promotional activities to raise awareness of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town is a means of enhancing food culture in accordance with the province or the country's initiative or policy for promoting gastronomic tourism through the involvement of the Michelin Guide. It is essentially hoped that gastronomic tourism will foster perceptions and attitudes of multiculturalism and contemporary culture of the changing roles of local cuisine in the era of globalization.

## 7. Limitations and Suggestions

There are several limitations of the study to be discussed. Firstly, the present study was intended to explore only the restaurants awarded Michelin stars in Phuket Old Town, each of which had its distinct attributes and differed from one another. This resulted in the limitation which needs to be explored at an international level. In addition, future research should assess the universality or international relevance of models presented in different aspects of local cuisine, such as ingredients, cooking processes, service skills, and restaurant management, in order to gain insights into identity of local cuisine. A significant limitation is that collecting questionnaires from customers of the Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants may inconvenience them during their personal time while dining.

As for the other limitation, this study examined the roles of local cuisine by measuring gastronomy components and perceived value towards the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria in Phuket Old Town. However, consumers traveling to dine at Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants in different areas may exhibit different perspectives, influenced by their received experiences and prior experiences of local food in those establishments. In Thailand, local cuisine in different regions may have been differently influenced by cultural diffusion, locally available ingredients such as vegetables or herbs used for treating certain diseases, and cooking techniques inherited from local wisdom. Further studies should expand their scope to regional or neighboring areas and take into account potential variations in perceptions according to social trends in different periods stemming from cultural and social issues.

Additionally, future research should expand the criteria for the sample group and include other factors or variables which impact gastronomic tourism in Phuket Old Town. It should consider using variables which represent social trends during that period to investigate consumers' behavior more thoroughly and accurately, and local gastronomic tourism in different or neighboring areas should be compared to enhance and elevate it to international standards in line with Thailand's economic development policy.

## 8. Implication

The present study sought to examine consumers' opinions on experiences and satisfaction with the Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants in Phuket Old Town in relation to two theoretical aspects. First, it investigated gastronomic components which are linked to supporting sustainable gastronomic tourism and raising it to an international level, increasing the recognition of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town. Even if the preservation of authenticity can contribute to the sustainability of food culture, consumers in today's world often seek food experiences which depart from the traditional experiences. That is, a combination of food from different cultures or the incorporation of science to develop local food is a means to enhance the standards of the food to address consumers' changing preferences. Accordingly, gastronomic components play a crucial role in elevating the status of local cuisine in Phuket Old Town and promoting its global recognition, thereby driving the economy [24,28,87]. Finally, the study aimed to raise awareness of perceived value, which is the basic theoretical underpinning. The results illustrate experiences and satisfaction with gastronomic components and perceived value; albeit being abstract or intangible, perceived value reflects emotions or the subconscious mind which seeks value through dining. Thus, high-quality food and impressive service can foster perceived value in various aspects for consumers, each receiving different value based on their experiences [47,48,50].

In practice, supporting local food in Michelin Guide-awarded restaurants should cultivate a critical mindset among local consumers to evaluate the reliability of information before deciding to travel for culinary experiences. In fact, transparent procedures will result in a more purposeful examination, increasing consumers' perceptions in different dimensions, such as various aspects of value, food products, and service. Additionally, offering recommendations, conducting chef interviews, and providing brief lectures about specific local dishes can allow consumers to better understand value derived from the ideals, thereby grasping the essence of those dishes influenced by or inherited from recipes and traditional cooking techniques. Nevertheless, the perceived value of food products is influenced by personal experiences and preferences, coupled with the standards and quality of service, which affect criticisms or feedback on the Internet or online social media for sharing both positive and negative experiences. Essentially, this poses a significant challenge for the restaurant proprietors in terms of advertising and public relations. Consequently, the Michelin Guide's assessment criteria will encourage the local restaurant proprietors to control and enhance the standards and quality of their food products and service in order to compete in the local food industry and partake in Michelin Guide award assessments. In addition, whether or not attaining Michelin stars, the proprietors are still encouraged to maintain the standards to ensure consumer satisfaction with their services, thereby promoting the sustainability of the local gastronomic tourism industry in Phuket Old Town. Its impact can also be expanded to neighboring areas to foster integration of routes for gastronomic tourism in Thailand, which will in turn promote food trends. Ultimately, food diplomacy should be employed to attract tourists through soft power by promoting the global recognition of local cuisine.

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