

The Role of Slow Food in Destination Image Development

Pichsinee Soonsap¹, Ann Suwaree Ashton^{1*} and Timothy J. Lee²

¹Graduate School of Tourism Management (GSTM), National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok, Thailand

²Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China

*Corresponding author: suwareeashton@hotmail.com

Abstract

Wellness lifestyle trends have entered our everyday thoughts, especially since the Covid 19 pandemic. This paper explores how the slow food concept has a vital role in making tourist trips more fun and healthier at the same time. It shows how to develop a slow food destination image. A qualitative approach using in-depth interviews was employed, and Chiang Mai, Thailand was selected as the study area. A total of 29 tourists were interviewed. Content analysis was used to analyze data. The findings revealed three components for developing a slow food destination image: (a) functional attributes, referring to five aspects: environment, authentic food, slow food community, local facilitators, and service quality; (b) psychological attributes, comprising slow food logo and signs, and value perception; and (c) unique attributes, seeking uniqueness and creating events/festivals related to the slow food concept, especially the concept of a good, clean, and fair event.

Keywords: Slow food, Slow food development, Slow food destination, Healthy food event, Destination image marketing.

Introduction

World tourism has been badly damaged by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, as it was an unpredictable shock to international tourist mobility. There is no doubt that the tourism industry faced many challenges before the pandemic, including unhealthy lifestyles, safety, and security, thus making the travel risk situation considerably more difficult to handle. Several tourism providers have launched new strategies to minimize health risks and to increase tourist well-being (Ansari et al., 2022; Bhumiwat & Ashton, 2020; Şeker, 2022). Thus, destinations must promote safety and healthy travel after the pandemic crisis, especially how destination image can be developed by minimizing risk perception (Jiang et al., 2022; Ong et al., 2022), most importantly, the actions that well-being tourism should take in response to high demand tourist after the pandemic crisis (Hekmat et al., 2022). As proposed, wellness tourism can be developed through four important activities, namely: spa/beauty and therapy for health; sport/leisure for health; spiritual mind and soul retreat; and healthy food (Ashton, 2021b; Nanpassakorn et al., 2023). Hence, slow food concept is one activity that falls under wellness tourism context. As discussed, this study focuses on how slow food destination image can be developed, boosting the tourist wellness lifestyle while travelling around the globe. The slow food concept means healthy food and well-being lifestyles (Chrzan, 2004). Notably, it can refer to using locally sourced ingredients, and traditional recipes with a slow process of cooking (Simonetti, 2012).

Hence, wellness lifestyle trends and accomplishments evolve by having better eating habits with nutritional quality, and work-life balance (Chin, 2021; Thornton, 2020); achievable through a wellness activities approach, in particular, sport/leisure for health (trail running, adventure and bushwalking), spa/massage/therapy, spiritual retreat activity, and healthy food (Ashton, 2018). With a rapidly emerging trend, consuming slow food and experiencing related activities crossover in the wellness tourism context are observed (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). Hence, developing healthy food becomes a crucial area for all nations to pay attention to since the pandemic crisis (Guachalla, 2021; Moreno-González et al., 2020; Pestek & Nikolic, 2011), in particular the concept emphasizes sustainable food production and consumption (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2020). Furthermore, slow food tourism is at the introduction stage in Thailand, both Thai and international tourists are lacking clear information about slow food (Soonsap, 2016). A review of existing literature was carried out and numerous past studies have explored slow food in various topics, for instance, consumer perception, the slow food phenomenon, business development, and destination development. The majority of slow food contexts emphasized consumer behavior; while studies in two other academic contexts are on tourist motivation (Chung et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2015) and tourist perception (Park & Lee, 2019). However, the focus on slow food tourism destination image is less developed, even though a rare study has explored the topic of destination image and local food (Choe & Kim, 2018; Dimitrovski et al., 2021).

Thus, this study aims to investigate how to develop a slow food destination image. To achieve the main aim, three research questions were asked: "What are the functional attributes that create slow food destination image?"; "What are the psychological attributes that create slow food destination image?", and "What are the unique attributes that create slow food destination image?". It is imperative to fulfill this gap for many reasons: (a) slow food destination development leads to sustainable wellness destinations because foundational resources will be developed based on the natural

environment and sustainable local culture (Ashton, 2018; Marozzo et al., 2022); (b) a healthy food destination image helps to minimize high-risk perception, in turn attracting more tourists to the destination (Chang, 2011; Leung & Cai, 2021), and (c) a slow food destination image is an explicit link to local settings, such as organic farming, local cooking clubs, political campaigning, education projects, and community service; as a result, its reputation will enhance local income and benefit all relevant stakeholders (Hendriks & Legendijk, 2022; Tse & Tung, 2022).

Literature Review

Slow Food Philosophy

The slow food philosophy has expanded globally since the establishment of a new anti-McDonalds project in 1986 in Rome, Italy (Petrini, 2013); it brings people back into their kitchens as in the good old days. Slow food refers to an authentic way of preparing fresh ingredients and the determination of healthy living for both individuals and communities to make the planet a better place (Viassone & Grimmer, 2015). In this study, slow food is defined as “locally sourced ingredients, traditional recipes and taking time to source, prepare and enjoy food” (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010).

A slow food philosophy should propose the importance of great experience, especially on convivial, mindful, and ethical values (Petrini, 2013). Convivial experience means the involvement of the participant with the food, ranging from leisure with new educational encounters to sharing food knowledge from experts and interactions with chefs or locals (Dimitrovski et al., 2021). In particular, slow food also links to a mindful meal experience; it features a pleasurable sense of eating food, but likewise concerns the ethics of food producers. Antithetically, the slow food concept refers to three keywords: good, clean, and fair (Amel et al., 2022; Payandeh et al., 2022). *Good* refers to tasty food; *Clean* means producing in an environmentally sustainable manner; while *Fair* refers to food prepared economically and socially fair to those who labor in it, creating responsibility for communities (Petrini, 2013). Likewise, the concept of good is also based on the education of the senses, curiosity for the unknown, and the pleasantness of taste. Good food does not depend on those who cook, when or where they do this, but the taste of local and traditional cuisine is the main motive. It refers to locally sourced fresh dishes, flavorful seasonal diets that are part of the local culture and made with high-quality ingredients, as well as healthy, natural food products, rather than focusing on stylish buildings or restaurants. (Payandeh et al., 2022). Furthermore, good food refers to the quality of taste and nutrition, giving pleasure, flavor, and knowledge because it is developed based on culture (Zimmerer et al., 2021).

In addition, clean food relies on a group of locals, farmers, small businesses, and the government in protecting environmental and traditional values in the preparation of resources (Mayer & Knox, 2006). Clean is related to agroecology with the renewed belief in the importance of the earth and sustainability (Payandeh et al., 2022); eating cooked food using wild ingredients gives a valuable experience; hence, local food and food products are important for the natural environment and environmental protection. The fair concept is based on co-production which focusing on respect for the rights of farmers and fishermen, opposing exploitation at the local and international levels (Payandeh et al., 2022). Alternatively, fair refers to accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for small-scale producers.

Slow Food Tourism Attributes Perspective

The success of slow food tourism destination development is determined by several attributes. The first factor is the personal lifestyles and behaviors of tourists, as the consumption of healthy food can be costly due to the quality of food and sophisticated processes. For example, producing a non-chemical raw ingredient sometimes can be more complicated and takes time. Second, the environment where tourists live or are involved can influence whether or not they are in a healthy or diet consciousness environment; and finally, for the level of individual health, some are seriously conscious and others might only just be aware of health and well-being (Hansmann et al., 2020).

Agricultural Biodiversity

Slow food is about healthy products and significant and central places for tourists to visit, hence the agricultural land of food production must be further developed (Dunlap, 2012; Newman et al., 2015). It is also known as an ethical food organization, promoting biodiversity due to concepts and criteria to deliver food products, such as preserving the diversity of taste (Viassone & Grimmer, 2015). Slow food tourism contributes to sustainable tourism development (Jung et al., 2014). The ingredients must be based on organic products using natural and environmentally friendly techniques to process (Viassone & Grimmer, 2015). Sometime called “Green Product,” the concept must use non-chemical and natural fertilizers to grow plants and feed animals on the farm (Petrini, 2013). Hence, slow food foundations will need to prepare chemical-free landscapes for food production and organic commodities in supporting the slow food process (Zimmerer et al., 2021).

Local Food Culture VS Slow Food

Why is local food called slow food? It is certainly often said that food localization is almost embedded with organic agricultural practice, artisanal food production, and slow food activity; hence, it cannot be a distinctive articulation of the local food movement (Payandeh et al., 2022). Local food culture has become a destination marketing development and promotion tool (Stalmirska, 2020). Significantly, local food is mostly explained as local, fresh, and homemade, it is often intertwined with history and heritage (Stalmirska, 2020). Similarly, slow food production has emerged from the food heritage and local culture promotion (Littaye, 2015). Local food and slow food both need landscapes and local traditions as the main attribute to develop destination image (Dunlap, 2012; Newman et al., 2015; Stalmirska, 2020). The focal point for slow food emphasizes mainly healthy food consumption, environmental sustainability, and chemical-free production (Hendrikx & Lagendijk, 2022). Food sometimes serves to distinguish believers, such as to define communities and cement social bonds through ritualized practices, for instance consuming fruits, vegetables, and grains are encouraged by almost all religions (Timothy & Ron, 2015). Significantly, food can link the hearts and souls of people because it reflects regional culture and heritage and strong spiritual beliefs and values (Sharma, 2019; Stalmirska, 2020).

The Power of Stakeholders and Slow Food Events

Stakeholder engagement is key in enhancing awareness of destination marketing development and providing an important competitive advantage in the existing natural

resources (Cortese et al., 2019). Similarly, within the slow food context, local communities play an important role in strengthening local image, especially for food tourism and slow food events (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013; Park & Lee, 2019), activities that can be created based on their unique local food culture and organization of such events (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013). Rural communities are the most powerful stakeholders in using food festivals and farmers' markets to promote local products, hence helping to enhance the image of the destination (Viassone & Grimmer, 2015). It is immensely beneficial for slow food associations and communities when building a strong destination image, in turn helping to generate income and economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability (Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013). In 2020, slow food community had been registered and named as "Food for Change Chiang Mai" to focus on raising awareness through activities and events with consumers, farmers, artisanal producers, chefs, and cooks that food is a cause, a victim, and a delicious solution to climate change. The members of the community have things in common, sharing things: experiences, problems, resources, knowledge, but also a way of positioning oneself and interconnecting (Slow Food, 2020).

Perceived Value and Slow Food Destination Image

Slow food is certainly associated with value perception (Lotti, 2010). Perceived value plays an important role in consumer satisfaction and intention to purchase (Yang & Xia, 2022). When tourists buy a slow food product, they also buy value, such as the value of good taste (Lotti, 2010). Perceived value can be defined as customers receiving a product and service worth the price they pay for, both monetary and non-monetary outcomes (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value development can be measured based on three components: perceived image, perceived quality, and perceived sacrifice in both the price and time (Soonsap, 2016). However, tourists will perceive healthy value when they have positive attitudes toward the local food image (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). For instance, when providing an image of the local sense of the place, particularly its unique culture, history, and respect for environmental sustainability (Di Gregorio, 2017). People often believe that slow food is about organic ingredients, authentic fresh local food, and sustainability (Chrzan, 2004); hence, the perceived value of the slow food image is the main trigger attracting tourist intention to visit because it contains locality, quality, taste, and is a healthy concept (Dimitrovski et al., 2021; Park & Lee, 2019).

Slow Food Destination Image Development Theory Foundation for This Study

Slow food events certainly enhance the destination image (Dimitrovski et al., 2021). A destination image is defined as an image that shapes how individuals view their location while traveling and influences tourists' decision-making for visiting the perspective destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004a, 2004b). Destination image theory seems to have a complexity of attributes, and scholars conceptualize this term in different perspectives, for example, destination image can be based on functional and psychological continuum (Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2009). These two continua have a great influence on the overall image of the destination, leading to tourist behavioral intention (Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2009).

Alternatively, tourism destination image theory can be based on three attributes, including functional, psychological, and unique attributes (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

This theory was later used in various studies. One particular study proposed a destination brand image model comprising three components: (1) functional, the sufficient tangible and practical aspects of tourist destination attributes, referring to tourism infrastructure, and local products, both man-made and natural ones; (2) psychological, referring to the intangible and emotional aspects of a destination which includes the sense of belonging and connection. It also provided a clear image and a picture of the destination attributes that can be created in the tourist's mind, for example, the perception of the place, atmosphere, and what experience a tourist will gain for a lifetime; and (3) the unique experience, referring to providing tourists with typical local products, interaction with ethnic groups and organizing events/festivals (Ashton, 2014). Hence, the theory model by Ashton (2014) underpins this study that aimed at destination image development, including the slow food tourism concept, with a special focus on local products, festivals/traditions, and interaction with ethnic groups as key main points of the study.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative method was employed because the process allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the group that is being targeted (Creswell, 2007). A semi-structured in-depth interview and a purposive sampling technique was employed because it helps provide extensive information, especially when the results involve the slow food tourist perception (Sharma, 2019). The tourists were selected and asked if they met the study criteria, especially if they had slow food experience, and in particular, if they were keen to be with and support local farmers, buy authentic organic food, eat in a healthy restaurant, be in sustainable environment, and enjoy slow food events and festivals (Ma, Zhang, Yang, & Wang, 2023). This research received an approval on human research protection by the Ethics Committee in Human Research at NIDA to confirm research ethics with protocol ID No. ECNIDA 2021/0082.

Data Collecting Process

The data collecting process is used in in-depth interviews because the study aim is related to human perception. This technique is best in helping the researcher to obtain sufficient data to achieve the research aim (Fox & Ward, 2008). To make sure that the study obtained valid and reliable results, the first five participants took part in the in-depth interviews to check for validity, understandable language, ethics, and unbiased questions. After eliminating any non-functioning questions, the researcher carried on with the in-depth interviews but stopped when data started to repeat. The participants were contacted when the researcher visited farmers' markets, or slow food events, and festivals and randomly asked if they were willing to join the research project. After agreeing, they were given a consent form to be part of the interview process; it was voluntary and participants could terminate at any time without consequences, whether the in-depth interview process was finished or not. The interviews took around 45 minutes (June-December 2021).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the content analysis technique because it is the most suitable tool for subjective interpretation through a systematic classification process of coding and defining themes or patterns (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The collected data were carefully translated from Thai to English by two more experts in this area including co-authors and native English language were final proofread to preserve trustworthiness of the data. This research also used qualitative analysis software, Quirkos (www.quirkos.com) to ensure objective and systematic grouping of responses by specific keywords (Turner et al., 2021). The data were organized line by line by answering three research questions and linking each of them using special keywords as seen in Figure 2.

The Study Area

Chiang Mai Province is in the Northern part of Thailand and was selected for this study as seen in Figure 1. Because of its popularity among Thai and international tourists, it founded the first slow food community, a perfect best practice area. Its abundant environment and cultural treasures were proclaimed to be a biosphere community by UNESCO in 2021. Moreover, the place offers unique culture and festivals, and it is a member of the slow food network (Slow Food, 2020). The scope of the study area included local restaurants with organic ingredients from farmers, organic farmers markets, and local food events/festivals.

Figure 1: Chiang Mai, Thailand Map



Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The participants were 29 Thai tourists who have had slow food experience and travelled to organic farmers' markets, participated in local festivals, and visited slow food hospitality (cafés and restaurants) in Chiang Mai, Thailand as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Profiles of Slow Food Destination Image

No.	Title	Sex	Age	Organization
1	Entrepreneur	Female	46	Restaurant
2	Entrepreneur	Male	29	Non-Alcohol Bar
3	Chef	Male	30	Restaurant
4	Freelance	Female	33	Private Business
5	Entrepreneur	Female	45	Private Business
6	Entrepreneur	Male	42	Coffee shop/ Cafe
7	Office Worker	Female	29	Private Business
8	Chef	Female	51	Restaurant
9	Entrepreneur	Male	37	Organic Farm
10	Lecturer	Male	29	University/ Institute
11	Lecturer	Female	33	University/ Institute
12	Government Officer	Male	49	Public Organization
13	Government Officer	Female	37	Public Organization
14	Freelance	Female	31	Private Company
15	Office Worker	Female	30	Private Bank Company
16	Entrepreneur	Female	45	Private Business
17	Student	Male	22	University/ Institute
18	Lecturer	Female	35	University/ Institute
19	Student	Female	26	University/ Institute
20	Student	Female	27	University/ Institute
21	Entrepreneur	Female	29	Private Business
22	Entrepreneur	Female	29	Private Business
23	Lecturer	Male	40	University/ Institute
24	Lecturer	Female	38	University/ Institute
25	Freelance	Female	49	Private Business
26	Office Worker	Male	36	Public Organization
27	Government Officer	Female	37	Public Organization
28	Freelance	Female	26	Private Business
29	Government Officer	Female	29	University/ Institute

Findings

The results are discussed with the three research questions in the following sections. (1) What are the functional attributes that create slow food tourism destination image? (2) What are the psychological attributes that create slow food tourism destination image? and (3) What are the unique attributes that create slow food tourism destination image?

The functional attributes for slow food destination image

The first research question asked: “What are the functional attributes that create slow food tourism destination image?” The results can be summarized as functional

attributes for slow food destination images comprising four components including (i) destination environment; (ii) slow food community; (iii) facilitator; and (iv) authentic service quality. Details are discussed below.

When asking the participants “What slow food destination attributes are most attractive, in your opinion?” The participants said that they preferred to travel to an eco-friendly environment destination, and there’s no need to have a luxury accommodation, just an ordinary room with basic facilities; the most crucial thing is cleanliness:

“I think it should be the same as how you develop other tourism destinations. I think the most important things are cleanliness, good and convenient transportation, reasonable hotel price, interesting, attractive spots to visit, and a variety of nice, tasty, and healthy food.” [ID 14]

“I think slow food is like a culinary art; it contains healthy and traditional food retaining the cultural identity, social and environmental responsibility. It is just the way how they process slow food production based on natural ways.” [ID 16]

Furthermore, participants expressed that such destinations must have a group of slow food community cohorts or a social enterprise to be at the centre of slow food events to provide information to all interested people both tourists and local suppliers alike regarding the slow food concept:

“The place must have a slow food community that can help promote a destination by organizing slow food events and be able to provide accurate information related to slow food tourism products, activities, and services. They are the important people who will support local farmers' markets in building a strong destination image. They will be the team leaders driving environmental sustainability, because slow food is about ways to take care of the earth, water, air, nature, animals, and humans, according to its concept.” [ID 1,2,4,5,9, and 20]

They also pointed out that it is crucial to have local facilitators who can provide genuine knowledge of authentic life and local food stories, especially the history of ethnic groups and their way of life, local culture, and food production based on their beliefs and values. Locals can be the best for storytelling to tourists; thus, knowledge and storyteller skills are needed to develop a destination image:

“Food facilitators come up in my mind, as many people do not understand the slow food concept clearly. By the way, there are many entrepreneurs of restaurants and tourism activities using the slow food concept with their businesses, but they do not explain and present the concept clearly. Having knowledgeable and skilled storytellers in the hospitality businesses is needed.” [ID 3 and 29]

“I think it would be more interesting if they had some stories on the local dishes. Storytelling is an essential marketing tool that helps to keep people interested, gain more memorable experiences, and fall in love with the slow food destination.” [ID 16]

Lastly, participants expressed that when experiencing the slow food tourism journey, they want to see authentic services from the host destination. Authentic services within this context refer to how locals give service based on the way of local life; the customs and culture they value and believe within their group and society.

They expressed that the local food and drink made them feel satisfied the most, especially with the friendliness and warm welcome of the locals; five-star hospitality is not needed, but clean and safe accommodation is sufficient for service. They enjoyed slow food tourism activity during the trip, especially when traveling to remote areas they learn more about real environments, and places without internet and electricity are acceptable. For example, when tourists visit ethnic or hill tribe villages in the northern mountains, they experience the originality of slow food processing and feel the fresh air while seeing organic farms. The slow food tourist does not need an air-conditioned place, or a luxury hotel with a swimming pool, room service, or gym, but being in nature is enough as expressed by participants:

“I do not need to disrupt the resident’s way of life; I’m not concerned too much about excellent service quality when talking about ‘slow food tourism.’ It is like a slower life journey where we can enjoy every precious moment and appreciate the value of every single surrounding thing within this environment.” [ID 13]

Another expressed:

“Slow food is already good by itself, so service does not specially need to take part. I believe that service should be satisfactory in all areas, not just for slow food. It is something that businesses should consider.” [ID 15]

The psychological attributes for slow food destination image

The second research question was: “What are the psychological attributes that create slow food tourism destination image?” The overall results summarized that logos, terms, signs, or symbols would create value perception in the tourist's mind. The results revealed that snail and turtle logos are the best to represent feelings and ideas for promoting a slow food image because they are related to the three main essentials: (1) cooking process; (2) seasonal ingredients; and (3) authentic cooking style. First, the cooking process involves the use of charcoal or firewood, which imparts a rich flavor and a distinctive smoky aroma, particularly when grilling. Second, using seasonal and chemical-free ingredients for cooking helps to maintain the original taste. Finally, the authentic style of cooking refers to some ethnic food having its way of being cooked and may also come with various interesting or prestige stories about its culinary heritage, as detailed below.

Another question was “Can you please describe your feelings when thinking about the word “slow food?” The participants confirmed that the “red snail” logo represented slow food and is recognized at the international level. As said by a participant, “*The turtle with a stone mortar or Sak and pestle or a Krok (Thai food utensil) can represent slow food [ID 5].*” Another said:

“When I search on the Internet, one thing that I would find is the ‘red snail’ logo with the word slow food, but slow food tourism, in my opinion, can also be a logo of a slow destination with a picture of food cooking.” [ID 11]

Moreover, participants revealed that value perception can be created in the tourist mind, and comprises three components: (1) creating an image of environmental conservation and sustainable destination development; (2) creating an image of quality linked to healthy food, particularly food from organic ingredients made by locals, and (3) creating an image of sacrifice perception, for instance, to perceive goods and services worth for money and time they spend as evidenced below:

“The slow food concept can enhance the quality of life both physically and mentally. For physical health, there are healthy foods made from high-quality ingredients from local areas and without chemicals. It gives good mental health as it is related to social and environmental responsibility. Likewise, slow food makes environments sustainable because it comes from a natural way of planting and growing.” [ID 16].

Another said:

“Consuming slow food made me feel safe and have good health. I also feel proud and grateful to have a good opportunity to support locals by purchasing products made with local ingredients.” [ID11]

Slow food is an authentic rich culture related to culinary heritage and represents a healthy lifestyle. They perceived high value from consuming slow food, especially for physical health and mental well-being. They feel it is worth the money and time they spend because nowadays everything is going very fast and eating fast food in such an environment causes them to have a poor quality of life; slow food gives good value, brings back slow life by enjoying healthy living. As evidenced by participants asserting:

“It gives good value when I see that slow food is made from the local peoples’ hearts, with the precious food process as well as healthy ingredients that help improve my physical well-being. Also, I can perceive that slow food and slow tourism leads people to return to the basics of living life. I need to get back to nature and relax with a slower life. Do not need to be in a hurry. This can give value to improve at least mind and spirit.” [ID 15]

In addition, they believe that their lives are valuable, especially when they can support the locals in gaining higher income and be able to exchange life experiences; the locals feel proud of their local culture when expressing their stories to tourists. One participant said, *“I had an opportunity to share my culinary experience with the local people. There are many interesting local food stories in each region.” [ID 18]*

The unique attributes of slow food destination image

The third research question was: “What are the unique attributes that create slow food tourism destination image?” The overall results can be summarized into two unique activities when developing a slow food destination image: (1) proposing a unique culture and festival related to slow food, and (2) creating a slow food event. The results are summarized as follows:

When asked, “What is the most unique attribute when participating in slow food tourism?” The results indicated that slow food tourism activity must be rare, unusual, an uncommon way of life, and valuable; the unique activity is related to seasonal food ingredients. This means people will only consume non-chemical foods and such when cooking food for tourists. To participate in a slow food event, all must be patient until the harvest. They said:

“The festivals, such as the hill tribes' New Year are unique because they celebrate only once a year, and as part of the festival they bring seasonal food and non-chemical ingredients to the festival, and worship and respect their spiritual beliefs.” [ID 5 and 29]

In terms of cultural events and festivals, ethnic groups arrange events and festivals following their mutual beliefs, values, and culture. They organize a set of unique themed slow food events based on their regional cultural perspectives. Chiang Mai has several tribal groups that gather to celebrate and pay respect to Gods and ancestors. They conduct festivals that are definitely related to slow food events concept, as they express hometown pride in their authentic culture. The uniqueness of food events organized by locals can be developed as slow food festival because they are related to real organic activity and food/drink. For example, they provide unique activities, by offering cooking and ethnic food workshops, sharing, and exchanging knowledge about food and culinary practices. One participant said, *“I like farmers' markets where I can find direct local entrepreneurs introducing products (no middleman), and a variety of food at the same place.” [ID 10]*

Discussion and Conclusion

This research aims to find out how to develop a slow food destination image. There are three main components to be discussed. First, the functional attribute; it refers to tangible elements created and developed based on existing resources that must have sufficient tourism infrastructure, especially attractions such as a natural environment, local culture, social interaction, and unique activities that provide visitors with a memorable experience (Ashton, 2021a; Ashton et al., 2021; Hsu & Scott 2020). Likewise, slow food is influenced by destination geographical innovation, especially sustainable new ways of agriculture; it must be cleaner with no chemicals involved. This result is consistent with Dunlap (2012), that the slow food destination must offer healthy products with environmental sustainability and be free of chemical food processes (Dunlap, 2012; Newman et al., 2015).

The functional attribute encompasses four elements, including destination environment, slow food community, facilitator, and authentic service quality. Slow food destination will be based on abundant environmental sustainability, including biodiversity and agricultural landscapes. Moreover, there is a social interaction with slow food stakeholders and slow food community which are social enterprises, associates, or clubs associated with the slow food concept. These groups take on a powerful role for the community as they are mechanisms for developing slow food principles; they provide information centers, support local suppliers, and control slow food regulations to maintain quality and authenticity. These associations must unite the main performers in the tourism industry and community, especially local farmers, chefs, food entrepreneurs, accommodation owners, local guides, and educational institutes. The

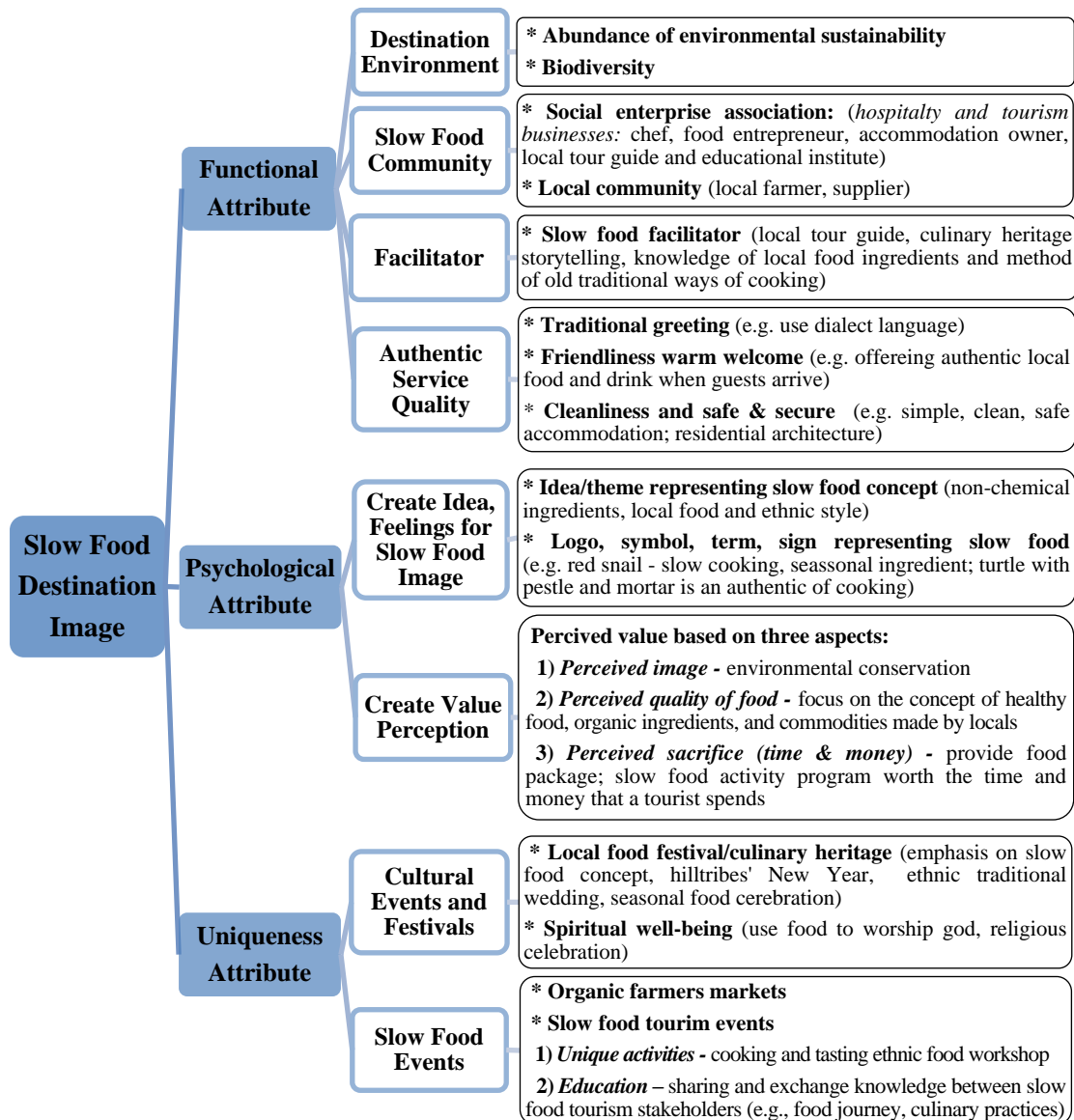
facilitators are important people who can provide genuine or trustworthy storytelling of their hometown history of the local cuisine as well as those born and raised in that culture. However, the unique and authentic service quality is generally ensuring that tourists will appreciate local way of life, such as warm welcoming and friendliness, in an authentic way, or the way locals use such in daily life, such as greetings and goodbyes. The service facilities may also use local resources as a tool for delivering produce, such as a welcoming drink that might use local herbs.

Second, the psychological attribute which is about intangible elements; it encompasses two elements; create ideas, feelings for slow food image, and create value perception. Therefore, it is about creating ideas, beliefs, terms, signs, symbols, and logos for tourists that represent the slow food concept. In this study, the symbol of a red snail or turtle with a pestle and mortar creates an idea of slow food, because it represents an authentic, slow, and healthy way of life. Such signs and symbols can influence tourist perception; also corroborated by Matos et al. (2017), proposing that an image concept is described as a perceived feeling, idea, or belief based on destination representation, objects, and impressions. Moreover, destination image is about tourist personal value perception, especially a healthy lifestyle. In this study, value is created by providing a clear image of environmental conservation and offering good quality and tasty food worth the time and money spent. Similarly, Simonetti (2012) contended that the goal of slow food is about placing the right focus on defending against poor quality, food fraud, and maintaining standardization of meals. In addition, slow food gives an enjoyable sensation because it is linked to a nature-based environment that preserves human rights from food production (Petrini, 2013).

Thirdly, uniqueness attribute; it encompasses two elements; cultural events and festival, and slow food event. Hence, the best way to understand this uniqueness is through local cuisines, festivals, or culinary heritage by describing traditional ways of having pleasurable sensations and appreciating local flavors. Similarly, Haven-Tang and Jones (2005) supported the idea that a sense of place helps create a unique visitor experience and differentiate destinations. Likewise, Simonetti (2012) contended that the main goal of slow food is to protect local cuisines, traditional production systems, and endangered plant and animal species. Significantly, the unique slow food events offer people an amazing spiritual well-being experience, as festival food is sometimes used in ritual practices. Timothy and Ron (2015) confirmed that food was served to worshippers, such as during worship of God or other religious celebrations. Consequently, slow food is unique as it provides spiritual well-being when participating in local events and festivals (Sharma, 2019; Stalmirska, 2020). (As summarized in Figure 2)

In conclusion, this study is an attempt to develop an insight into slow food destination image. The principles of the slow food concept are good, clean, and fair, offering an opportunity to promote wellness tourism and environmental sustainability. More significantly, slow food activities are a nature-based concept, and all activities are linked to wellness tourism destinations, such as cooking and tasting food with indigenous flora and fauna ingredients. The development of wellness tourism through the application of the slow food concept can ensure environmental sustainability, economic success, and social well-being in surrounding communities (Caton et al., 2018). Finally, creating a good image for a slow food destination will encourage wellness travelers to consume healthy local food, support the local community, and learn more about local cuisine (Mariani et al., 2022).

Figure 2: Slow Food Destination Image Model



Implications

Theoretical Implication

This study has proposed a new theoretical contribution to slow food destination image development. The slow food concept was linked to destination image by adapting a theoretical model for destination image proposed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993). This study gives new concept for slow food concept by adding sensory impressions, memories, and experiences with tourism products and attributes, critical for effectively portraying a destination image and influencing consumer behavior (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Finally, this paper develops an understanding of how Thai tourists perceive slow food destination image. The finding model comprises three main components: functional attribute, psychological attribute, and uniqueness attribute. Additionally, the destination image strategy represents a valuable slow food phenomenon, such as a local place that contains some culinary history and offers the opportunity to have new

experiences with the slow food concept by participating in activities and consuming healthy food. (A theory model presented in Figure 2)

Limitations and Further Research

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the public sector was not allowed to arrange many events and festivals due to this epidemic. It was quite limiting to find the number of participants required for this study, even the participants in this study were all Thai tourists. The researcher overcame this limitation by using online channels and snowball effect for in-depth interviews and obtaining participant contacts through previous visits to slow food events/festivals, and via a slow food community. Due to this study collected data from women more than male, hence future research may concentrate on how males perceive the slow food study. Future researchers should explore how slow food is related to a spiritual retreat context, and how slow food can promote mental well-being. The findings of this study showed that in some districts, slow food events are organized for celebration and ritual merit performance. Additionally, it would be advisable to conduct any studies on which factors influence the intention to visit slow food tourism destinations, or what makes for memorable experiences in such tourism destinations. Furthermore, researchers could conduct interviews/focus groups with slow food tourism operators/businesses to explore supply-side perspectives.

Practical Implications for Asian Business

The study findings provide important insightful guidance for slow food stakeholders and food tourism businesses. Currently, consuming healthy food is one of the most important activities that the managerial sector must emphasize, according to COVID-19 guidelines. Food businesses must create opportunities by rethinking how to utilize their rich resources for tourism. There is no denying that Asia has an extensive and diverse culinary heritage, as Asia's cultures are diverse, so are its culinary traditions. To meet the demand of tourists, slow food offers tourists a slow food that focuses on the concept of well-being, the preservation of culinary heritage, and the environment can enhance local products and develop a market that benefits both producers and marketers.

First, by promoting wellness destinations from the perspective of developing a slow food image and applying the successful criteria for this results in a strong slow food community. There are many slow food communities in Asia, for instance, the Promoting Food Culture in Hanoi community in Vietnam, Cempaka Garden to Table of Kuala Lumpur community in Malaysia, and Indigenous Youth Eco-Cultural Warriors of Mountain Province community in Philippines. Overall, it is aimed at raising awareness of environmental consciousness by empowering people to conserve local biodiversity, defend local culture and heritage, and minimizing food waste. Hence, slow food community can apply the slow food destination image model to attract tourists' number to the destination. Importantly, slow food members must engage with locals and stakeholders in every process, especially people who work related to food producers, farmers, artisans, chefs, restaurants owners, farmers and who help to contribute sustainability to community and empower local economy.

Second, it is also important to understand the behavior of the slow food tourist, who is often conservative and seriously seeks an authentic way of slow life. Their main goal is

the maintenance of good health with healthy food while traveling. The most important aspect to attract tourists is based on healthy food, such as arranging food with local authentic atmosphere, such as traditional lifestyle, spiritual and emotional sensitivities celebrations. Alternatively, there should be a willingness to use biodiversity and agricultural landscapes for supplying all necessary slow food ingredients. Destination image creates good environmental sustainability with opportunities to reduce food processing waste and promotes authentic cooking methods without using out of season ingredients.

Third, it is recommended for government about the regenerative of tourism business emphasized on well-being lifestyle, sustainability and equality between tourists and locals. It would also positively impact the three pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) UN: People, Planet and Prosperity which the policymakers of all countries need to integrate tourism planning development. It not only creates great tourism experiences, but also preserves cultural heritage and the environment, which are necessary resources for tourism businesses. Moreover, eating high quality food can promote good health, prevent disease, and release depression. Especially, Asian countries might issue slow food concept for tourism development, as Asian countries have potential to be developed. The government must rethink how to encourage both residents and tourists to think beyond sustainable and responsible tourism after COVID 19 pandemic.

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