Satisfaction and Loyalty in Local Food Festival: Do Switching Barriers Matter?

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Abstract
In food tourism context, attracting customers and provision of satisfaction is of necessity. In accord with the call for empirical evidence within the extant literature, this study examines switching barriers and its role as moderator on the relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty, at a food festival in Delhi, India. Switching barriers can be a vital factor for attracting more tourists into organized festivals, if implied adequately and maintained on a controlled manner. Creating switching barriers can be an effective approach for obtaining long-term visitors from marketing and tourism aspects. A questionnaire was designed specifically using related measures based on the literature. Various regression models were applied to estimate switching barriers’ effects and to further analyze our hypotheses. Interaction plot exhibited suppressing effect of switching barriers on the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The results of this study found that the role of switching barriers is not merely statistically significant, but requires critical attention from organizers.

JEL Classification: M3, M30, M31, M37, M39

Keywords
India, food Industry, switching barriers, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty

Introduction
Food and related products were categorized as factors with low levels of engagement/participation (Beharrell & Denison, 1995). However, this perspective has drastically changed in recent years with vast improvements in agriculture, welfare, animal care, and overall health, which has made food-related activities a matter of interest, especially in tourism and marketing contexts (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Wu & Ai, 2016). While early studies have suggested that those, deeply and thoroughly involved with food are more comfortable to distinguish and treat foods differently (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Chen, 2007), recent studies have pinpointed other aspects such as authenticity, sustainability (Zhang et al., 2019), trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and switching barriers (i.e., Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Dawi et al., 2018). Food involvement is described as the importance given to food by an individual (Bell & Marshall, 2003). Accordingly, organizers of events as business owners are more likely to have their customers remain through increased satisfaction, loyalty, and switching barriers (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Kheiry & Alirezapour, 2012).

Customers’ satisfaction and subsequently loyalty are vital for all businesses and organizations. This extends to the context of food tourism, food festivals, and events. Oliver (1999) has described satisfaction as the assessment and opinion of a customer toward a given service or commodity. In a study conducted by Budianto (2019) it was noted that satisfaction and loyalty have correlations that are statistically positive. Switching barriers are known as elements influential on retaining customers and their satisfaction (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020). Studies have reported a linkage between satisfaction and loyalty on an extensive manner. However, moderating role of switching barriers, has been only regarded in a study conducted by Dawi et al. (2018), which addressed the notion in electronics (e.g., TV) market. Considering the fact that the extant literature lacks sufficient empirical evidence for understanding the effect of switching barriers on food-related behaviors, the current research aims to investigate this notion in the context of marketing and tourism sectors.

Theoretical Framework

Food Tourism
Since the year 2000, the number of studies on food related products and services and their influence on attracting tourists to various destinations, has grown rapidly (Chang et al., 2011; Choe & Kim, 2018; Kim et al., 2009). Food service and

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festivals have been receiving more attention due to increased importance of health, sustainability, and animal care in tourism and marketing sections (Wu & Ai, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019), consumption of local cuisine (Choe & Kim, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019), and tourism experience of food (Chang et al., 2011). This depth of food tourism requires a more thorough understanding, as awareness regarding food-related products is increasing (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2019; Chang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2019). As number of studies investigating this matter are relatively limited in the literature, current research takes the notion of food tourism into consideration.

Local Food and Beverages

In UK, Germany, and Canada annually (main locations of local food and beverage consumption), tourists' purchase level is extremely high and significant. The amount of expenditure identifies vitality of foods and beverages, which play a key role for tourists to visit a specific destination alongside economical contributions to the destination itself (Choe & Kim, 2018; Telfer & Wall, 2000; Zhang et al., 2019). Local foods and beverages as a stimulus for tourist absorption has been studied through a number of approaches and techniques, such as economic value and local improvement and development; destination marketing (Okumus et al., 2007; Pirnar et al., 2019), local food barriers and attractions (Cohen & Avieli, 2004); consumption of food and its connectivity to the visitors’ experience (Chang et al., 2011), and switching barriers (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Kheiry & Alirezapour, 2012; Wu & Cheng, 2019).

Factors Influencing the Consumption of Food for Tourists

Studies conducted on food consumption of tourists vary in terms of services given and provided (e.g., Pirnar et al., 2019; Sheldon & Fox, 1988), consuming and usage of local foods (Kim et al., 2009; Torres, 2002), the experience of food in tourism and hospitality industry (Chang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2019), food as a subcategory of special/unique tourism (Long, 2004; Wu & Cheng, 2019). The main influential factors can be religion and culture, socio demographic, food tourist behavior and personality traits, past experience and familiarity, and motivational factors (see Mak et al., 2012, p. 2). Kim et al. (2009, 2013) identified three distinctive categories for influential factors with significant impact on local food consumption in a destination, namely: physiological elements (food neo-philia and food neo-phobia); motivational elements (physical environment, experience excitement, regard and care of health, getting away from routine, authenticity of the experience, prestige, gaining knowledge, and togetherness); and demographic factors (age, gender, and level of education).

Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction

The impact of customers’ extent of satisfaction on their intention to revisit a destination or repurchase a service or commodity is shown in the literature (Madrigal, 1995; Petrick, 2004). Satisfaction level merges from a sophisticated and complex data process with a comparison of expectation and actual experience in reality after purchasing or consuming a service/good (Oliver, 1999). Loyalty is defined to be a set of repurchase behaviors undertaken by the customer, which can be categorized into the intention to repurchase, spread of word—of—mouth and electronic—word—of—mouth (WOM/eWOM), willingness to pay more, and recommendation (Budianto, 2019; Lee & Feick, 2001). In a study conducted by Budianto (2019) it was noted that satisfaction and loyalty have statistically positive correlations. While some suggest that satisfaction can predict loyalty (e.g., Chang et al., 2011; Oliva et al., 1992), others have reported direct exhibitions of loyalty characteristics (repurchase, recommendation, and/or reduced price sensitivity) (Dawi et al., 2018; Gao & Bai, 2014; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013).

When a given product meets expectation level to its least, satisfaction and positive emotions toward the product are established (Dawi et al., 2018), which is in pair with prediction of future intentions of repurchase or revisit in case of this study. More specifically, customer satisfaction is directly and positively correlated with their loyalty in the context of food and beverages, reception, and price (Pirnar et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). In accord with the context of current research, switching barriers carry a moderating effect on the linkage between aforementioned variables (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Dawi et al., 2018). Studies conducted in tourism sector (e.g., hotels, and/or festivals) found a direct relationship existing between satisfied customers and their repurchase, and spread of WOM intentions (Wardi et al., 2018).

Loyalty is interpreted differently by scholars (e.g., Oliver, 1999; Wardi et al., 2018). In this paper we consider the definition of loyalty as the strength of the connection between a person’s “relative attitude and repeat patronage” (Dick & Basu, 1994, p. 94). Customers, who show loyalty attitudes are more likely to purchase on a regular basis, decrease marketing expenses and expenditure, exhibit a lesser sensitivity toward changes of price, and spread more positive WOM and eWOM (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014; Wardi et al., 2018). This can be beneficial and profitable for organizations (Sharp & Sharp, 1997). This research looks into concepts of satisfaction and loyalty of customers through switching barriers in food festival format, which are explained in the following section.

Switching Barriers

Marketing research has shown inconsistency regarding the roles of switching barriers (e.g., Balabanis et al., 2006; Burnham et al., 2003; Dawi et al., 2018; Wu & Cheng, 2019).
It has been suggested that switching barriers have two general classes of positive and negative, which are characterized to sub-dimensions by extension (e.g., Egan, 2001; Jones et al., 2007). Tendency to switching behavior not necessarily occurs for dissatisfied customers (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Jones et al. (2007), described switching barriers as all the restraining elements that could make the process of changing service providers inconvenient. Further, they classified switching barriers into interpersonal communication, and the attractiveness and availability of alternatives. Furthermore, they suggest that sense of “being locked leads to a point, where customers tend to remain with provided service. ‘Customer inertia’ has been later added by some scholars as false loyalty” (White & Yanamandram, 2004). It has also been mentioned that switching barriers can be acting as an enhancer for the linkage between satisfaction and loyalty-behaviors such as, repurchase (Dawi et al., 2018). Switching barriers consist of the linkage between customers and the service providers, for consumers to leave or change the existing supplier such as: relational benefits, social advantages, confidence gaining, and unique caring benefits, which are influential on a greater level than the performance of the service itself (Jones et al., 2007; Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall, 2006).

Positive and Negative Switching Barriers

Julander and Soderlung (2003), distinguished switching barriers into positive and negative similar to others in the literature (e.g., Han, Back et al., 2011; Han & Hyun, 2012; Han, Kim et al., 2011). Positive switching barriers can be defined as willingness of being in a relationship, and negative switching barriers can be described as being forced to stay in, or keep a relationship (Han, Kim et al., 2011; Hirschman, 1970). Negative switching barriers could be luring customers into a relationship (e.g., switching costs, and lack of alternatives) (Colgate & Lang, 2001). However, positive switching barriers are those factors, which increase the tendency of customers to stay in the relationship with providers (e.g., relational profits and loyalty practices). Egan (2001) mentioned that barriers are satisfactory for customers due to their natural creation in a relationship (cost of search) or based on the customers’ improvisation (relational profits). Accordingly, some barriers can be interpreted as coercive (financial switching costs). Creation of switching barriers may fail in long-term (Jones et al., 2007) as dissatisfied customers might stay in the relationship due to switching barriers but are likely to engage in negative spread of WOM, and/or decrease their openness/affirmation toward new goods/services. In contrast, powerful interpersonal relationship among customers, employees and providers as a type of positive switching barrier can enhance the customer retention (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Dawi et al., 2018). This type of relationship profits consumers in various ways, namely, social profits (e.g., companionship, personal acknowledgment), psychological advantages (e.g., decrease in level of anxiety and solicitude), economic profits (e.g., time management and less time consumption, discount), and customization (e.g., unique personal services) (Berry, 1995; Kim et al., 2004; Patterson, 2004). Firms can take advantage of the “switching costs” and “lack of available and attractive alternatives” as negative switching barriers to maintain a well-established relationship.

Switching Costs

This can be defined as the perception of time, money and the endeavor that customers have to outlay for the process of changing service providers (Balabanis et al., 2006; Ping, 1993). Studies have indicated switching costs as one of the core factors, which holds customers from exiting the relationship, regardless of their dissatisfaction (Balabanis et al., 2006; Burnham et al., 2003; Caruana, 2003; Han, Kim et al., 2011). Jackson (1985) classified switching costs into psychological, physical, and economic as their origin. Switching costs can create a long-term flow of benefits for the firm via loyal customers, who do not switch to alternatives (Dawi et al., 2018). Switching costs involve time, endeavor, psychological expending (e.g., unwanted consequence, uncertainty, incompetence, perceived risk) and financial costs (Alkhurshan & Rjoub, 2020; Colgate & Lang, 2001). To hold a food festival can be a suitable option for considering switching costs as service providers are presented in a relatively small area.

Lack of Attractive Alternatives

This is of importance as a switching barrier perceived by customers (Han, Kim et al., 2011; Yanamandram & White, 2006). Providers seek to create relationships with their customers, which involves social advantages, confidence, and special/unique care (Colgate & Danaher, 2000; Patterson, 2004). Existence of attractive alternatives is a key to switching behaviors (Patterson & Smith, 2003). The possibility of staying in a relationship increases when the availability of attractive alternatives is scarce (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Patterson & Smith, 2003), and vice-versa (Dawi et al., 2018; Sharma & Patterson, 2000). Delhi is a city rich of food related events. Therefore, researchers have considered the schedule for this specific event, which has only one competitor in its time. Hence, embedding the notion of alternatives and their availability in the study.

Relational Investment

Relational benefits are the outcome of fostering growth in relationship with suppliers, which is of extreme importance in comparison with performance of the service (Han & Hyun, 2012; Han, Kim et al., 2011). More particularly, in the context of food tourism (local food festivals) as a part of
service industry with high interaction, it is crucial to boost and strengthen relational investments. This will further increase the perceived relational profit for customers, which in turn yields in positive spread of WOM/eWOM, intention for future revisit and positive feedback. Inevitably, this will benefit the organization (festival organizers) in both long and short-term as festivals can be held seasonally or fortnightly to attract domestic visitors as well as foreigners.

**Switching Barriers and Customer Loyalty**

Various studies emphasized on the correlation existing between switching barriers and customer retention (e.g., Jones et al., 2007; Julander & Soderlung, 2003; Lee & Feick, 2001). Customers, who feel entangled in a relationship might terminate it to become free of the feeling, which is in regard with switching barriers and its relation with loyalty (Colwell & Hogarth-Scott, 2004). Contradictory to what was mentioned, recent studies found a positive correlation for switching barriers and customer loyalty (i.e., Dawi et al., 2018). The effects of switching barriers on revisit intention of customers to food providers have been also noted in a study conducted by Jeong et al. (2010). Therefore, the current research emphasizes on the inclusion of switching barriers and all its dimensions as an influential factor that can enhance loyalty of customers through satisfaction.

**Moderating Role of Switching Barriers**

Satisfaction is known as one of the most important factors for customer loyalty determination. Cronin and Taylor (1992) suggested customer satisfaction is not equal to their loyalty and customer loyalty is reachable through existence of other elements (Oliver, 1999). It is important to note that relationship is conditioned by switching barriers. Many studies focused on switching costs (i.e., Dick & Basu, 1994; Jones & Sasser, 1995; Jones et al., 2007), while switching barrier is much wider in definition, which is the effort taken by a customer for switching to a new provider (financial, social, psychological endeavor) (Dawi et al., 2018). Switching costs can act as moderators of behavioral intentions (Jeong et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Jones et al. (2007), the attractiveness of alternatives, moderates the satisfaction, and repurchase intentions. Considering the sophistication of switching barriers’ nature and their impact on loyalty, this paper tends to examine the moderating role of switching barriers on the satisfaction—loyalty linkage.

**Hypotheses**

With regards to theories and arguments mentioned, and considering relevant existing literature, the following hypotheses have emerged for the current study and the theoretical model (Figure 1) illustrates moderating role of positive switching barriers (i.e., relational investment) and negative switching barriers (i.e., switching costs and availability and attractiveness of alternatives). As the research aims to show and examine the moderating effect of switching barriers on satisfaction and loyalty of customers within food festival context, the following hypotheses are designed to achieve the said objective:

**Hypothesis 1:** Customer satisfaction has a direct impact on customer loyalty.

**Hypothesis 2:** Switching barriers moderate the satisfaction—loyalty relationship.

**Hypothesis 2A:** Switching costs moderate the satisfaction—loyalty relationship, that relationship is weaker when switching costs are high.

**Hypothesis 2B:** Availability and attractiveness of alternatives moderate the satisfaction—loyalty relationship, that relationship is weaker when availability and attractiveness of alternatives is low.

**Hypothesis 2C:** Relational investment moderate the satisfaction—loyalty relationship, that relationship is weaker when relational investment is high.
Methodology

Sampling and Measurements

The sample was taken amongst participants of Dogri and Ladakhi, The Gourmat High street and Palate food festival districts in Dehli. These regions constitute more than 1000 participants in various events due to wide market. A convenience sampling method was used to collect 380 data from respondents in a span of 3 days. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, from which a total of 45 were incomplete and 25 were excluded from the research due to their biased responses (unattended questions or patterned answers). The response rate remains over 80% with 84.4%, which is satisfactory considering accessibility and other factors (i.e., willingness to participate). Participants in the sample were selected from those, who were able to understand English to avoid validity tests ascending from translation of questionnaire items. To evaluate switching barriers, a recent (Han, Back et al., 2011; Han, Kim et al., 2011) scale was utilized. To assess customer loyalty (Brady et al., 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Zeithaml et al., 1996), and customer satisfaction (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982) relevant scales were used. For measuring included constructs, five items were selected to reflect the variable (e.g., loyalty was designed as recommendation, spread of WOM or eWOM, and intention to revisit). The appropriateness of measurements is approved for assessment of behavioral intentions (Brady et al., 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Zeithaml et al., 1996). A 5-point Likert scale is designed from 1 = totally agree/highly likely, to 5 = totally disagree/highly unlikely. Age and gender of the participants were also involved in the survey. The questionnaire remains anonymous and confidential with the researchers, as agreed with all participants. A sample question for each dimension is provided (see Table 2).

Analysis

For testing the proposed conceptual model, Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) developed by Saunders (1956) was utilized as according to the literature and previous current studies it is one of the most generally accepted approaches for examination of moderating effect (Chen & Wang, 2009). In this approach (MRA), regression coefficients of the hypothesized moderator and predictor variables are examined for determination of the statistical significance of the moderation effect. Regression analysis is conducted for investigation of the existing relationships among variables. MRA was utilized in the next stage of the analysis for determining the moderating effect of switching barriers on the satisfaction—loyalty linkage. Some studies have used other methods for the analysis of the data such as PLS-SEM (partial least square structural equation modeling), which is a normal modeling for maximization of variance explanation of the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2011, p. 139). This method is appropriate for dealing with complex models (Hair et al., 2011), which the current study does not consist. Therefore, the Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) developed by Saunders (1956) was utilized. This method is modernized in the literature (e.g., Statistical Mediation and Moderation by Jose, 2013; Regression analysis and linear models by Darlington & Hayes, 2017; Mediation, Moderation, and conditional process analysis by Hayes, 2013). Hence, Hierarchical Regression Analysis as well as Interaction plot were conducted to test the aforementioned hypotheses.

The data also indicates a number of 177 female respondents as well as 203 male participants, while age range is presented in Table 1. Table shows reliability test, average variance extracted as well as composite reliability and factor loadings for items selected in the model, which show a satisfactory statistical level (Hair et al., 2017; Hayes, 2017). Moderated regression analysis was conducted on the data to test the hypotheses of the study (Tables 3 and 4). This is while each factor of the moderator variable (switching barrier) showed no significant impact on an individual level (see Appendix). Hence, by using the mean of dimensions of the moderator variable and regression techniques (mentioned in section 3.2), switching barriers were collectively implied in the regression model. Nevertheless, the impact of switching costs and relational investment were found negative, when regressed individually. Tables below represents the causal model of the study, in which satisfaction is the independent variable loyalty is the dependent and switching barriers are moderators of the relationship between the main variables of the study. From this table, a percentage of 82.6 when the moderator variable entered the model. This 22% increase in the R2 indicates a moderating effect, which is supported in the following table. Accordingly, mean and standard deviations have been used to draw an interaction

### Table 1. Age.

| Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 15–25     | 80      | 21.1          | 21.1               |
| 26–35     | 130     | 34.2          | 34.2               | 55.3               |
| 36–45     | 95      | 25.0          | 25.0               | 80.3               |
| 46 and above | 75    | 19.7          | 19.7               | 100.0              |
| Total     | 380     | 100.0         | 100.0              |
plot to illustrate the moderating effect of switching barriers in Figure 2.

**Discussion**

The theoretical model proposed and examined in the current paper is to better understand the existing relationship amongst positive switching barriers (relational investment), negative switching barriers (switching costs, and availability and attractiveness of alternatives), customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (supporting first hypothesis). As expected, the results are in consensus with previous findings for customer satisfaction is an important antecedent of customer loyalty (e.g., Han & Hyun, 2012; Han, Kim et al., 2011).

Similarly, the moderating effect of switching barriers on the satisfaction—loyalty relationship was supported, accepting Hypothesis 2 (a, b, and c). This result is an expansion for previous findings (e.g., Han, Kim et al., 2011) from the context of hotel industry to the food tourism and food festivals. The results show a positive impact on customer loyalty from customer satisfaction (hypothesis 1). The impact of satisfaction on loyalty is weaker, when customers feel the existence of switching costs, lack of attractive alternatives, or have a better relationship with the provider (in this case, festival staff). This implies that a rise in the customers’ perceived switching costs can provoke their spread of WOM, recommendation and intention to revisit and can create positive feelings toward food festivals, which was also stated by the findings of the study.

From interaction plot (Figure 2) and Tables 3 and 4 presented above it can be interpreted that switching barriers, when low can in fact lead to higher degrees of loyalty and protect the festival if a sample presented in the festival had low satisfaction rate. The aforementioned notion was supported through in-person observation and interaction with

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**Table 2. Factor Loading and Reliability.**

| Factor                                      | FL  | CR  | α   | AVE |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Satisfaction                                |     |     |     |     |
| Foods and beverages in this festival made me satisfied | 0.721 |     |     |     |
| ST2                                         | 0.735 |     |     |     |
| ST3                                         | 0.771 |     |     |     |
| ST4                                         | 0.782 |     |     |     |
| ST5                                         | 0.764 |     |     |     |
| Loyalty                                     |     |     | 0.82| 0.80|
| I recommend this festival to my friends and family | 0.751 |     |     |     |
| LT2                                         | 0.730 |     |     |     |
| LT3                                         | 0.774 |     |     |     |
| LT4                                         | 0.710 |     |     |     |
| LT5                                         | 0.721 |     |     |     |
| Switching costs                             |     |     | 0.80| 0.82|
| It can be difficult to go to other festivals | 0.745 |     |     |     |
| SC2                                         | 0.701 |     |     |     |
| SC3                                         | 0.744 |     |     |     |
| SC4                                         | 0.731 |     |     |     |
| SC5                                         | 0.719 |     |     |     |
| Lack of attractive alternatives             |     |     | 0.81| 0.83|
| All the festivals look the same             | 0.801 |     |     |     |
| LAA2                                        | 0.822 |     |     |     |
| LAA3                                        | 0.738 |     |     |     |
| LAA4                                        | 0.706 |     |     |     |
| LAA5                                        | 0.702 |     |     |     |
| Relational investment                       |     |     | 0.78| 0.84|
| I like the staff of the festival            | 0.723 |     |     |     |
| RI2                                         | 0.712 |     |     |     |
| RI3                                         | 0.798 |     |     |     |
| RI4                                         | 0.701 |     |     |     |
| RI5                                         | 0.713 |     |     |     |

**Table 3. Statistical Output for Interaction Plot.**

| Variable          | Mean   | Standard deviation |
|-------------------|--------|--------------------|
| Customer satisfaction | 19.3142 | 1.4324             |
| Switching barriers     | 8.4598  | 1.7158             |
the participants and other attendees. However, as switching barriers force more impact into the said linkage, satisfaction decreases. This in turn yields in lowered customer loyalty, which supports both hypotheses presented in this paper. It is important to note that switching barriers have shown positive effect, when the degree is low. The findings support the hypotheses of the research that is satisfaction has a direct relationship with loyalty, as well as the switching barriers can moderate this relationship (as stated above), switching barriers individually did not show a significant effect on the relationship. The findings of the study show a relatively less influence from switching costs and relational investment than lack of attractive alternatives. This can be explained to some extent as most of the participants of the festivals were from other locations and/or countries, from which it can be interpreted that the relationship between customer and the provider was of low importance for this specific sample or the unimportance of switching costs for selected sample. However, the findings show insignificance in relation to these factors, but the factors have shown a moderately weak impact on the satisfaction—loyalty relationship.

### Conclusion

Relational investment and loyalty programs are aspects of festival management, which require a thorough understanding on the phenomenon from an array of perspectives. Positive impact on customer loyalty from customer satisfaction indicates that an increase in the customers’ perceived switching costs, can provoke their loyalty behaviors and intentions. This expands to relational benefits and lack of alternatives as well. The perception of gaining benefits and lack of alternatives triggers loyalty-type behaviors in customers such as, recommendation, intention to revisit and spread of Word-of-mouth (WOM) and/or Electronic WOM. The implication of current analysis is that with creation and strengthening positive switching barriers (relational investment), the environment will be an atmosphere of positivity, sense of companionship, and having continuous interactions with the providers as well as employees. These establish a bond between customers and festivals as an entity, which can further enhance their loyalty behaviors. Furthermore, to facilitate food tourism as a key element of profit-making in a tourist destination, appropriate and relevant policies and rules could be issued by the Tourism department of the country to enhance and ease organizing such events. This was drawn based on personal conversations with festival organizers as they noted a number of restricting factors that hinder process toward creating an event in food context. Moreover, the idea of scheduling a food-related festival within an already existing event or festival is not farfetched. Hence, current festivals can be modified through establishing elements of switching barriers that further attract and link customers to festivals.

In consensus with prior studies (e.g., Han, Kim et al., 2011), effects and moderating role of relational investment was found, suggesting that creation of relational investment can lead to perceived relational benefits for customers that can in turn, create a positive switching barrier so strong that can cover some flaws in the organization. This further contributes to the understanding of effects of switching barriers regarding obtaining loyalty and satisfaction for customers in an event (festival) context. Notably, results show that low
switching barriers can pose an enhancing effect on satisfaction-loyalty linkage, which is an interesting notion that has not been regarded in the extant literature. Hence, it can be said that controlled and optimized switching barriers in fact can have positive effects for creation of loyalty among customers. This is an important finding that can open new pathways for establishing switching barriers, particularly, in the context of festivals and/or events to improve their performance. The aforementioned finding can be used by marketers, managers and coordinators of events, and scholars in terms of further examination.

Limitations and Recommendations

Current study is limited inherently by a number of restraints. Most significant limiting factor was time that researchers had to collect the data from festivals. This is due to the fact that duration of stay in the country under examination was limited to 10 days. Future studies can expand this time and collect data without time boundaries. This can help to generalize findings. Additionally, due to lack of sufficient literature of the subject at hand, the current research did not include other variables such as, quality of service, marketing features of festivals, and behavioral aspect of staff to measure satisfaction and loyalty of customers. Future studies can further include these variables to provide a better understanding of underlying effects. Moreover, current research was limited to a number of festivals in one city in India (Delhi). Future studies may expand geographical borders to provide a comparative result. Additionally, managerial aspect of event/festival organization was not included in this research, which can be extended to future studies, where managers and/or staff are targeted regarding organization and coordination of events and measures to improve festivals.

Appendix

KMO and Bartlett’s Test.

| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy | Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| .696                                          | .823.981                      |

Model Summary.

| Model | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. error of the estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1     | .897a | .804     | .804             | .52124                    |

Excluded variablesa.

| Model               | Beta | ln t  | Sig. | Partial correlation | Tolerance |
|---------------------|------|-------|------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 ZSwitchingCost    | .177 | 5.241 | .000 | .262               | .428      |
| ZRelationalInvestment| .253 | 6.031 | .000 | .298               | .272      |
| LackofAlternatives  | .410 | 12.829| .000 | .553               | .356      |

*aDependent Variable: Loyalty.  
bPredictors in the Model: (Constant), Satisfaction.

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Data Availability

The data that supports the results of this research is available upon request from the corresponding author (PZ) as the data includes confidential data regarding participants and organizers.
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