Factors affecting the attractiveness and tourists’ word-of-mouth intention to the Southern Folk Cake Festival

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Abstract

The study aims to determine factors impacting the attractiveness and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions with the Southern Folk Cake Festival. Research data were collected from a survey of 202 visitors who have visited the Southern Folk Cake Festival. Applying the structural equation modeling (SEM), the study shows six impacting factors to the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival. They include typical cuisine, festival content, promotion, festival information, festival environment, and facilities. Among them, festival content has the most impact on the attractiveness of the festival itself. Besides, the attractiveness of the festival positively affects tourists' WOM intentions.

Keywords: Attractiveness; Word-of-mouth intention; Tourist; Southern folk cake festival

1. Introduction

Festivals and food events are keys elements in tourism development. Therefore, festival tourism pushes the industry development, leading to the increase in income of the tourist community (Nagy and Nagy, 2013; Congcong, 2014). There exists a positive correlation between food festivals and local tourism development (Bottyán, 2015). The development of tourism plays an essential role in the economy. Festivals attract tourists, decrease the seasonality in tourism, and positively impact both public and private economic sectors (Getz, 2016). Previously, Felsenstein and Fleischer (2003) pointed out that organizing festivals is considered a strategy to promote the image of local tourism. Festivals may encourage tourists to spend more, thereby increasing local income and promoting local economic development. Besides, celebrating festivals associated with tourism positively affects the preservation of the local tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Cudny, 2013).

As a center city of the Mekong Delta region, Can Tho has made great efforts to develop tourism by developing typical tourism products. Although the festival tourism in Can Tho City is still limited, the city is home to a variety of cuisines from all provinces and cities of the Mekong Delta, creating favorable conditions to attract international tourists. In particular, the Southern Folk Cake Festival is a key festival that impresses domestic and foreign tourists. According to the Department of Culture - Sports and Tourism of Can Tho City, in 2019, this city welcomed 8.8 million visitors, an increase of 4.6% over the same period in 2018. Total revenue from tourism reached over 4,435 billion VND, up 17.2% over the same period last year. The Southern Folk Cake Day was held for the first time in 2012 that later became an annual culinary event of the city. In 2015, the event was raised to the scale of a festival. This contributes to introducing and promoting typical folk cakes of the Southern region to domestic and overseas visitors. Therefore, this study is conducted to determine factors influencing the attractiveness and WOM intentions about the Southern Folk Cake Festival. The research results are the scientific basis to complete the festival program and attract more tourists to the festival.

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2. Research methodology

2.1. Research hypotheses

Based on the above literature review, researchers have pointed out factors that influence the attractiveness of a festival and positive word-of-mouth intentions of visitors. Thus, several research theories are set out below.

Local cuisine characteristics and culinary values are essential factors creating the attractiveness of a tourist destination (Quan and Wang, 2004; Tellstrom et al., 2006; Biazen, 2012; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016). Hence, the study suggests hypothesis H1: Typical cuisine positively affects the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

The variety of activities and the novelty of the festival content positively affect the attractiveness of the festival (Lee et al., 2011; Nagy and Nagy, 2013; Stankova and Vassenska, 2015; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018). Therefore, the study proposes hypothesis H2: The festival content beneficially impacts the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

Promotion activities including attractive advertisements and impressive slogans create the attractiveness of the festival (Lee et al., 2011; Popescu and Corbos, 2012; Nagy and Nagy, 2013; Egresi and Kara, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018). As a result, the study sets up hypothesis H3: Promotion puts a positive impact on the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

A source of adequate, reliable, and up-to-date information makes the festival more worthy to participate (Lee et al., 2011; Biazen, 2012; Maneenetr and Tran, 2014; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018). Hence, the proposed hypothesis H4 is as follows: Festival information affects its attractiveness positively.

A clean environment with a high level of security and a bustling festive space positively impacts the festival’s attractiveness (Cudny, 2013; Congcong, 2014; Lee et al., 2016; Mihajlović, 2017). From the above perspective, the study proposes hypothesis H5: Festival environment positively influences the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

Modern equipment and facilities, high-quality public convenience (parking slots and public restrooms) have a positive effect on the festival’s attractiveness (Cudny, 2013; Sahoo, 2013; Maneenetr and Tran, 2014; Bottyán, 2015; Marković et al., 2015). Thus, hypothesis H6 is as follows: Infrastructure beneficially affects the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

The festival with interesting activities, attractive content, and unique folk cakes promotes positive WOM intentions (Lee et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2017; Naqvi et al., 2018). So, the study recommends hypothesis H7: The attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival increases tourists’ WOM intentions.
Based on the aforementioned literature review and research hypotheses, the research model of factors affecting the attractiveness and WOM intentions about the Southern Folk Cake Festival is established.

**Table 1** Interpretation of observed variables in the research model

| Factor                  | Observed variable                                           | Sign | Scale  | Reference resources                                                                 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Typical cuisine         | Regional cuisine is unique and diverse.                      | TC1  | Likert 1-5 | Quan and Wang, 2004; Tellstrom et al., 2006; Biazen, 2012; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016 |
|                         | The cuisine is high-quality.                                 | TC2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The foods and drinks are tasty and delicious.                | TC3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | Food safety and hygiene are always guaranteed.              | TC4  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
| Festival content        | Activities are diverse.                                      | FC1  | Likert 1-5 | Nagy and Nagy, 2013; Stankova and Vassenska, 2015; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018 |
|                         | The content is attractive.                                  | FC2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The festival creates novel experiences.                     | FC3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The program is professionally prepared and organized.       | FC4  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
| Promotion activity      | Marketing activities are well prepared.                     | PA1  | Likert 1-5 | Lee et al., 2011; Popescu and Corbos, 2012; Nagy and Nagy, 2013; Egresi and Kara, 2014; Lee et al., 2014; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018 |
|                         | Festive advertising images put a strong impression.         | PA2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | Plenty of media channels to promote the festival.           | PA3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The marketing campaign is successful.                       | PA4  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
| Festival information    | The information is provided fully and accurately.           | FI1  | Likert 1-5 | Biazen, 2012; Maneenetr and Tran, 2014; Marković et al., 2015; Tsai and Sakulsinlapakorn, 2016; Coskun, 2018 |
|                         | Signs and maps are clear and easy-to-understand.            | FI2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The information is continuously updated.                    | FI3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The source of information is reliable.                      | FI4  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
| Festival environment    | The festival space is associated with Southern characteristics. | FE1  | Likert 1-5 | Cudny, 2013; Congcong, 2014; Marković et al., 2015; Mihajlović, 2017               |
|                         | The food courts are eye-catching.                            | FE2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The festival surrounding is clean.                          | FE3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The ambiance is always bustling.                            | FE4  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | The security is guaranteed.                                 | FE5  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
| Festival facility       | Convenient parking slots.                                   | FF1  | Likert 1-5 | Sahoo, 2013; Cudny, 2013; Maneenetr and Tran, 2014; Bottyán,                       |
|                         | Clean public restrooms.                                     | FF2  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
|                         | Full infrastructure and facilities.                         | FF3  | Likert 1-5 |                                                                                      |
Factor | Observed variable | Sign | Scale | Reference resources
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Modern equipment for the festival operation. | FF4 | Likert 1-5 | 2015; Marković et al., 2015
Attractiveness | The folk cakes are diverse and tasty. | ATT1 | Likert 1-5 | Lee et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Chang et al., 2017; Naqvi et al., 2018
The activities are interesting. | ATT2 | Likert 1-5 |
The festival content is impressive and novel. | ATT3 | Likert 1-5 |
The festival creates a trend that attracts visitors. | ATT4 | Likert 1-5 |
WOM intention | I will share the information with the community. | WOM1 | Likert 1-5 | Lee et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Chang et al., 2017; Naqvi et al., 2018
I will recommend the festival to my relatives and friends. | WOM2 | Likert 1-5 |
I will share the positiveness of the festival. | WOM3 | Likert 1-5 |
I will invite my relatives and friends to the festival. | WOM4 | Likert 1-5 |

2.2. Analytical method
To test hypotheses of the research model, analyses used are as follows: reliability test with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to evaluate convergent and discriminant validity of variables, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the suitability of data to the market, and structural equation modeling (SEM) to demonstrate factors affecting the attractiveness and visitors’ WOM intentions to the Southern Folk Cake Festival.

2.3. Data collection method
To meet the reliability requirement of the SEM model, the sample size should be between 100 and 200 (Hoyle, 1995). The SEM requires large sample sizes because it is based on the theory of large-sample distribution (Raykov and Widaman, 1995). However, there is no clear definition of how the sample size is considered large. Besides, Hoelter (1983) said that the minimum sample size should be 200. The study collected 202 observations by direct interviews and applied a convenient sampling. The survey subjects are tourists who have ever visited the Southern Folk Cake Festival. Thus, the sample size meets the reliability requirement for model testing.

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Reliability test of scales
To indicate factors affecting the attractiveness and tourists’ WOM intentions for the Southern Folk Cake Festival, the study used SPSS 22 and AMOS 22 software to support the analysis.

3.1.1. Step 1: Test the reliability of scales
The study tests the reliability level by Cronbach’s alpha values. The test result in table 2 shows 34 observed variables belonging to 8 factors with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients from 0.719 to 0.873 (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994; Slater, 1995). Also, all variables have item-total correlation values greater than 0.3. Therefore, the variables are used for the EFA step.
3.1.2. Step 2: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales. The test results are guaranteed as the following numbers. (1) Factor loading values are all higher than 0.5; (2) the suitability test of the model (0.5 < KMO = 0.24 < 1); (3) Bartlett’s test for correlation of variables (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05). Cumulative variance test = 53.12% > 50% which shows that variables included in the model have suitable explanations (Hair et al., 1998). Therefore, 8 factors are formed from 34 observed variables and there is no variable disturbance among factors so the factors’ names remain the same.

3.1.3. Step 3: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

After running the EFA, the above eight factors are included for confirmation factor analysis (CFA). The result shows as follows: Chi-square/df = 1.281 < 2 with P = 0.000 ≤ 0.05. The TLI and CFI index reaches 0.930 and 0.938, both are > 0.9. RMSEA = 0.043 < 0.08. These prove that the model is consistent with market data (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). The standardized regression weights of scales are higher than 0.5 and unstandardized regression weights are statistically significant, so scales achieve convergent validity. Besides, the correlation coefficients among factors are less than 1 with standard deviations less than 0.05. Therefore, the research model reaches the discriminant validity.

Based on the result in table 3, the Composite Reliability ($\rho_c$) is satisfactory. Meanwhile, the Average Variance Extracted ($\rho_{vc}$) is slightly low (less than 0.5), the $\rho_{vc}$ can accept the value of 0.4 or higher under the condition that the $\rho_{vc}$ is greater than 0.6 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Fraering and Minor, 2006). Thus, all factors are satisfactory in terms of value and reliability, so the model is suitable to be applied in the next SEM.

**Table 2 Cronbach’s alpha test result**

| Scale            | Number of observed variables | Cronbach’s alpha | Min corrected item-total correlation |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Typical cuisine  | 4                           | 0.719            | 0.614                                |
| Festival content | 4                           | 0.843            | 0.778                                |
| Promotion        | 4                           | 0.838            | 0.765                                |
| Festival information | 4                       | 0.799            | 0.720                                |
| Festival environment | 5                          | 0.873            | 0.829                                |
| Facility         | 5                           | 0.772            | 0.705                                |
| Attractiveness   | 4                           | 0.753            | 0.668                                |
| WOM intention    | 4                           | 0.868            | 0.782                                |

**Table 3 Reliability test result**

| Factor           | Number of observed variables | Composite Reliability ($\rho_c$) | Average Variance Extracted ($\rho_{vc}$) |
|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Typical cuisine  | 4                           | 0.72                            | 0.40                                     |
| Festival content | 4                           | 0.85                            | 0.58                                     |
| Promotion        | 4                           | 0.84                            | 0.58                                     |
| Festival information | 4                        | 0.80                            | 0.50                                     |
| Festival environment | 5                          | 0.87                            | 0.57                                     |
| Facility         | 5                           | 0.77                            | 0.41                                     |
| Attractiveness   | 4                           | 0.75                            | 0.44                                     |
| WOM intention    | 4                           | 0.88                            | 0.64                                     |
3.2. Verification of theoretical model and research hypotheses

After the CFA, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test research hypotheses.

Table 4 Relationship estimation in the SEM

| Relationship | Estimated value | Standard Errors (S.E) | Critical Ratios (C.R) | Standardized estimated value | P-value | Hypothesis |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------|------------|
| ATT <--- TC  | 0.152          | 0.066                 | 2.303                 | 0.244                       | 0.021   | H1         |
| ATT <--- FC  | 0.470          | 0.116                 | 4.051                 | 0.564                       | 0.000   | H2         |
| ATT <--- PA  | 0.142          | 0.070                 | 2.033                 | 0.199                       | 0.042   | H3         |
| ATT <--- FI  | 0.160          | 0.064                 | 2.505                 | 0.200                       | 0.012   | H4         |
| ATT <--- FE  | 0.127          | 0.061                 | 2.092                 | 0.190                       | 0.036   | H5         |
| ATT <--- FF  | 0.115          | 0.056                 | 2.050                 | 0.185                       | 0.040   | H6         |
| WOM <--- ATT | 0.557          | 0.133                 | 4.174                 | 0.469                       | 0.000   | H7         |

The estimated values indicate the impact level of each factor on the attractiveness and WOM intentions of visitors. The greater the absolute values, the higher the degree of impact. Table 4 claims that estimated values of factors are statistically significant at the level of 1% to 5%. This means that all mentioned factors positively impact the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival. Accordingly, the festival content has the strongest impact on the attractiveness of the festival. Besides, the festival’s attractiveness positively affects the WOM intentions of visitors. This result proves that the Southern Folk Cake Festival has an attractive program, interesting activities, various and impressive types of folk cake, which leads to positive WOM intentions. Research results are similar to those of Lee et al. (2011), Lee et al. (2014), Chang et al. (2017), and Naqvi et al. (2018).

4. Conclusion

The Southern Folk Cake Festival has become a typical feature of Can Tho City and a culinary cultural highlight of the Mekong Delta. It brings both traditional and modern values. This is one of the festivals in the region attracting a large number of visitors. The festival offers an opportunity for the city managers to promote the land, people, and culture of the South. It introduces typical folk cakes, preserves culinary cultures, and develops the tourism industry of the city. The factors that positively affect the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival are typical cuisine, festival content, promotion activities, festival information, festival environment, and facilities. Also, the festival’s attractiveness beneficially impacts the WOM intentions of visitors to the festival. Based on the research results, some governance implications are proposed to improve the attractiveness of the Southern Folk Cake Festival in Can Tho City. First of all, build a diverse festival program with new and attractive activities. Secondly, upgrade the infrastructure and equipment for the festival. Thirdly, promote and improve the quality of promotion activities. Fourthly, strictly manage the festival surrounding to create beautiful scenery. Fifthly, preserve and enhance the culinary cultures, ensure food safety and hygiene.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.
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