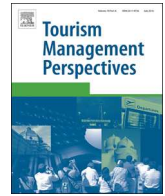




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## The role of food festivals in branding culinary destinations

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### ABSTRACT

Food-themed festivals are at the heart of culinary tourism and have long been identified as a key element contributing to a destination's competitiveness. Building on the motivation, opportunity, ability (MOA) theory and elaboration likelihood model (ELM), the current study investigates how participants' motivation, time pressure and prior festival knowledge play a role in portraying a favorable culinary destination image that in turn attracts repatronage. In addition, the moderating role of food involvement is also examined. The results are expected to advance the literature on destination branding, and provide managerial insights for destination marketing organizations and industry practitioners.

### 1. Introduction

An omnipresent ingredient of travel experience, appreciation of local cuisine and food-related customs has become a must-do activity for many tourists. In parallel with the growing appetite of tourists is the rapid development of culinary tourism, which is considered as a gateway for destination prosperity (Stone, Migacz, & Wolf, 2019). Culinary tourism is defined as “any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, or consumes branded local culinary resources” (Smith & Xiao, 2008, p. 289). To usher in the growth of culinary tourism, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are actively seeking avenues to forge a destination into a place of gastronomy, with a lineup of promotional events and activities. Food festivals, in particular, have been frequently resorted to as a branding tool for culinary tourism (Du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003; Horng & Tsai, 2010; Lee & Arcodia, 2011; Sotiriadis, 2015).

Most research on food festivals has centered on elements and consequences of the eventscape such as service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions (e.g., Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017; Stone, Soulard, Migacz, & Wolf, 2018; Vajirakachorn & Chongwatpol, 2017). In some recent empirical studies, the association between culinary festivals and destination branding has commanded researchers' attention, linking event attendees' experiences to their perceptions of the host destination (Folgado-Fernández, Hernández-Mogollón, & Duarte, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Yuan & Jang, 2008). However, like research on other types of events in destination marketing (e.g., Deng & Li, 2014; Hallmann,

Zehrer, & Müller, 2015; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005), these studies mainly have investigated holistic destination images and loyalty intentions, but not food-specific aspects associated with a culinary destination. Previous research has underscored the distinctiveness between destination image formation and destination branding (Cai, 2002), and has called for the establishment of a unique destination identity (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). Therefore, it is worthy to scrutinize how culinary festivals, as key enhancers, can forge a solid food-related image for the host destination, and entice repatronage behaviors. In addition, the quality and value of festivals are the focal factors of current research interest, which will transition to a favorable destination image and enhanced destination loyalty.

From the perspective of customer characteristics, the motivation, opportunity, ability (MOA) theory (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991) provides theoretical underpinnings to understand how brand information processing is promoted by three advertising executional cues (i.e., motivation, opportunity and ability.) First conceived in advertising and marketing research, this theory has been recently adopted by festival studies to investigate the influential factors of festival participation (Jepson, Clarke, & Ragsdell, 2013). When one of the strategic considerations governing the organization of food festivals is to brand a culinary destination, likewise, the MOA theory establishes the theoretical foundations to scrutinize determinants that will influence the effectiveness of such branding activities, when event attendees participate in the festival with different levels of motivation, opportunity (e.g., time available) and ability (e.g., prior knowledge of the festival).

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In addition to examining the three antecedents of branding effectiveness, it is also worthwhile to delve into food-related traits that will condition the impact of the MOA components. In particular, food tourists are characterized by the degree of their interest in food; that is, they may largely vary in their levels of enthusiasm for cuisine that can be conceptualized as food involvement (Robinson & Getz, 2016). Foodies demonstrate a notably ardent interest in authentic culinary experiences from food-themed festivals (Getz & Robinson, 2014). It is therefore of interest to scrutinize whether food involvement plays a role in food festivals and culinary destination branding. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) provides a theoretical basis for investigating food involvement by suggesting a more salient influence of diagnostic cues on consumers' assessment, when a high level of consumer involvement unfolds (Bian & Moutinho, 2011). This model inspires studies to further research food involvement as a conditioning factor that moderates the impact of the MOA clues on culinary destination branding.

The following research questions therefore guide this study: (1) How do the MOA components play a role in culinary destination branding? and (2) Does food involvement moderate these impacts on advertising effectiveness? An empirical study was conducted in Macao, a special administrative region of China that was designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as "a creative city of gastronomy" in 2017. In particular, UNESCO has lauded the role of food festivals in branding Macao as a culinary destination:

Macao has an important experience in hosting large-scale gastronomy-related events such as the Macao Food Festival; a landmark event gathering local and international chefs and key sector stakeholders from across Asia and Europe. (UNESCO, 2018, October 9).

Using Macao Food Festival (MFF) as an example, this study aims to address the two aforementioned questions. A framework is proposed and tested, leading from MOA components of tourist attendees to culinary destination image and loyalty. In addition, the moderating effect of food involvement is also examined. The contributions of this study are threefold. First, while the extant research on the role of events in destination branding is informative, it seldom investigates the creation of a pronounced destination brand identity, but merely focuses on the enhancement of a holistic image and place awareness. The current study fills the void by empirically testing the branding effectiveness of food festivals as an advertising tool to forge a culinary identity of the host destination. Second, it enriches the literature on consumer characteristics in festivals, and elucidates how different personal traits with regard to food involvement matter in destination branding. Finally, the results also provide managerial insights for event organizers and DMOs, helping them to synergize their efforts and resources, and to employ tactics that cater to the needs of target tourist segments.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Destination image, destination branding and brand image transfer

Destination image has been recognized as "the individual's mental representation of knowledge, feelings, and global impressions about a destination" (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 870). Although destination image formation constitutes the core of destination branding, the two concepts are distinct (Cai, 2002). To brand a destination, marketers should select a consistent brand element mix to establish a unique destination identity (Boo et al., 2009). Buhalis (2000) has also underscored the importance of understanding the unique characteristics of a destination, as each destination usually attracts a specific type of tourist. In this respect, effective destination branding calls for a distinct selling proposition that is not easy to imitate or surpass. Facing intense competition in the global tourism industry, an ever-increasing number of destinations have endeavored to brand a unique identity to attract target tourists. In particular, recent studies have identified food as a

core element to brand a destination (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2019; Tsai & Wang, 2017; Yu & Sun, 2019), as it is perceived as an intangible cultural heritage inspiring tourists to "purposely travel to a given destination because of its food image" (Lai, Khoo-Lattimore, & Wang, 2018, p. 580).

At the heart of destination branding lies destination brand image formation; that is, how tourists perceive a destination regarding its qualities and associations (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). From destination marketing's point of view, tourism studies have widely adopted customer-based brand equity—in particular, tourists' perceived destination image and the subsequent destination loyalty—to assess whether branding is successful or not (e.g., Lai et al., 2019; Li & Kaplanidou, 2013; Tsai & Wang, 2017). Brand image transfer has been a topic of intense interest in marketing research. A commonly advanced rationale for companies' strategic emphasis on their featured products or services is their motivation to leverage the equity in their most valuable assets, thereby developing their brand names relatively easily (Keller & Sood, 2003). Toward this end, umbrella branding, an approach in portfolio management, has become a management imperative. This approach adopts a parent or master brand name across a range of products, linking customers' perceived brand image to all the products and services in the same "branded house" (Knox, 2004). Reciprocally, a corporation can also build on the enormous success of its popular products by extending the positive associations attached to those products throughout the entire corporation. Therefore, the value created by featured products is to impart a more favorable image of the parent brand, with image transfer viable between the parent brand and lines of products with the same branding through a "halo effect" or a "feedback spillover effect" (Balachander & Ghose, 2003).

Image transfer research provides theoretical underpinnings for destination marketers to apply the above brand concepts at the destination level. In the context of corporate branding, the espoused values of featured products connote a sense of quality and credibility, which communicates the core values of the corporation and builds up a more desirable corporate image (Chun & Davies, 2006). In tourism, this spillover effect makes possible image transfer from a tourism product to the destination itself. Similar to corporate image (Balmer & Gray, 2003), a destination image encapsulates core values of the place, and thus allows a destination to capitalize on this well-established brand equity and brand knowledge for extensions to new products and services. As a result, DMOs are increasingly and actively leveraging special events to entice potential tourists and to further reinforce a favorable image (Getz, 2008).

### 2.2. Events in destination branding

When an event is paired or marketed jointly with a destination, a synthesis between the two takes place in which elements of the image of the event will transfer to that of the corresponding destination, and vice versa (Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2004). For instance, participating in such an event allows visitors to have a special experience and better understanding of the local culture and characteristics, which in turn alter their perceived destination images associated with economic, sociocultural and environmental aspects of the hosting community (Deng & Li, 2014).

Although special events have been widely utilized as avenues for destination branding (e.g., Kruger & Viljoen, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Peter & Anandkumar, 2016), academic studies have seldom empirically explored the role of events in establishing a unique destination brand or identity (e.g., a culinary paradise or a shopping mecca). While there is great divergence in the values that are conveyed to customers from various events, these studies have primarily discussed broad impacts of events on various image aspects (e.g., cultural environment, infrastructure, political awareness, and economic benefits), but failed to further examine how different events project a particular destination brand identity (e.g., Deng & Li, 2014; Hallmann et al., 2015; Lee et al.,

2005). As Karim and Chi (2010) have noted, the tourism industry has many facets, such as culinary tourism, sports tourism and medical tourism, and there remains an apparent lack of understanding of how special events can portray the unique facets of a destination's image. Therefore, the need arises to thoroughly examine destination branding through planned events (Brown et al., 2004).

### 2.3. The role of food festivals in culinary destination branding

Gastronomy has long become an essential vehicle that adds value to destination branding, and many regions are now capitalizing on the potential opportunities of cuisine to contribute to destination marketing. For example, the Korean government has pledged to exert much effort to promote its cuisine, which has become one of the fastest growing regional cuisines in terms of global popularity, along with its history and cultural etiquette (Phillips, Asperin, & Wolfe, 2013). In the case of Hong Kong, famed as a "gourmet paradise," the DMO tends to promote its exotic fusion of Eastern and Western flavors that combines integrated and globalized cuisines (Hornig & Tsai, 2010). Similar to Hong Kong, Singapore has proposed the slogan "The Food Capital of Asia" to foster culinary tourism development with a wide variety of culinary delights (Henderson, 2004).

Culinary tourism resources include a broad spectrum of forms that have been categorized into four types: facilities, activities, events and organizations (Hornig & Tsai, 2012). Within the various types, food festivals have been tremendously popular and gained much attention in recent years (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Vajirakachorn & Chongwatpol, 2017; Wong, Wan, & Qi, 2015). Food festivals offer more than merely sustenance or external promotions to visitors; they also have implications for identity and lifestyle (Hall & Sharples, 2008; Lau & Li, 2019). Researchers have asserted a vast potential exists for development of destination attractions through food events (Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008), which provide tourists with opportunities to taste indigenous flavors, to engage in cultural activities, to experience an authentic lifestyle and to learn the traditions of a destination (Wan & Chan, 2013). These activities translate into a deeper appreciation of the culture, which in turn connects tourists with a destination through an emotional identification (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Food festivals therefore provide local themes for tourism development and destination image makers, and can serve as catalysts for culinary tourism as well as sustainable tourism in general (Smith, Costello, & Muenchen, 2010).

With respect to the research context, Macanese cuisine, which integrates Portuguese and Chinese cooking, has made culinary activities one of Macao's main tourist attractions. The DMO in Macao is seeking to promote the city by featuring its cross-cultural interchange. In particular, the Association of Macao Restaurant Merchants has been hosting the MFF as one of the major annual events in Macao since 2001. The MFF provides not only rich and diverse dining experiences, but also exciting live entertainment, games and competitions. The organizer has exerted much effort to hallmark its local food and beverage industry, provide Macao with a more reinforced culinary image, and lure more tourists to the destination (Wan & Chan, 2013).

It is imperative for event designers and DMOs to investigate the effectiveness of leveraging food festivals in branding a culinary destination. Most previous research adopts a common practice stressing communication objectives over economic objectives, as it is difficult to quantify sales volume under different influences (Kusumoto, 2002). Advertisement effectiveness, in this sense, is widely considered as customers' response at the cognitive, affective, or conative level, such as their recall and recognition of a brand, perceived brand image, repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth recommendation (Wells, 2014). In the context of tourism destination branding, likewise, the effectiveness of a promotional campaign largely resides in the resulting destination image, and subsequent destination loyalty induced by this image (e.g., Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Park & Petrick,

2006; Qu et al., 2011). The MOA theory provides theoretical underpinnings to understand how the branding effectiveness is affected by three executional cues (i.e., motivation, opportunity and ability). Grounded in the MOA theory, this paper will examine how these three components of a food festival will influence the advertising effectiveness, based on culinary images of the destination that further induce repatronage and positive word-of-mouth reputation.

## 3. Hypothesis development

### 3.1. Motivation, opportunity, ability (MOA) theory

First conceived in advertising and marketing research, the MOA theory posits that brand information processing is promoted by three advertising executional cues: motivation, opportunity and ability (MacInnis et al., 1991). These three drivers largely condition consumers' level of information processing and the extent to which they "allocate attention and processing resources to comprehend and elaborate on brand information in an ad" (MacInnis et al., 1991, p. 33). Without adequate MOA cues of an advertisement, consumers are not fully immersed in information processing, leading to unfavorable outcomes in developing positive ad/brand attitudes. Besides being studied in research on advertising, the MOA theory has recently been gaining attention in the tourism and hospitality field; it has been applied in different contexts such as festival engagement (Jepson et al., 2013; Jepson, Clarke, & Ragsdell, 2014; Jepson & Ryan, 2018), community participation in tourism development (Hung, Sirakaya-Turk, & Ingram, 2011; Latip, Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Marzuki, & Umar, 2018; Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Ahmad, & Barghi, 2017) and social media involvement (Leung & Bai, 2013).

#### 3.1.1. Motivation and advertising effectiveness

In the MOA theory, motivation refers to consumers' goal-directed appraisal—the willingness to process information imbedded in an ad (MacInnis et al., 1991). It conditions both the direction and intensity of customer behaviors (Ross, 1979). Consumers with high motivation indicate readiness and desire to identify and process information in an ad, while low-motivated consumers seldom reflect such goals or needs. Therefore, motivation will encourage customers to heed their interests in an intrinsic or extrinsic way, and induce them to act upon the needs by digesting the brand- or product-related information in the advertisement (Mooy & Robben, 2002). This step will further translate to a higher level of information processing and therefore, enhance advertising effectiveness (Wilson, Baack, & Till, 2015).

In the context of event and destination branding, a comprehensive understanding of motivations can provide important information about branding effectiveness, as a tourist's motivation influences his/her perception of a destination and subsequent behavioral intentions (Albayrak & Caber, 2018; Crompton, 1979). Motivations exercise a positive influence on the perceptions of destination image if visitors' needs are satisfied (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Meanwhile, existing studies also provide support for a relationship between motivation and destination image, suggesting that visitors with different needs and interests tend to have different perceptions of destination attributes, such as culture, experiences and activities (Baloglu, 2000; Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010). In particular, an attendee with strong event motivations is more closely tied to information seeking, environment consciousness and destination exploration. The event experience in turn helps him/her to forge a better understanding of the destination and thus enhances value and certain aspects of the perceived image (Kim, Ao, Lee, & Pan, 2012; Kim, Lee, Petrick, & Hahn, 2018). In other words, a tourist's image perceptions of a place could be enhanced through his/her predisposition toward tourism products (e.g., events) offered by the place (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Event motivation positively affects culinary destination image.

### 3.1.2. Opportunity and advertising effectiveness

Opportunity has been defined as the degree of distractions or exposure time that condition one's attention devoted to the ad (MacInnis et al., 1991). The brand-processing context that facilitates or hinders a consumer's behavior matters in the assessment of ultimate advertising effectiveness; as it affects their ability to get access to the message delivered in the ad and also how the consumer subsequently processes the information. Length of exposure (Donthu, Cherian, & Bhargava, 1993), the location of the advertisement (Wilson et al., 2015), and the interference of other ads or tasks (MacInnis et al., 1991) are all possible influential factors that will determine the visibility of the ads and whether information processing is impeded or not.

In the context of an event or festival, time constraints or time pressure are frequently referred to as indicators that inhibit continued participation (Lei & Zhao, 2012; Mahadevan, 2018). (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999) have documented three general ways that consumers may respond to time pressure when a decision needs to be made: 1) accelerate the information processing rate, 2) only concentrate on key attributes, in particular the negative aspects, while ignoring other information, and 3) simplify their decision strategies using non-compensatory rules. In this respect, food festival participants under time constraints may not have enough opportunities to fully appreciate the gastronomic offerings, and they will hastily forge an image of the destination accordingly. In essence, time pressure acts as a travel constraint that lowers tourists' opportunities to interact and experience local offerings (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008). Fast-paced travel also hinders an individual's self-enrichment and revitalization during the trip (Oh, Assaf, & Baloglu, 2016). Such a nuance reduces their understanding and hence, their image perceptions of the destination. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Time pressure (a reverse of opportunity) negatively affects culinary destination image.

### 3.1.3. Ability and advertising effectiveness

Ability implies one's brand-relevant knowledge that helps one to interpret the information (MacInnis et al., 1991). It would be difficult for a consumer to perform certain behaviors in the absence of necessary abilities in a relevant domain (Hung et al., 2011). Previous studies have adopted both experience-based and knowledge-based approaches to measure consumers' efficacy in processing the information in an advertisement. However, the experience-based measure has been subject to conceptual criticism for its insufficiency to elucidate the degree of information encoding (e.g., similar experience or product usage may not necessarily produce the same amount of information gathered). Therefore, knowledge-based measures are more frequently employed to assess awareness and accessibility of information pertaining to the brand or product being advertised (Brucks, 1985). Consumers with sufficient prior knowledge are expected to devote more effort to obtain new information and reveal more thoughts on the brand or product (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Therefore, they could better interpret brand/product information conveyed in the ad and hence, the advertising effectiveness is further assured (Bian & Moutinho, 2011).

Previous tourism studies have outlined prior knowledge as an essential factor that will alter tourists' information search behaviors and subsequently reshape their perceptions of the image of a destination (Park & Kim, 2010). In this respect, food festival attendees with more prior knowledge of the event are more likely to base their evaluations on more sophisticated cues about food and food-related activities, which can better facilitate the formation of the culinary image of a destination. In other words, image perceptions of a destination are dependent not only on exposure from the current travel experience, but also on familiarity and prior experience acquired from the media or other channels (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Kim, Leht, & Kandampully, 2019). Hence the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: Prior event knowledge positively affects culinary destination image.

### 3.2. Destination image and destination loyalty

The importance of destination image has been widely acknowledged in the existing literature, as it significantly affects an individual's perception, destination choice and subsequent behavior (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). One stream of research has examined the influence of destination image on tourists' pre-visit decision-making processes (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Another stream has argued that destination image also conditions tourists' post-decision behaviors (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001). In particular, destination image plays an important role in determining tourists' behavioral intentions, such as intentions to revisit and willingness to recommend (Bigne et al., 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Tourists who perceive a favorable destination image will likely be satisfied with their on-site experiences and thus are more inclined to revisit the destination and spread positive word-of-mouth reputation (Lee et al., 2005). Therefore, the next research hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Culinary destination image positively affects destination loyalty intentions.

### 3.3. The elaboration likelihood model and food involvement as moderator

Involvement has been a well-theorized construct in consumer behavior research, referred to as the perceived degree of salience or relevance that an individual has attached to an object such as a good or a service (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In food-related contexts, food involvement represents a trait that helps to identify the bona fide food enthusiasts for whom gastronomy plays an important role in their day-to-day life (Levitt, Zhang, DiPietro, & Meng, 2017; Robinson & Getz, 2016). Consumers with high levels of food involvement tend to possess an underlying passion for cuisine of true authenticity and superb quality, and actively seek out food-related experiences when travelling in a destination (Ji, Wong, Eves, & Scarles, 2016; Robinson & Getz, 2016). Their high food involvement parallels a deeper understanding of nuances between different food ingredients and the development of cooking methods (Bell & Marshall, 2003).

The moderating role of product involvement on the message–response path has been underpinned by the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) in marketing and advertising research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). While high involvement induces a “central route” to persuasion when consumers base their evaluation on cognitive elaboration and argument, low involvement engenders a “peripheral route” in which only superficial analyses of obvious cues are adopted (Bian & Moutinho, 2011). Therefore, for individuals with high product involvement, diagnostic cues such as product attributes and information play a more salient role in determining their evaluation criteria.

Drawing on the ELM stream of work, we contend that the personal trait of food involvement could moderate the relationships between an influential factor and an individual's behaviors or perceptions (Eertmans, Victoir, Vansant, & Van den Bergh, 2005; Kim & Woo, 2016). This premise rests on the fact that in the context of a food festival, food enthusiasts would resort to an event-related message more frequently when forming a comprehensive culinary image of the destination. Specifically, consumers' elaboration likelihood differs by their involvement status, which subsequently conditions how motivation, opportunity and ability influence cognitive processing (Chung & Zhao, 2003). A high-involvement status would “enhance a person's motivation for issue-relevant thinking” (Chung & Zhao, 2003, p. 127), inducing the central route to persuasion. Therefore, for those with a high level of food involvement, the role of event motivation (e.g., a desire to attend the festival for the best quality food and unique experiences) could further be magnified in that it could serve as a diagnostic cue to improve the image of a destination.

Likewise, their passion for food triggers cognitive elaboration and reinforces the relationship between prior knowledge and culinary destination image, such that a greater probability of information



processing is encouraged. Food enthusiasts' reliance on time spent at the festival, however, may not be as critical as for low-involvement participants, given their higher involvement with the local food and their ability to discern subtle differences in food promptly (Bell & Marshall, 2003). Time pressure would therefore be a less salient constraint.

In addition, consumers are posited to derive a higher level of loyalty from high-involvement purchases (Chen & Tsai, 2008). Given that involvement sets a motivation standard for human behaviors (Zaichkowsky, 1985), while a favorable destination image engenders tourist interest in patronizing a place (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014), it follows that the influence of destination image on tourist loyalty should be enhanced for highly involved tourists, but not necessary for less involved ones. In other words, when signals of a favorable culinary image are perceived, tourists who are keen on local gourmet food (i.e., high involvement) could be more likely to process this argument and build up loyalty to a destination for food tourism experience. Given the above rationale, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H5: Food involvement positively moderates the relationship leading from (a) motivation to culinary destination image, (b) time pressure (a reverse of opportunity) to culinary destination image, (c) prior event knowledge (ability) to culinary destination image, and (d) culinary destination image to culinary destination loyalty.

Based on the above discussion, Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual model of the relationships and postulates the hypotheses.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Sample and data collection

Lee and Arcodia (2011) underscored four distinct characteristics of food festivals that contribute to destination branding: festivals' longevity, number of visitors, government assistance, and media coverage. The MFF, as one major annual event with substantial government support and high media exposure, has attracted a vast number of visitors regionally and internationally (UNESCO, 2018, October 9). Therefore, it has been selected as the research context for the present study.

Empirical research to test the hypotheses was carried out at the

venue of the 17th MFF. Undergraduate students majoring in event management were engaged and trained to conduct the survey over a seven-day period. Training on interviewee selection and survey administration was held to enhance the efficiency and credibility of the survey. Tourist attendees were the population of interest in the current study, identified through a screening question. A convenience sample of spectators was drawn at the event venue on completion of their festival participation. Finally, 522 useable questionnaires were collected, coded and analyzed for this research, with a response rate of 70.4%.

#### 4.1.1. Instrument development

Based on previous studies, a questionnaire was designed to measure the constructs of interest. The questionnaire was first drafted in English and then translated into Chinese by two bilingual authors. The translated version was then back-translated into English by another bilingual translator to ensure accuracy. Prior to data collection, a pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted to ensure clarity and content validity. The questionnaire was finalized afterwards as detailed below.

To measure motivation, opportunity and ability in the MOA theory, the study adopted a seven-item scale of event motivation modified from Smith et al. (2010), a three-item scale of time pressure from Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2005), and a five-item scale of prior knowledge from Lin and Chen (2006), respectively. Three items were adopted from (Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015) to assess a respondent's food involvement. Compared with other scales of food involvement that only measure food enthusiasm (e.g., Derinalp Çanakçı & Birdir, 2019; Levitt, Zhang, DiPietro, & Meng, 2019; Robinson & Getz, 2016), this scale focuses on tourists' preference of authentic cuisine and consumption of local food and beverages. Culinary destination image of Macao was measured as a second-order construct, including six items pertaining to food quality and six items about food-related tourism activities (Karim & Chi, 2010). The next section involved a two-item destination loyalty intentions scale adopted from Yoon and Uysal (2005) to include measures of intentions to revisit Macao for food and spread positive word-of-mouth reputation to promote Macao as a culinary destination. All scale items mentioned above were assessed based on an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (10). The last section sought to obtain the demographic profiles and travel characteristics.

Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships, we first obtained

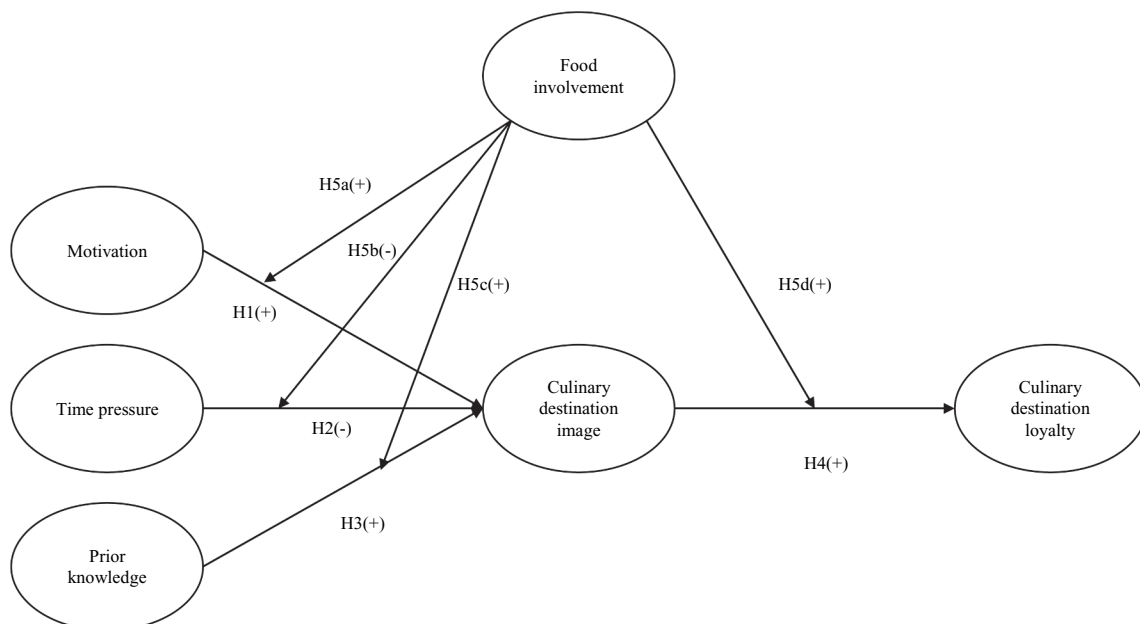


Fig. 1. The conceptual framework.

descriptive statistics and tested the reliability and validity of the variables of interest using SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 24.0. Hierarchical regression was then performed using SPSS 24.0 to test the main and interaction effects.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Sample profile

The gender composition showed that more females (59.1%) than males (40.9%) completed the survey. About one half of the respondents were 25 to 34 years old (45.4%) and a majority of them (74.2%) held a bachelor's degree or above. Most of the respondents came from mainland China (73.1%) and had a monthly income level not in excess of \$1500 USD (74.9%). Respondents were predominately repeat visitors to Macao (77.4%), but more than half were first-time participants in MFF (53.7%). On average, each respondent spent approximately \$32 USD.

### 5.2. Validity and reliability of the measurement items

The fit of the measurement model was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As shown in Table 1, results of the CFA tests reveal a good model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 2.19$ , CFI = 0.97, NNFI = 0.96,

RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05). Measurement reliability and validity were also diagnosed and assured. For example, composite reliability (CR) coefficients ranged from 0.92 to 0.95, exceeding the threshold of 0.70. In addition, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values, which were all greater than 0.70. The model also achieved convergent validity, as all of the average variance extracted (AVE) values were greater than the 0.50 cutoff value. The standardized loadings ranged between 0.72 and 0.95, all significant at the 0.01 level. Table 2 summarizes the means, standard deviations and inter-correlations of the variables. Discriminant validity was further assured: for each construct, the square root of the AVE was greater than the correlations between it and other constructs.

### 5.3. Results of hypotheses testing

Hierarchical moderated regression analyses were adopted to test the hypothesized relationships. A summated score was derived for each variable of interest for the data analysis. Four regression models were established for culinary destination image and culinary destination loyalty, respectively. Model 1 controlled for gender, age, number of participations in MFF, and spending per person in 2017 MFF. In Model 2, all the predictors were added. For the analyses of culinary destination image as the dependent variable, motivation, time pressure and prior

**Table 1**  
Scale items and validation.

Scale items	Standardized loadings	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
<i>Motivation (I attend the 17th MFF...)</i>		0.92	0.92	0.62
Because I like food of the best quality	0.73			
Because I enjoy special food events	0.83			
To enjoy the good food	0.85			
To experience new and different foods	0.80			
Because I have heard about the event and it sounds fun	0.79			
Because food events are unique	0.72			
Because Food events help increase my knowledge of local culture	0.76			
<i>Time pressure (a reverse score of Opportunity)</i>		0.95	0.95	0.86
I find myself pressed for time when attending MFF.	0.90			
I am in a hurry when attending MFF.	0.96			
I have only a limited amount of time available when attending MFF.	0.91			
<i>Prior knowledge (Ability) Before I attend the 17th MFF...</i>		0.94	0.94	0.74
I knew MFF well.	0.85			
I was willing to understand MFF actively.	0.87			
I have actually stored in my memory about MFF's information.	0.91			
I could discriminate the difference of MFF and other events.	0.85			
The accumulated level what I know about MFF is high.	0.87			
<i>Food involvement</i>		0.90	0.90	0.76
I like to buy food that is produced locally	0.70			
I try to buy food from local markets as much as possible	0.95			
I don't really mind where in the world my food comes from (reverse coded)	0.94			
<b>Culinary destination image</b>				
<i>Food-quality image (Macau is a city that...)</i>		0.95	0.94	0.73
Offers variety of foods	0.84			
Offers good quality of food	0.88			
Offers regionally produced food products	0.85			
Offers attractive food presentation	0.88			
Offers exotic cooking methods	0.82			
Offers delicious food	0.86			
<i>Food-tourism image (Macau is a city that...)</i>		0.93	0.94	0.74
Offers food and wine regions	0.84			
Offers package tours related to food and wine	0.72			
Offers unique cultural experience	0.88			
Offers opportunity to visit street market	0.83			
Offers unique street food vendors	0.88			
Offers various food activities	0.89			
<b>Culinary destination image (second order)</b>		0.89	0.92	0.86
<i>Food-quality image</i>	0.93			
<i>Food-tourism image</i>	0.92			
<i>Culinary destination loyalty</i>		0.92	0.92	0.85
I will revisit Macau for food again.	0.90			
I will recommend Macau as a culinary destination to others.	0.94			

Note:  $\chi^2/df = 2.19$ , CFI = 0.97, NNFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.05.  
CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

**Table 2**  
Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables.

	M	Std	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Motivation	7.32	1.70	<b>0.78</b>						
2. Time pressure	4.99	2.93	0.08	<b>0.93</b>					
3. Prior knowledge	6.12	2.24	0.45***	0.22***	<b>0.86</b>				
4. Food involvement	6.60	1.66	0.44***	0.18***	0.36***	<b>0.87</b>			
5. Food quality image	7.38	1.68	0.74***	0.02	0.40***	0.43***	<b>0.86</b>		
6. Food tourism image	7.08	1.79	0.70***	0.04	0.46***	0.40***	0.84***	<b>0.86</b>	
7. Culinary destination loyalty	7.78	1.79	0.59***	0.09*	0.38***	0.35***	0.70***	0.68***	<b>0.92</b>

Diagonal elements are the squared root of AVE for each construct.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

event knowledge were added as the predictors; for the analyses of culinary destination loyalty as the dependent variable, culinary destination image was added as the predictor. Model 3 examined the main effect of the moderator by adding food involvement. Finally, Model 4 tested the moderating effect of food involvement by adding two-way interactions. The predictors were centered to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). All the variance inflation factors were 1.51 or below, revealing that multicollinearity is not a problem in the study.

The results of hypotheses testing are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. For the analyses of culinary destination image as the dependent variable (Table 3), Model 2 indicates that event motivation ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and prior knowledge of MFF ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) have a significant positive effect on culinary destination image, supporting H1 and H3. However, time pressure only exerts a weak impact. H2 is therefore rejected. Model 3 indicates that food involvement will positively influence destination image ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, Model 4 adds two-way interactions into the model, indicating that the interaction of food involvement and time pressure on destination image is significantly positive ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ), along with the involvement-knowledge interaction ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, H5b and H5c are supported, while H5a is rejected.

For the analyses of culinary destination loyalty as the dependent variable, results in Model 2 show that food destination image will significantly enhance loyalty for a culinary destination ( $\beta = 0.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting H4 (see Table 4). In Model 3, the main effect of food involvement on culinary destination loyalty is not significant.

**Table 3**  
Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses: culinary destination image as the dependent variable.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Controls</b>				
Gender	-0.07	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04
Age	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.02
MFF prior experience	-0.08	-0.05	-0.05	-0.04
MFF spending	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02
<b>Main effects</b>				
Motivation		0.65***	0.62***	0.59***
Time pressure		-0.05	-0.05	-0.08*
Knowledge		0.17***	0.15***	0.15***
<b>Moderator</b>				
Food involvement			0.10**	0.08*
<b>Two-way interactions</b>				
Motivation × Food involvement				0.00
Time pressure × Food involvement				0.07*
Knowledge × Food involvement				0.11**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.54	0.55	0.57
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.52***	0.01**	0.02***

Coefficients are standardized.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 4**  
Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses: culinary destination loyalty as the dependent variable.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Controls</b>				
Gender	-0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00*
Age	-0.03	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06
MFF prior experience	0.01	0.06	0.07	0.06
MFF spending	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01
<b>Main effects</b>				
Culinary destination image		0.68***	0.66***	0.64***
<b>Moderator</b>				
Food involvement			0.06	0.04
<b>Two-way interactions</b>				
Culinary destination image × Food involvement				0.10**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.46	0.46	0.47
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.46***	0.00	0.01**

Coefficients are standardized.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Finally, Model 4 supports H5d, with a significant two-way interaction ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

### 6.1. Theoretical contribution

#### 6.1.1. Role of food festivals in branding a culinary destination

Given the valid evidence of festivals' role in enhancing a destination's image and awareness (e.g., Deng & Li, 2014; Hallmann et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2005), there is still a paucity of research on whether festivals are effectively building a unique identity or a desired image of a destination, especially in the context of culinary tourism development (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Yuan & Jang, 2008). In addition, the characteristics of festival attendees, which could be the key determinants of branding effectiveness, are seldom investigated. The current research sets out to fill these research gaps and advances both tourism and advertising literature.

The results imply that tourist festival attendees' motivation for food and their prior knowledge of the festival help them to conjure up a favorable culinary destination image (e.g., a place full of delectable and authentic edibles and food-related cultural activities). This positive image will in turn facilitate destination loyalty and attract repatronage for food. A "deeper message processing route" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) is tapped into when advertisement processing follows a central route and leads to stronger attitude formation, given festival attendees' high motivation and great familiarity with the festival.

It is also worthy to note that time pressure (opportunity) only has a weak impact, which differs from the findings of previous advertising

studies (Wilson and Till, 2008, 2011; Chan and Cheng, 2012). Lack of opportunity has been posited to induce a “peripheral route” in information processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 2012); but this may not be true for a food-themed festival, in which attendees' satisfaction mainly lies in their immediate gustatory experience, a flash of taste excitement. Thus destination branding is not necessarily restricted by time or other constraints, when food festivals are utilized as a means to brand a culinary destination.

### 6.1.2. Culinary destination branding for food enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts

This study advances the understanding of different tourist segments (in particular, tourists with high versus low food involvement) as a moderator of destination branding effectiveness. The results reveal that high food involvement buffers the negative impact of time constraints on perceived destination image, and reinforces the positive impact of prior knowledge. In addition, the culinary image-loyalty effect is strengthened. For food enthusiasts (i.e., those with high food involvement), their customary high expectations for quality food make possible a deeper understanding of nuances between different food ingredients and food-related activities (Bell & Marshall, 2003), thus eliciting a quick and effective response to such information. The non-enthusiasts (i.e., those with low food involvement), in comparison, demand more time to discern the good and the bad, and their time constraints at the festival will retard the formation of a favorable culinary image.

In addition, food involvement also conditions whether prior knowledge of the festival matters to destination branding, and whether a strong food-related image indeed translates to unswerving loyalty. These positive results may only be true for festival participants with high food involvement. For non-enthusiasts, familiarity with the festival does not necessarily help to forge a better culinary image, given their inability to appreciate high-quality cuisine with rich food culture embedded. Furthermore, their perceived culinary destination image is less likely to ensure repatronizing intentions to the place for food, if local food and food-related activities do not tap into their inherent needs and interests. These results echo the moderating effect of product involvement noted in the advertising and marketing literature (e.g., Bian & Moutinho, 2011; Chung & Zhao, 2003), reinforcing the role of consumers' traits of involvement in implementing an effective branding strategy.

### 6.2. Managerial implications

This study provides managerial insights for both DMOs and event planners, paving the way to fulfilling outcomes through themed festivals. The findings that MFF effectively boosts a “culinary destination” image of the host city and subsequently enhances destination loyalty inevitably will inspire industry practitioners. For only do flagship themed events stand out with their large scale and influence on destination awareness, they can also be effectively leveraged as tools for destination branding by establishing a unique destination identity.

Different from traditional media such as TV commercials, newspaper ads and street billboards that target mass customers (Lau, Lee, Lam, & Ho, 2001), a themed event usually attracts a specific customer segment. Results of the study suggest two critical components for message processing: strong festival motivation for food, and better prior knowledge of the event. Event planners are advised to devise promotional strategies that are aligned with tourists' desire for high quality and exotic food available in the event, as well as means to improve their prior knowledge for such a planned occasion. For example, the design of promotional materials could underscore the superb quality, value for

money, and good variety of food, and maximize the distinctive activities and benefits provided at the festival. Marketers could employ digital marketing on social media platforms (Cantallos & Salvi, 2014) (e.g., through electronic word-of-mouth and celebrity influence) to increase prior event knowledge for tourists prior to their visit. Hanging banners at major tourist entry points such as the border gates, airports and ferry terminals are also an effective of means of improving target attendees' prior knowledge.

Second, the result that branding effectiveness is not subject to time constraints has implications for event planners in devising the content of the food festival, when they are actively collaborating with DMOs for destination branding. Peripheral event activities and amenities (e.g., stage performances, lucky draws or sufficient resting areas), which are usually planned to sustain tourists enjoying a longer stay, might not be a vital consideration for branding purposes (though they are still critical for economic purposes). Instead, concentrating on activities to improve participants' appreciation of cuisine is more effective. Therefore, event organizers are encouraged to incorporate food-related elements and culture into their existing activities to ensure that they are indeed in line with the desired culinary image.

Third, the result that culinary destination branding is more effective for high food-involvement tourists may suggest marketing clues (i.e., that foodies are the primary target for customers). It is relatively easier to derive a favorable culinary image and higher loyalty from food enthusiasts who have sufficient knowledge of food, and demand high-quality and authentic cuisine. On one hand, event organizers could introduce more supplies of authentic local gourmet fare to attract this tourist segment. On the other hand, more promotions could be arranged in collaboration with local restaurants of high reputation and famous food bloggers, as their customers/subscribers are usually considered to be those with high food involvement. Promotional materials could highlight the essence of the festival (i.e., food authenticity itself). However, it is also noted that these promotional strategies are not as effective for non-enthusiasts; for them, additional information about the festival and sufficient exposure time is necessary.

### 6.3. Limitations and future research

Several limitations of the current study should be noted which suggest directions for future research. First, the proposed model is only tested in MFF, and the results are thus limited for generalization to other contexts. Cross-events and cross-cultural examinations may provide DMOs and event planners with more comprehensive understandings. Second, this research is an initial attempt to incorporate participants' characteristics into culinary destination branding. Future research could further investigate the influence of other consumer traits within the umbrella of this branding strategy. Third, destination branding's success may also be contingent on various stakeholders. Future studies may also investigate the role of different stakeholders, such as residents and event marketers, in branding a culinary destination. Finally, the current study centers on culinary destination branding through a food festival. The possibility to brand other destination identities through different themed festivals is an essential research question that we leave for future endeavor.

#### Credit Author statement

Fiona X. Yang handled conception and design, literature review, data analysis and interpretation, conclusion and implications. IpKin Anthony Wong handled conception, literature review, conclusion and implications. Xiuchang Tan worked on literature review. Chi Wai Wu worked on data collection.



## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100671>.

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