

Examining food festival attendees' existential authenticity and experiential value on affective factors and loyalty: An application of stimulus-organism-response paradigm

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Food festival
SOR
Existential authenticity
Experiential value
Satisfaction
Delight

ABSTRACT

Food festivals appeal to a broad range of potential attendees. However, for food festival attendees to engage in such a food adventure to arouse high levels of satisfaction in an environment different from their home, their true authentic self may need to be restrained. The present study, thus uses Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm to examine the relationship among existential authenticity, experiential value, satisfaction, customer delight, and loyalty within the food festival context. Using a questionnaire survey, 598 festival attendees of a food event were sampled conveniently. The results show that while experiential value and existential authenticity are important environmental stimuli within the food festival setting, not all emotional states are influenced by existential authenticity. Existential authenticity is negatively related to satisfaction suggesting that the more attendees are true to themselves regarding different food cultures, the lesser they are to be satisfied. Moreover, festival attendees' loyalty is affected by both satisfaction and customer delight. Implications for marketing food festivals to meet the preferences of prospective attendees are discussed.

1. Introduction

Festivals are considered as one of the indispensable resources in tourism development due to their cultural, economic, and social contributions to local communities (Wu & Ai, 2016). Among various festival types, food festival has enjoyed the broader popularity worldwide (Meretse, Mykletun, & Einarsen, 2016; Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015). Almost in all corners of the world, different food festivals are held (Meretse et al., 2016). From the participants' perspective, a food festival is desirable as it caters to basic human physical needs. For the host destinations, food festivals promote the local food culture and stimulate domestic agriculture (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Seraphin, Gowreesunkar, Zaman, & Bourliatauz-Lajoinie, 2019). However, studies delving deeper into the search for authenticity and subsequent behavioral enactments among food festival attendees are rare.

As a critical stakeholder of food festivals, attendees have attracted research attention over the past decades (e.g., Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017). Many of such studies have sought to explain the attitudes of food festival attendees using the cognitive appraisal theory to elaborate the relationship among

cognitive, affective, and conative factors (Girish & Chen, 2017; Kim, Kim, & Goh, 2011; Vesci & Botti, 2019; Yuan, Morrison, Cai, & Linton, 2008). Others have chosen a different theoretical framework including Herzberg's two-factor theory to ascertain the satisfaction levels of attendees at the Festival of Arts and Culture (Tichaawa & Idahosa, 2020) while a growing body of research employs personality frameworks to examine food-related personality traits (Hsu & Scott, 2020; Ramaprasad, Mallya, Sanil, & Patwardhan, 2020). Recent studies argue for the need to extend existing theories to include enduring involvement theory and optimal communication strategies in food festival tourism research (Beckman, Shu, & Pan, 2020; Zhang, Jeong, Olson, & Evans, 2020).

Despite the immense insights provided by these studies, first, there is a failure to examine the attendees' need to be true to themselves (Girish & Chen, 2017) in relation to their emotional states of the food festivals (Culha, 2020). Second, these studies do little to inform academics and practitioners of the multidimensional space of food festivals where the human senses are triggered by a myriad of internal and external factors yielding certain behavioral responses (Cudny, 2016). Importantly, the food festival is featured not only by food variety but more so various

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.06.014>

Received 24 November 2020; Received in revised form 30 June 2021; Accepted 30 June 2021

Available online 9 July 2021

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activities including culinary techniques, demonstration shows, family-friendly entertainment, live performance, beer-drinking contest, and so on (Wan & Chan, 2013). In other words, a food festival is a typical festival offering the attendees with diverse stimuli which must be understood for proper marketing of such events (Lee & Lee, 2019).

As part of understanding such diversity of the food festival environment, recent studies employing memory dominant logic framework have drawn our attention to the inadequacy of the experience economy framework in festival research (Harrington, Ottenbacher, Schmidt, Murray, & von Freyberg, 2021; Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020; Wu & Gao, 2019). Harrington et al. (2021) argue that in the context of the Oktoberfest beer tent experience, there are multiple aspects related to service delivery elements such as tangible food and beverage, service system delivery, a variety of sensory elements, emotional response, and other contextual factors that trigger a variety of responses among attendees. Confirming such argument, a growing body of research (e.g., Chen, King, & Suintikul, 2019; Hightower, Brady, & Baker., 2002) suggests that festivalscapes (the mixture of tangible and intangible environmental cues) influence attendees' responses. Indeed, environmental dimensions such as event program, staff, information, convenience, facility, souvenirs, and food possess transformative impacts on attendees (Chou, Huang, & Mair, 2018). However, studies examining the existential authenticity in the context of food festivalscapes in relation to other affective and behavioral factors are rare. Prior studies in psychology suggest that people obtained satisfaction by being authentic (Yu, Li, & Xiao, 2020) but whether such assumptions hold in the food festival context is unknown. Proponents of existential authenticity contend that tourism provides a platform for participants to be more authentic and freer to express themselves than in their daily lives due to the departure from the home (Stepchenkova & Belyaeva, 2021; Wang, 1999; Yu et al., 2020). Consequently, food festivals organized away from attendees' home is a valuable context to understanding the interplay of existential authenticity, experiential value, satisfaction, delight, and loyalty. Meanwhile, given the characteristics of food festivals where participants become part of multiple worlds and experiences, investigating food festival attendees' experiential value and its impact on satisfaction and delight can facilitate the provision of appropriate environmental triggers which indirectly lead to customer loyalty.

While prior studies have tangentially expressed the need to develop a framework to unpack the relationship among attribute-satisfaction-behavioral outcomes (Molina-Gómez, Mercadé-Melé, Almeida-García, & Ruiz-Berrón, 2021; Pratt, Suintikul, & Agyeiwaah, 2020; Tanford & Jung, 2017), we know little about the relationship among existential authenticity, experiential value, satisfaction, delight, and loyalty. The limited attention is shown by the obsession with Pine and Gilmore's experience economy dimensions (e.g., Molina-Gómez et al., 2021; Suintikul, Agyeiwaah, Huang, & Pratt, 2020) which some commentators have criticized to propose dichotomous drivers of memorable experience namely "emotion triggers" and "emotion constructors" (see Harrington et al., 2021; Wu & Gao, 2019). Such propositions demonstrate that current research must move beyond the experience economy. Nonetheless, there is a constant failure to examine the role existential authenticity play alongside experiential value to stimulate emotions that lead to long-term loyalty. Understanding the relationship among such factors has practical benefits for both the attendees and festival providers. First, it provides information on personal and non-personal environmental factors that must be considered to meet the changing needs of the festival attendees. Second, it helps to explain the triggers of satisfaction - an intrinsic positive outcome derived from the festival experience, and loyalty - a strong commitment to revisit, recommend and share festival experiences with friends and family; both of which are key measures of festival performance (Wood & Kinnunen, 2020; Molina-Gómez et al., 2021).

This study is guided by two research questions. First, how do the food festival's existential authenticity and experiential value affect festival attendees' satisfaction and delight? Second, what impact do attendees'

satisfaction and delight have on loyalty? The preceding research questions are addressed by employing the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm, a theory from environmental psychology (Getz, 2010). According to the framework of S-O-R, the emotional state from the appraisal of environmental stimuli would affect humans' behavior response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The S-O-R paradigm delineates the mechanism of the behavioral outcome formation process which provides the solid theoretical foundation for this study. Therefore, the current study is distinguished from prior studies to encapsulate external and internal environmental stimuli. We set out three main objectives:

1. To examine the experiential value and existential authenticity components within a food festival context;
2. To investigate the relationship between experiential value and existential authenticity with satisfaction and delight; and
3. To examine the relationship between satisfaction, delight, and loyalty.

To achieve these three objectives, a research model is constructed and tested based on the S-O-R framework. We contribute to existing knowledge in food tourism in two ways. First, the outcome of this study contributes to empirical evidence to explain why in the context of food festivals the relationship between existential authenticity and satisfaction may differ from those of other tourism contexts. Second, this study offers a novel framework for understanding existential authenticity, experiential value, satisfaction, delight, and loyalty in the context of food festivals. The rest of the paper is structured into four main parts including literature review, methodology, results, and discussion with practical and theoretical implications.

2. Literature review

2.1. Stimulus-organism-response framework (S-O-R)

Both tourism researchers and practitioners are constantly in search of theories and frameworks that explain tourist behavior and responses to tourism products since understanding tourism behavioral responses can facilitate strategies to increase customer loyalty and revenues (Song, Li, van der Veen, & Chen, 2011). Such reasons have stimulated the application of frameworks in environmental psychology (Lee, 2014; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), social psychology (Bandura, 2002), marketing (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Wu & Liang, 2009), and consumer behavior research (Hwang & Seo, 2016; Oliver, 1993; Ryu & Han, 2010). Within environmental psychology, one important framework for understanding the antecedents, intervening, and outcome of tourism activities is the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm. Based on a causal chain of three elements (stimulus, organism, and response), the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework argues that environmental stimuli, through intervening affective and cognitive organism states, influence behaviors (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001; Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The stimuli elements comprise the atmospheric cues, both internal and external, that arouse the individual (O'Brien, 2010; Peng & Kim, 2014; Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011) with the organism elements representing cognitive and affective states (pleasure, arousal & dominance) that mediate stimuli and response (Loureiro & Ribeiro, 2011). These response elements comprise positive approach behaviors and negative avoidance behavioral responses (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Eroglu et al., 2001).

Within the food festival research, the ability of the food festival environment to ignite organism states and responses is omnipresent (Lee, 2014; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Nonetheless, studies examining how environmental antecedents of food festivals influence behavioral outcomes through intervening emotional states are scarce with few rare studies (e.g., Girish & Chen, 2017; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Vesci & Botti, 2019). Mason and Paggiaro (2012) argue that the influence of festivalscape on visitor behavioral responses within culinary tourism are

mediated through satisfaction which suggests the potential of the S–O–R model sequence yet relatively few signs of progress have been made in developing a framework within food festival settings to aid strategic marketing decisions. Additionally, [Vesci and Botti \(2019\)](#) employ the theory of planned behavior to confirm the impact of festival quality dimensions on visitor attitudes among attendees of three local and small Italian culinary festivals.

There is an abundance of studies examining food festivals as vehicles of behavior change based on the theory of planned behavior ([Organ et al., 2015](#)), and those applying multi-dimensional and hierarchical model to identify festival quality dimensions ([Wu, Wong, & Cheng, 2014](#)) and attributes that influence consumer perception ([Axelsen & Swan, 2010](#)). Others apply stakeholder theory ([Santini & Cavicchi, 2014](#)) and the use of food festivals for destination branding is ubiquitous ([Dimitrova & Yoveva, 2014](#); [Lee & Arcodia, 2011](#)). However, we know little from the application of these theories and models how loyalty responses are ignited and formed through the internal cues of food festivals. This study argues that given the significant role of the food festival environment to impact on affective and behaviors ([Mason & Paggiaro, 2012](#)), the application of S–O–R will inject intellectual vitality into food festival research and facilitate marketing strategies to increase loyalty and revenues. Consequently, in the food festival environment of the current paper, the stimulus focuses on the internal environment comprising existential authenticity ([Kim & Jamal, 2007](#)) and experiential value ([Yuan & Wu, 2008](#)) since both have received a limited examination in previous food festival research. The organism states comprise satisfaction ([del Bosque & San Martín, 2008](#); [Oliver, 2014](#)) and delight ([Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997](#)) that are both cognitive and affective variables in this study. The final response focuses on loyalty since the response to stimuli can be attitudinal ([Islam & Rahman, 2017](#)).

2.2. Experiential value

[Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon \(2001\)](#) proposed the concept of experiential value to explain how consumer's evaluation of the products and services is based on multidimensional experiences. Experiential value focuses on what is experienced during the entire transaction process and interaction with the service/product providers ([Keng & Ting, 2009](#)). Experience-based value creates pleasure and memorable experiences for the customers ([Wu & Liang, 2009](#)). Specifically, experiential value refers to the "interactions involving either direct usage or distanced appreciation of goods and service" ([Mathwick et al., 2001](#), p. 41). In addition, the experiential value reflects customers' perceptions of four different dimensions: playfulness, aesthetics, customer return on investment (CROI), and service excellence ([Yuan & Wu, 2008](#)). Playfulness indicates the fun and enjoyment from activity participation which also provides a sense of escaping from daily routine ([Mathwick et al., 2001](#)). Aesthetic value denotes "the consonance/unity of physical objects and their cadence in terms of an overall performance" ([Jin, Lin, & Goh, 2013](#), p. 681). CROI refers to "the active investment of final, temporal, behavioral and psychological resources that potentially yield a return" ([Mathwick et al., 2001](#), p. 41) whereas service excellence represents the quality, expertise, and skills that meet customers' expectation ([Jin, Line, & Goh, 2013](#)).

Tourism-related studies have investigated experiential value and conceptualized it as an environmental stimulus that can trigger tourists' emotional state ([Hung, Peng, & Chen, 2019](#); [Lee et al., 2017](#)). Experiential value provides the mechanism elaborating how modern tourists value their experience during their trip or the process of consuming tourism-related products. It also offers effective guidance to the stakeholders in designing tourist experiences to gain competitive advantages ([Van Niekerk, 2017](#)). The food festival is highly experiential and dedicated to delivering a unique experience and diverse food to the attendees ([Axelsen & Swan, 2010](#)). A food festival involves extensive tangible and intangible products that reflect the core concept of experiential value ([Lee et al., 2017](#)). For example, apart from providing local and authentic

food products, the food festival also encompasses the cooking workshop, hands-on activities, and celebrity chef demonstration for the attendees to participate, enjoy, and experience ([Organ et al., 2015](#)). Hence, the food festival provides a dynamic and lively environment where experience constitutes an essential element of attendees' evaluation of the festival ([Axelsen & Swan, 2010](#)).

2.3. Existential authenticity

Existential authenticity is a concept reflecting the philosophy of existentialism and implies the integrity of one's self ([Fu, 2019](#); [Steiner & Reisinger, 2006](#); [Wang, 1999](#)). Existential authenticity in tourism relates to the touristic experience and tourists' inner feelings ([Kolar & Zabkar, 2010](#)). Such feelings are aroused by tourism activities based on the argument that tourism is a catalyst for existential authenticity since it allows tourists to be true to themselves and others in a natural way ([Fu, 2019](#)). Consequently, [Wang \(1999\)](#) defines existential authenticity as "a potential existential state of being that is to be activated by tourist activities" (p.352). It is, thus, tourists' subjective experience in destination and has nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects. Existential authenticity can be further divided into two dimensions namely interpersonal and intrapersonal authenticity. Interpersonal authenticity focuses on interpersonal relationships since tourism provides an avenue for participants to build a connection ([Wang, 1999](#); [Yi, Fu, Yu, & Jiang, 2018](#)). Intrapersonal authenticity involves bodily feeling and self-making. Specifically, existential authenticity is a state that tourists feel the connection with the real world through involving themselves in non-ordinary routine and tourism activities ([Wang, 1999](#)). Previous studies have confirmed the important value of existential authenticity in tourism planning and marketing as well as tourists' subjective experience ([Brown, 2013](#); [Steiner & Reisinger, 2006](#)).

[Kim and Jamal \(2007\)](#) applied this concept in the festival setting and found that the festival helps the attendees to develop existential authenticity. This study further indicated that the unique characteristics of festivals allow attendees to be free from conventional social norms. It is this freedom from social norms that is fundamental to festival attendees ([Kim & Jamal, 2007](#)). While this study provides valuable evidence that the festival is a venue that allows attendees to establish their authentic selves, how existential authenticity affects attendees' behavior or emotion is still unclear. Few exceptions exist in the tourism literature but are somehow dominated by qualitative research and demonstrate how the concept is connected to the tourism phenomenon ([Brown, 2013](#); [Steiner & Reisinger, 2006](#); [Wang, 1999](#)). Examining the relationship between existential authenticity and tourists' behavior or emotions contributes to clarifying the controversies of the concept in current literature while the lack of empirical examination triggers skeptical arguments towards the connection between tourism and existential authenticity ([Shepherd, 2015](#); [Vidon, Rickly, & Knudsen, 2018](#)).

2.4. Customer satisfaction and delight

Customer satisfaction has been a central focus in marketing in general since it has a great influence on the survival of any business ([Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008](#)). Customer satisfaction has been explained in different ways. One school of thought argues that customer satisfaction is an emotional state or the customer mindset of emotional response to a product ([Baker & Crompton, 2000](#)). Another argument suggests that customer satisfaction is a desired outcome resulting from the appraisal of a product or service (i.e., when the performance reaches or exceeds the expectation) ([Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015](#)). In the tourism industry, it has been argued that tourists' satisfaction is highly experiential ([Baker & Crompton, 2000](#)). Tourists encounter the emotional state of satisfaction through positive experiences ([Williams & Soutar, 2009](#)). Generally, [Oliver et al. \(1997, p.13\)](#) definition of satisfaction as a "judgment that a product or service feature provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment" is widely applied in the festival and

tourism literature (Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012).

On the other hand, some commentators argue that simply fulfilling customer' satisfaction is insufficient in the highly competitive market (Oliver et al., 1997). Customer delight represents another more intense and positive emotional state which comprises joy, thrill, or exhilaration emotions. Finn (2005, p. 104) conceptualized customer delight as “an emotional response which results from surprising and positive levels of performance”. Thus, delight requires more stimuli to reach a higher level of emotion (Kumar, Olshavsky, & King, 2001; Torres & Kline, 2013). Compared to satisfaction, customer delight involves additional unexpected and unanticipated satisfaction to create more surprise moments and greater customer loyalty (Oliver et al., 1997). Consequently, customer delight and satisfaction are regarded as two different concepts (Kim, 2011) since satisfaction is elicited from cognitive and affective factors while delight is stimulated by affective factors (Oliver, 1993). While satisfaction has received substantial attention in the tourism-related setting, current research on customer delight is limited and requires investigation (Ahrholdt, Gudergan, & Ringle, 2017).

There have been some attempts to examine the factors influencing food festival attendees' satisfaction. Factors such as festival quality and festival image (Markovic, Dorcic, & Krnetić, 2015; Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015), food-related personality trait (Hsu & Scott, 2020), festival attributes (Wan & Chan, 2013), festival attributes qualities (Jung, Ineson, Kim, & Yap, 2015), and perceived value are found to influence food festival satisfaction (Yuan et al., 2008). Nevertheless, a study investigating how the food festival attendees' emotional states can be explained by the experiential value is limited. Although Lee et al. (2017) provided the first valuable evidence and confirmed the positive relationship between the experiential value and satisfaction, there is no clue of the effect of experiential value on a higher level of emotional state (i. e., customer delight).

In view of this, some studies have examined customer satisfaction in a luxury-hotel restaurant and found that there is a positive relationship between experiential value and satisfaction (Wu & Liang, 2009). A study maintained that experiential value has a positive effect on satisfaction in Starbucks (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Moreover, an investigation of festival attendees' experience of service quality has shown that experiential value affects festival satisfaction (Cole & Chancellor, 2009) yet current research investigating the experiential value's effect on customer satisfaction and delight simultaneously is limited. Previous studies reveal that the four dimensions of escapism, aesthetics, CROI, and service excellence influence satisfaction and delight in the tourism industry (Ahrholdt et al., 2017). Such studies suggest that the physical environment has a positive effect on the emotional state and aesthetic experience during the trip (Hightower, Brady, & Baker, 2002; St-James & Taylor, 2004). Further conclusions in the retail settings indicate that unexpected low prices stimulate customer delight (Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder, & Lueg, 2005). Other studies that examined customer delight in tourism suggest that escapism is an important trigger of customer delight (St-James & Taylor, 2004). Based on such existing literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Experiential value has a positive influence on festival satisfaction.

H2. Experiential value has a positive effect on customer delight.

Moreover, although there has been some empirical evidence investigating the antecedents of existential authenticity and its relationship with engagement and loyalty (Bryce, Curran, O'Gorman, & Taheri, 2015; Jiang, Ramkissoon, Mavondo, & Feng, 2017; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Yi et al., 2018), currently, there is no statistical result further indicating its effect on other tourists' related emotion (e.g., satisfaction and delight). Prior studies provide a solid foundation that existential authenticity is a concept of self-oriented tourist experience (Cohen, 2010; Lew, 2011). While such a standpoint is generally accepted by most scholars, this study, therefore, further postulates that such a self-oriented experience of existential authenticity may influence the emotional state (e.g., satisfaction and delight). Previous research

showed that visitor's self-oriented experience is positively related to festival satisfaction (Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Girish & Chen, 2017; Jung et al., 2015). Other studies suggest different customer experiences lead to the emotional state of delight in the hotel industry, theme park, and retail shopping (Ali, Kim, Li, & Jeon, 2018; Arnold et al., 2005; Torres, Fu, & Lehto, 2014). Lee and Park (2019) indicate that guests' self-oriented experience has a positive effect on customer delight in an upscale hotel. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3. Existential authenticity has a positive influence on festival satisfaction.

H4. Existential authenticity has a positive influence on customer delight.

2.5. Customer loyalty

Creating consumer loyalty is the ultimate goal that all businesses desire to achieve. Loyal customers contribute to repeat patronage, increase sales volume, and enhance positive word of mouth (Agyeiwaah, Otoo, Sunkul, & Huang, 2019; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Oliver (1999, p. 34) provides one of the most adopted definitions for loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product/service”. Customer loyalty is arguably the foundation of the stable development of a company and even the food festival sub-sector. Hence, food festival organizers also pursue the same goal to ensure the success of the festival (Lee et al., 2012). In the tourism industry, tourists' loyalty highly represents a commitment to travel to certain destinations. Tourists demonstrate their commitment through revisiting the destination which is associated with behavioral loyalty (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Others exhibit their behavior through favorable word of mouth which is ascribed to attitudinal loyalty (Reichheld, 2003). For the thriving development of the food festival, retaining the revisited attendees and recruiting new visitors are equally important. In this study, both types of loyalty are discussed in the food festival setting.

From the literature, tourists' satisfaction is an essential antecedent of tourist loyalty (Kim, Vogt, & Knutson, 2015; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). According to recent studies, festival satisfaction exhibits a positive and significant effect on festival loyalty (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Wong et al., 2015; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010). There is also evidence that festival satisfaction positively influences tourist behavior towards festival hosting destinations (Lee et al., 2012). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5. Food festival satisfaction has a positive relationship with loyalty.

Previous studies have provided empirical evidence of how delight can lead to loyalty. Loureiro and Kastenholz (2011) investigated the effect of customer delight on loyalty in rural lodging and confirmed the positive relationship between customer delight on loyalty. A more recent study found that customer delight affects loyalty in upscale hotels (Lee & Park, 2019). Within the restaurant industry, Bowden and Dagger (2011) examined both satisfaction and delight and found that satisfaction leads to loyalty but delight had no effect. A similar result was reported by Kim et al. (2015) who investigated loyalty from resort customers' perspective. Although this study confirmed that both satisfaction and delight are positively related to loyalty, delight, however, is not a stronger predictor of affective loyalty. Likewise, Ahrholdt et al. (2017) found a significant positive relationship between customer delight and loyalty in sports events. From the preceding results of previous studies, the effect of delight on loyalty is inconsistent and requires further examination. This study, therefore, proposes the following hypothesis:

H6. Customer delight has a positive effect on loyalty.

3. Method

3.1. Study site and target respondents

As a former Portuguese colony for more than 400 years, Macau is rich in food culture from a combination of different cultures from Portugal, Guangdong province, Malaysia, India, and Africa. This rich food culture is reflected in the unique Macanese food. Due to its historical value, Macanese gastronomy has been designated as an intangible cultural heritage by the local government in 2012. Additionally, given its over 400 years old culinary legacy, Macau was recognized as the creative city of gastronomy by UNESCO in 2017. Macau is now a gastronomy city where visitors can enjoy food experiences that integrate cooking techniques from different food cultures. Therefore, the Macau food festival serves as the ideal research site for this study. Macau food festival is an outdoor event and the public is free to participate. This festival has been held for 19 consecutive years. The 2019 Macau food festival has expanded the scale to 150 food stalls with many other food-related activities and entertainments. It is an international food event with great popularity among residents and tourists.

For this study, we targeted attendees who participated in the 2019 Macau food festival. Using the convenience sampling technique, research investigators collected the data at the entrance of the food festival. Potential participants exiting from the festival entrance were approached and inquired about their willingness to join this study. The entire process took 15–20 min to complete. Additionally, this study only collected the data from the festival attendees who are 18 years old and above. This criterion of 18 years and above was used for both pilot surveys and main data collection. For the appropriate sample size for the actual data collection, [Weston and Gore \(2006\)](#) suggested a minimum sample size of 200 for the structural equation modeling while [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) suggest a sample size of 382 respondents for a population above 75,000. Following the above suggestions, 598 useable samples were obtained in the food festival to fit the two different perspectives of sample size criteria.

3.2. Measurement and instrument design

A structured questionnaire was developed by reviewing previous related studies. The questionnaire was composed of six parts: (1) experiential value; (2) existential authenticity; (3) customer delight; (4) food festival satisfaction; and (5) food festival loyalty; and (6) general background information about respondents. The experiential value scale had 14 items validated in a previous study ([Lee et al., 2017](#)). Minor modifications were made to the scale items to fit the context of the Macau food festival. Existential authenticity was measured using eight items adopted from the literature ([Jiang et al., 2017](#); [Yi, Lin, Jin, & Luo, 2017](#)). Of these, four items each measuring intrapersonal authenticity and interpersonal authenticity were designed. To assess customer delight, six items were adapted from prior research ([Ma, Scott, Gao, & Ding, 2017](#)). The satisfaction construct was measured using five items extracted from previous festival research ([Lee et al., 2017](#); [Yoon et al., 2010](#)). The fifth section was developed to assess the attendees' loyalty to the Macau food festival. Items on this scale were adopted from prior studies and contained three items ([Yoon et al., 2010](#)). The sixth section examined personal information such as sex, age, and education of attendees. A seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (= 1) to strongly agree (= 7) was used to assess all items.

The questionnaire was provided in two languages, English and Chinese. The questionnaire was first translated from English to Chinese by the lead author (a native Chinese speaker). To ensure the accuracy of the translation, five scholars in the tourism field proficient in both languages were asked to back translate the Chinese version into English and as a result, several minor modifications were made. Additionally, before the final data collection, a pre-test was conducted to confirm the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The pre-test participants' selection

applied the same criteria as the major data collection. Festival attendees who have already finished their visitation of the 2019 Macau food festival were asked their willingness to participate in this pilot survey. Data collection for the pilot survey was conducted in the first two days of the Macau food festival using a convenience sampling method. The pre-test targeted 110 respondents but in the end, 100 useable questionnaires (response rate of approximately 91%) were obtained. Data was subsequently subjected to the reliability assessment. As a result of the pilot test, it was found that Cronbach's alpha reliability test for each scale ranged from 0.85 to 0.94 demonstrating good reliability. As a result, no item was deleted resulting in 36 items for the actual data collection.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data collection was conducted at the entrance of the Macau food festival and targeted those who have participated in the food festival from November 8 to 24, 2019 (before the spread of the COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020). Consequently, we conveniently sampled 650 attendees of the Macau food festival. Of the 650 attendees who participated in the questionnaire survey, 598 questionnaires were useable for analysis. The useable questionnaires represented an approximately 92% response rate. According to the data collected, the sample had slightly more female respondents (63.2%) than males (36.8%). The majority of the sample (56.9%) was college-educated, with 16.8% having graduated or reached a postgraduate educational level. Overall, 26.3% did not have a college degree. In terms of the income level, half of the sample (51.5%) have an income under 10,000 (MOP) while 21.1% have income more than 19001 and above. The modal age of tourists ranged between 18 and 44 years. Although the age group in this study tends to be youthful, it is consistent with prior studies conducted at the Macau food festival which reported that more than 90% of attendees are under the age of 49 years ([Hornig, Su, & So, 2013](#); [Wong et al., 2015](#); [Wu et al., 2014](#)). Among the attendees, more than half (55.2%) were residents while 44.8% were international tourists (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Canadian, Filipino, and European). [Table 1](#) presents more detailed information about respondents' demographic profiles.

4. Results

Before conducting the measurement model and structural model

Table 1
Sample profile (n = 598).

Variable	Category	Number	%
Local or overseas	Local residents	330	55.2
	Overseas tourists	268	44.8
Gender	Male	220	36.8
	Female	378	63.2
Age	18–24	294	49.2
	25–34	254	42.5
	35–44	37	6.20
	45–54	7	1.2
	55–64	5	0.8
	65 and above	1	0.2
Income (MOP)	8000 and under	244	40.8
	8001–10000	64	10.7
	10,001–13000	59	9.9
	13,001–15000	48	8.0
	15,001–17000	32	5.4
	17,001–19000	25	4.2
Educational level	19001 and above	126	21.1
	Under high school	7	1.2
	High school	85	14.2
	College	65	10.9
	University	340	56.9
	Graduate school and above	101	16.8

Note: 1 MOP equals to approximately 0.13 USD.

analysis, this study first examined the missing values and outliers. It was found that there were no missing values and outliers in the data. Subsequently, multivariate normal distribution was examined for the basic assumption when conducting structural equation modeling. It has been suggested that a normal distribution is assumed when the absolute value of the skew index is less than 3, and the absolute value of the kurtosis is less than 10 (Kline, 2015). The values for skewness ranged between 0.015 and 0.516 while kurtosis ranged between 0.018 and 1.072 suggesting the data of this study is normally distributed. In addition, we also examined the common method bias (CMB) of the measures using Harman’s single-factor approach (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Agyeiwaah, Dayour, Otoo, & Goh, 2021). Based on this approach, we found that the variance explained by the first major factor based on the exploratory factor analysis was 22.091% which is less than the suggested cut-off point of 50%. The approach confirmed that there are no common method errors in the results.

4.1. Measurement model

As part of establishing the measurement model with both first-order and second-order factors, we first establish a measurement model for all major constructs excluding the second-order factors. This is followed by the second step of including second-order constructs. The reliability of the individual measures and the discriminant validity of the constructs were examined (Hulland, 1999). To achieve good reliability, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients should be 0.7 or higher. Construct reliability was measured by the composite reliability (CR) with an acceptable level of 0.7 or above for internal consistency. An individual item of regression weight should be higher than 0.5 with significant t-values (t-value \geq 1.96 at $\alpha = 0.05$) for unidimensionality (Hair, Black, Anderson, 2006). Both convergent and discriminant validity were examined for the measurement models. The average variance extracted (AVE) was used to confirm convergent validity. An appropriate AVE is expected to be 0.5 or higher.

The results of the first-order measurement model indicated an inadequate model fit, suggesting the need for model modification. Therefore, this study deleted items with large modification indices to improve model fit (Joreskog, 1993). During the process of deletion, three items (items 11, 14, and 15) from experiential value were eliminated. Consequently, the model fit revealed a good fit to the data (i.e., CMIN/df = 2.87, GFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.05, TLI = 0.95, NFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.96, RMR = 0.062, SRMR = 0.037, AGFI = 0.581, PGFI = 0.65). Additionally, factor loading for all the items was above 0.5 (from 0.65 to 0.87) with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in the range between 0.76 and 0.92. After establishing the first-order measurement model, the second-order measurement model was examined. The results of second-order measurement model showed a good fit (i.e., CMIN/df = 2.62, GFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05, TLI = 0.95, NFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.96, RMR = 0.067, SRMR = 0.03, PGFI = 0.61). In the end, a total of 27 indicators of exogenous variables and five indicators of endogenous variables were used in the overall measurement model.

The measurement model adequacy was subsequently assessed by reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients are analyzed to confirm the reliability of the individual scales used in measuring the latent variables. Analysis of the variables’ reliability showed that the coefficients for each measurement scale were all greater than 0.7 and ranged from 0.76 to 0.94 which indicates good reliability (Nunnally, 1978). For the regression weight, all the items have factor loading above 0.5 (from 0.652 to 0.903). The CR value of all constructs was greater than the recommended threshold of 0.7. The evaluation of AVE for each measurement in this study is higher than 0.5 (from 0.559 to 0.788) with only one measurement (intrapersonal authenticity) which is slightly lower than the ideal level of 0.5 (0.489). Nevertheless, the factor loading and CR for the concept of intrapersonal authenticity were all satisfactory (Table 2). Therefore, it can be concluded the convergent validity for the intrapersonal authenticity

Table 2
Measurement results.

Construct	Loading	alpha	CR	AVE
Interpersonal Authenticity	0.720***	0.83	0.835	0.56
I am able to discover more about myself at this food festival	0.795***			
I am in touch with my feelings and emotions at this food festival.	0.792***			
In the food festival, I was freed from the self-control or limitation of daily work/routine life and become more self and subjective in its own right.	0.981***			
In the food festival, I tried to seek extramundane or extraordinary experience to pursue self-realization or get self-satisfaction.				
Intrapersonal Authenticity	0.762***	0.79	0.741	0.489
At the food festival, I kept in touch with vendors in a natural, authentic, and friendly way.	0.652***			
At the food festival, I kept in touch with my family members in a natural, authentic, and friendly way (no identity or class differences).	0.681***			
Visitors at this destination genuinely interact with each other.				
Aesthetic	0.865***	0.80	0.827	0.706
The food presented is delicate.	0.815***			
The display of the variety of wines is aesthetically appealing.				
Service Excellent	0.838***	0.84	0.847	0.734
Food providers offer friendly service.	0.876***			
The overall service provided at this festival is excellent.				
CROI	0.789***	0.76	0.817	0.691
I am happy with the food prices at this festival.	0.871***			
The total expenditure on the festival is acceptable.				
Playfulness	0.661***	0.88	0.848	0.653
Attending this festival makes me feel like being in another world.	0.878***			
Attending this food festival let me forget my worries.	0.867***			
My attendance at this food festival helps me perceive pure enjoyment.				
Satisfaction	0.797***	0.89	0.841	0.639
Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at this event.	0.762***			
The festivals offer me more value than I expected.	0.837***			
I believe I did the right thing in attending the festival.				
Loyalty	0.847***	0.89	0.892	0.733
I will spread positive word-of-mouth about this festival.	0.852***			
I will keep attending this festival.	0.869***			
I will recommend this festival to my friends and neighbors.				
Customer Delight	0.843***	0.94	0.933	0.735
Elated	0.829***			
Enthusiastic	0.903***			
Excited	0.895***			
Surprised	0.812***			
Astonished				

Note: ***Significant at significant at $p < 0.001$.

measurement is established. Results of measurement model analysis for this study are shown in Table 2.

For the discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) is compared with the correlation of latent constructs. The construct’s AVE is expected to be greater than the variance shared between the construct and other constructs in the model. The results of the discriminant validity are presented in Table 3. Following Fornell and Larcker’s criteria, there is no correlation greater than the root of variances extracted in this study.

Table 3
Discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker criteria).

	AES	CROI	CD	PL	INTER	INTRA	LO	SA	SE
AES	0.923								
CROI	0.414***	0.919							
CD	0.494***	0.498***	0.886						
PL	0.470***	0.453***	0.649***	0.87					
INTER	0.351***	0.337***	0.516***	0.494***	0.781				
INTRA	0.407***	0.385***	0.599***	0.566***	0.618***	0.816			
LO	0.507***	0.52***	0.752***	0.596***	0.488***	0.528***	0.906		
SA	0.546***	0.548***	0.759***	0.67***	0.527***	0.563***	0.803***	0.871	
SE	0.526***	0.442***	0.59***	0.543***	0.536***	0.49***	0.628***	0.652***	0.931

Note: ASE-aesthetic; CROI-Customer return on investment; CD-Customer delight; PL-Playfulness; INTER-Interpersonal; INTRA-Intrapersonal; LO-Loyalty; SA-Satisfaction; SE-Service excellent.

***Significant at significant at $p < 0.001$.

Therefore, discriminant validity is confirmed.

4.2. Structural model

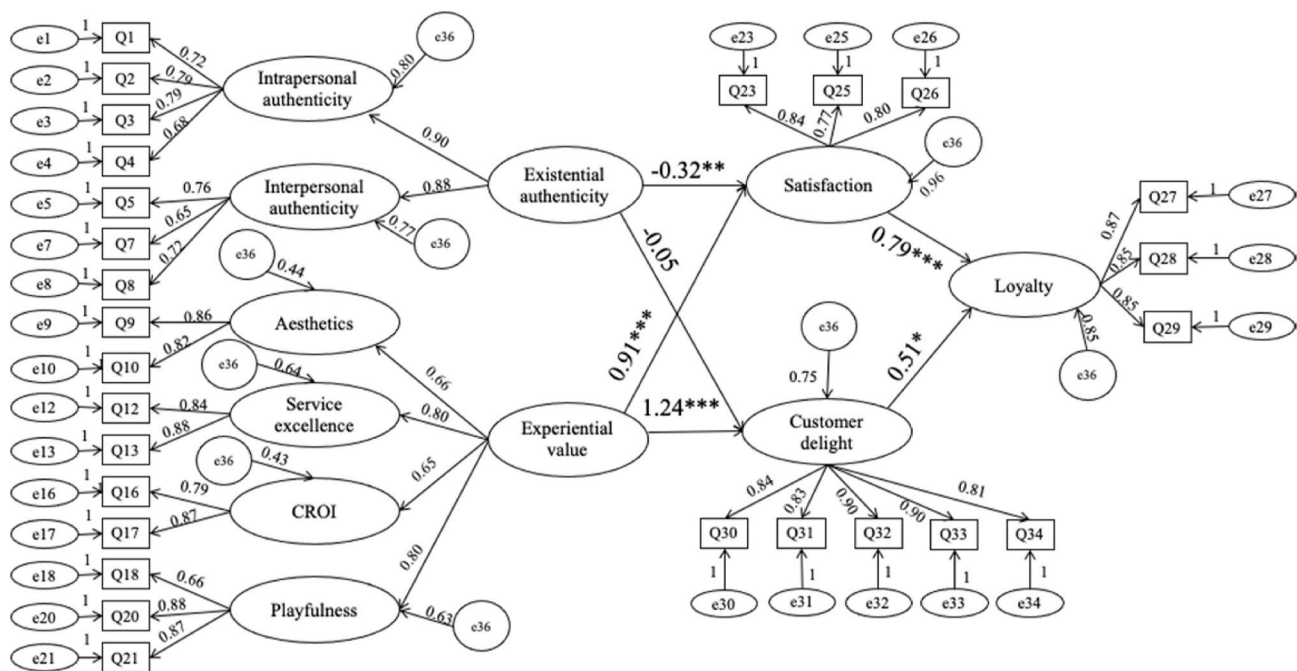
An evaluation of the goodness-of-fit indices revealed that the hypothesized model fit the data well (i.e., GFI = 0.904, SRMR = 0.039, RMSEA = 0.052, NFI = 0.929, CFI = 0.955, IFI = 0.955, and TLI = 0.949). Although the χ^2 rejected the model with a p-value less than 0.05, a major concern of applying the χ^2 -test is that it is sensitive to the sample size (Kline, 2015). Therefore, an index of χ^2/df is the alternative to evaluate the structural model. In this case, an index less than 3 (χ^2/df is 2.623 in this study) is suggested to be a reasonably good indicator of model fit (Kline, 2015). According to the indices mentioned above, the proposed model fits the data well.

Fig. 1 illustrates the structural model of this study. Results show that hypotheses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 of this study are supported while hypothesis 3 was not supported. Specifically, ‘experiential value’ has a significant

positive relationship with ‘customer delight’ ($\beta = 1.24, t = 9.24, p < 0.001$) and ‘festival satisfaction’ ($\beta = 0.91, t = 9.39, p < 0.001$). ‘Existential authenticity’ has a significant negative relationship with ‘festival satisfaction’ ($\beta = -0.32, t = -2.979, p < 0.01$). ‘Customer delight’ has a significant positive relationship with ‘festival loyalty’ ($\beta = 0.51, t = 2.454, p < 0.05$). ‘Festival satisfaction’ has a significant positive relationship with ‘festival loyalty’ ($\beta = 0.79, t = 11.785, p < 0.001$). All the hypotheses are presented in Table 4 and discussed subsequently.

5. Discussion and conclusion

While food festival research continues to attract more scholarly attention, recent studies that examine existential authenticity, experiential value, satisfaction, delight, and loyalty concurrently are rare. This study applied the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm to develop a framework to explain the relationship between two stimuli (e.g., experiential value and existential authenticity), two emotional states (e.g.,



Note: ***Significant at significant at $p < 0.001$; ** Significant at significant at $p < 0.01$; * Significant at significant at $p < 0.05$

Fig. 1. Structural model.

Note: ***Significant at significant at $p < 0.001$; ** Significant at significant at $p < 0.01$; * Significant at significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 4
Hypothesis results.

Path	Standardize path estimate	t-value	Results
H1: Experiential value- > festival satisfaction	0.91	9.39***	supported
H2: Experiential value- > customer delight	1.24	9.24***	supported
H3: Existential authenticity- > festival satisfaction	-0.32	-2.98**	supported
H4: Existential authenticity- > customer delight	-0.05	-0.58	Not supported
H5: Festival satisfaction- > festival loyalty	0.79	11.76***	supported
H6: Customer delight- > festival loyalty	0.51	2.45*	supported

Note: ***Significant at significant at $p < 0.001$; ** Significant at significant at $p < 0.01$; * Significant at significant at $p < 0.05$.

satisfaction and customer delight), and festival loyalty in the context of the Macau food festival. Overall, the findings of this study support the hypothesis that behavioral outcome is influenced by the different levels of emotional state. These results imply that festival attendees' loyalty is affected by their satisfaction with the festival and higher-level emotional state of customer delight. Significantly, experiential value and existential authenticity possess different impacts on attendees' emotional states.

Specifically, experiential value has a positive and direct effect on both the emotional states of satisfaction and customer delight. Experiential value is attendees' overall appraisal of the extrinsic stimuli (e.g., food festival's playfulness, aesthetics, CROI, and service excellence) from the environment of the food festival. Therefore, festival attendees with higher experiential value are not only emotionally satisfied with the festival but are, more so, aroused by a higher emotional state of delight. We offer two possible explanations for such positive relationships. First, food festivals are organized to provide attendees with novel and delicious food with various fun and pleasure activities that create many surprise moments for the participants (Harrington et al., 2021; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Vesci & Botti, 2019). Second, as an intangible cultural heritage, Macau gastronomy represents a mixture of different cultures from Portugal, Guangdong province, Malaysia, India, and Africa which is unique to many attendees. The unique experience of this mixing of cultures during the food festival may explain why it has a strong potential to ignite high levels of emotions in attendees. Such unique experiences are fundamental to festival attendees' satisfaction and delight. Our result is consistent with prior research that states that festival quality has a direct effect on festival satisfaction (Akhoondnejad, 2016). Similarly, Torres and Kline (2013) maintain that excellent and caring service from hotel staff can trigger customer delight in the hotel industry.

Existential authenticity shows a significant but negative effect on satisfaction which is inconsistent with previous studies (Girish & Chen, 2017). Nonetheless, this result confirms Yu, Li, and Xiao's (2020) assertion that breaking from home to a different context does not guarantee existential authenticity. This is very true in the case of the food festival context where people may not reach satisfaction if they seek existential authenticity due to the natural quest to meet the basic physical need of food. One possible explanation could be that a food festival, unlike other festival types, reflects a human's basic need which clashes with the central idea of existential authenticity. Existential authenticity occurs when "one is true to oneself" in a travel situation (Wang, 1999). Specifically, visitors or tourists reach an authentic self-state through self-discovery and self-realization (Kolar & Zabkar, 2010). Therefore, this study argues that the quest to fulfill a physical need is a part of the authentic self. Maslow's theory supports such a viewpoint as it asserts that one needs to fulfill basic needs before reaching a higher state of needs (self-fulfillment need). Additionally, "a

sense of inauthentic self arises when the balance between these two parts of being is broken down in such a way that rational factors over-control non-rational factors (emotion, bodily feeling, and spontaneity, etc.)" (Wang, 1999, p. 361). Thus, this study argues that the unbalance between the rational factor of the physical need for hunger in the food festival, and the non-rational factor (emotion, bodily feeling, and spontaneity, etc.) may account for such an outcome.

This study has also found that there is no relationship between existential authenticity and customer delight. According to the Oliver-Rust-Varki (ORV) model (Oliver et al., 1997), substantial surprise experience is the major resource contributing to delight emotion. Previous research indicates that customer delight requires intense surprises and joyful moments (Ma et al., 2017). On the other hand, existential authenticity requires experiencing the real world to reach self-discovery and self-actualization. It is an inner and spontaneous feeling (Brown, 2013). While existential authenticity is a desirable and enjoyable experience for visitors to pursue, it may not be a strong stimulus compared to surprise. Delight requires more stimuli from the environmental activities (Torres & Kline, 2013) while existential authenticity focuses on subjective experience (Brown, 2013). Therefore, this study argues that existential authenticity provides less arousal and stimulus to reach the state of delight.

The significant effect of emotional states on the behavioral outcome is established. Such a result suggests that satisfaction is not the only emotional state to influence festival attendees' loyalty. Customer delight, on the other hand, is also an important antecedent. This study has provided empirical evidence that both satisfaction and customer delight are pertinent to loyalty development and demonstrated the effectiveness of customer delight in leading to positive behavioral outcomes in the food festival setting. Such a result confirms previous research indicating satisfaction and customer delight have a positive influence on customer loyalty (Kim et al., 2015; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). One outcome that deserves considerable attention is the finding that the emotional state of satisfaction has a stronger influence on festival loyalty than customer delight.

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

These findings have both theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, we contribute to the existing research in food tourism in three ways. First, this study examined the experiential value and existential authenticity relationship with customer satisfaction and delight in the festival context to demonstrate how each of these stimulates attendees' emotions. While previous studies in food festivals tend to limit environmental factors to elements within Pine and Gilmore's experience economy framework (Molina-Gómez et al., 2021; Sontikul et al., 2020), this present study highlights the important role of existential authenticity. It, thus, contributes to the argument that experiential value is not the only antecedent of satisfaction and delight. Nonetheless, it highlights the subjectivity of existential authenticity within food festivals and its inverse relationship with satisfaction.

Second, by applying the S-O-R paradigm to examine festival attendees' loyalty response process, festival attendees' loyalty is confirmed to be influenced by the emotional states of satisfaction and customer delight (Eroglu et al., 2001; Jacoby, 2002; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This paper, thus, promotes the notion that satisfaction is not the only predictor of customer loyalty as demonstrated in many previous studies (Wong et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2010) but other surprising elements can trigger high emotional states for festival attendees. Third, this study presents insights into two of the least examined constructs within food festivals namely existential authenticity and delight. It highlights the lack of a significant relationship between the two which draws attention to why such a relationship exists in the food festival context.

From a managerial perspective, this study's findings provide practical implications in food festival sustainable development and

destination marketing. First of all, food festival organizers should recognize the importance of attendees' emotional state on their festival loyalty and provide not only satisfaction but also a delightful experience to the festivalgoers. According to Crotts, Pan, and Raschid (2008), delightful emotions can be triggered by food sampling, wine tasting, good organization, food-related activities, and crowd control in a food and wine festival. Therefore, the food festival should provide more food sampling opportunities to the festival attendees, manage visitor numbers to avoid overcrowding, and enrich the food-related entertainments and activities. Additionally, results showed that experiential value affects both customer satisfaction and delight. In this vein, food festival organizers should pay attention to creating a fun and joyful environment (playfulness), designing a proper festival layout and food presentation (aesthetics), delivering better service (service excellent), and enhancing value-added service and product (Van Niekerk, 2017; Yuan & Wu, 2008).

5.2. Limitation and future research

Despite the above significant implications of the findings, some limitations are worth highlighting. The construct of existential authenticity is based on limited measures. Hence, future research is encouraged to include more measures to examine existential authenticity in food festivals or other types of festivals. This study was limited to only food festival settings. Therefore, it is suggested that future research could empirically examine the existential authenticity in different kinds of festivals to gain a more insightful understanding of this concept. Additionally, since delight predicts festival loyalty, distinguishing the different elements in the food festival that contribute to customer satisfaction and delight can be an interesting area to investigate. Finally, the study was based in Macau with unique food festival characteristics which may be different from other destinations. Therefore, future studies should extend food festival research in another context as part of developing an in-depth understanding of the festival attendees' behavior.

Funding

There is no financial interest to disclose.

Declaration of competing interest

I have no conflict of interest to declare.

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