THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF AMBASSADOR BEHAVIOR IN THE CULTURAL FESTIVALS SECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

One of the common forms of cultural tourism, festivals have already become the most significant and fastest-growing part of tourism. Around the world, cultural festivals have grown exponentially in number and diversity (Snowball & Antrobus, 2020). Understanding the participants is essential to better managing a cultural festival. This paper examines the process of forming ambassadorial behavior among cultural festival participants. These festival participants demonstrated their supportive attitudes toward the event and experienced a more significant impact on identity formation (Zhang et al., 2019). It presents a general conceptual model of the process, which may be relevant to different festival and event sectors.

Cultural interaction has long been recognized in the tourism literature as a primary motivation for festival participants, with the depth of the experience being integral to cultural tourists (Zou et al., 2020; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015; Morgan, 2008). Few studies have been conducted on the interaction of festival participants with local culture. In this regard, it is essential to examine the impact of cultural contact on the cultural festival experience. Festivals can only stand out in today's challenging environment if they create exciting and memorable experiences for festival participants and ensure sustainable loyalty (Ayob et al., 2013). Therefore, a festival's sustainability needs to build its identity with its participants (Lee & Chang, 2016).

Festivals generate specific behavioral responses (Chang & Hsieh, 2017), when participants feel a sense of identity from the festival, they can perform ambassadorial behaviors to develop the festival and the culture. There is a potential for ambassador behaviors, such as writing about the festival experience online and contributing to its development, to create positive festival-related behavior, specifically for the destination, festival development, and cultural revitalization. However, there is a need for more conceptual clarity around managing ambassadorial behavior in cultural tourism, particularly for festival studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural festival.

Festivals have become one of the fastest-growing tourism industry segments, and there is growing research interest in this area (Savinovic et al., 2012). While the success of organizing festivals provides an excellent way for festival destinations to improve the image and competitiveness of their goals, there is a need for more conceptual foundations that stakeholders can use to create innovative festival experiences. One of the main benefits of cultural festivals for participants is the opportunity to experience new or more extensive forms of culture and the social aspect of time spent with family and friends, which can enhance the quality of life (Hand, 2017). To date, festival research in tourism has focused mainly on understanding the importance of festivals and cultural events, the expectations, needs, and motivations of participants, and has sought to determine the motivational dimensions of participants attending various festivals and events (Schofield & Thompson, 2007; BOWEN & DANIELS, 2005; Crompton & McKay, 1997). However, the fundamental role of various traditional cultural festivals and their dynamics may influence the ongoing value of festivals to the stakeholders involved (Choi et al., 2020).

Cultural contact.

Contact, or cultural contact, is generally used as the term archaeologists describe a group having entered or maintained contact with a diverse culture for days, years, decades, centuries, or even millennia (Chen & Rahman, 2018). Cultural contact was identified by Chen and Rahman (2018) as an antecedent that influenced tourists' involvement in cultural tourism and their creative experiences. In cultural tourism, tourists gain more cultural contact on holiday by interacting through traditional cultural services, experiencing different cultural product providers at the destination, educating other tourists, and choosing how all their needs can be met through cultural activities (Lee & Bai, 2016). There is a tendency for cultural tourists, mainly the relatively serious cultural tourists, to be active, interested, questioning, and reflective about what they see and experience (Crang, 1996; Prentice, 2001). Although increasingly extended to tourism, there needs to be a conceptual basis upon which holiday stakeholders can use these concepts to create a higher level of interaction or engagement with the culture they visit, especially in cultural festivals.

Festival experience.

In current travel and tourism literature, experience is considered a vital construct (Chang et al., 2014). It has been defined as that "inherently personal existing only in the minds of individuals who have been engaged at an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level" (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, p. 99). Although much conceptual research has been conducted on the tourism experience, the literature on the festival experience needs to be more cohesive (Marković, 2019). Meanwhile, the extent of cultural interaction with the local culture between tourists and the local culture largely influences the "depth of the experience." This point is strongly emphasized by McKercher (2002) in his study of cultural tourism.

Identity construction.

"Identity" refers inherently to the culture of a people, the shared identification with aspects of a collective or social category as well as the self, involving the significance that individuals attribute to the diverse roles they commonly play in a highly polarised contemporary society (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Individuals believe that cultural festivals strengthen the sense of identity compared to other forms of tourism (Buch et al., 2011; Merkel, 2015). Therefore, when visitors participate in a festival, the identity of the festival participants will influence the visit experience (Choi & Murray, 2010). Cultural and festival identity construction can then be seen as an individual's fondness for the local culture or festival, i.e., the particular culture or festival relates to the individual's sense of belonging, identity and psychological feelings (Lee & Chang, 2016). The purpose of identity will influence the individual's post-festival behavior and future behavioral intentions (Ervin & Stryker, 2009).

Ambassador behavior.

Brand-building behaviors in destination branding consist mainly of "word of mouth (WOM)" (Chen et al., 2018) and "ambassadorial behaviors" (Wassler et al., 2021). Brand-building behavior describes how residents can act as goodwill ambassadors who always see the destination brand about how it communicates through public messages and marketing communications, for instance, by residents supporting their involvement in and participation with tourism planning and development (Morhart et al., 2009). Govers (2011) identified branding with a greater focus on building brands that reflect the local cultural identity and establishing the conditions for residents to become local brand ambassadors as an essential branding tool to enable a non-marketing approach to brand positioning (i.e., internal branding). Previous research has identified the WOM recommendations and ambassadorial behavioral intentions of visitors and residents in a tourism context (Wassler et al., 2021). However, more analysis must be applied to participants' festival brand-building behaviors.

Cultural festivals are about creating a learning environment that connects with participants and allows them to experience the uniqueness of a culture or the character of a place and its people, which plays a considerable role in the heritage and tourism experience of the place where it is held. Providing educational experiences for tourists can be affected by the way they are delivered (Lynch et al., 2011), especially in the context of preserving intangible cultural heritage. The festival experience occurs when there is increased contact between

festival participants and the local culture (places and people). Their relationship reduces the level of perceived social distance and assists festival participants in perceiving the attractiveness of the destination (Thyne et al., 2017). These experiences are an essential part of the local culture and can form the character of a cultural festival, which is particularly relevant for the destination. In this context, previous research has focused on studying tourist choices and behaviors through the influence of Destination Management Organizations (Uchinaka et al., 2019). In contrast, ambassadorial behavior can be adapted to understand festivalgoers and emphasize the importance of their role in the context of place branding.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

A conceptual model is presented to understand the ambassadorial behavior-building process. This model represents the process of ambassadorial behavior building as applied in the context of cultural festivals. In particular, the model provides a basis for future research and offers guidance for practitioners. This model is presented in Figure 1. Festival organizers use cultural contact with local cultures to present different attributes of the festival experience, which influence the construction of festival participants' identities and their ambassadorial behavior toward local cultures and festivals. The participants of the cultural festival can communicate and present their real feelings and evaluations in the process. Festivals and the construction of local cultural identity draw on a combination of contact with local culture and real experiences of festivals to present actual and personalized interpretations and identifications. For example, creating ambassadorial behavior can be developed based on authentic local culture while incorporating a personalized festival experience. Similarly, as ambassadors, participants can use the festival experience and identity to promote the appeal of a place or a festival.
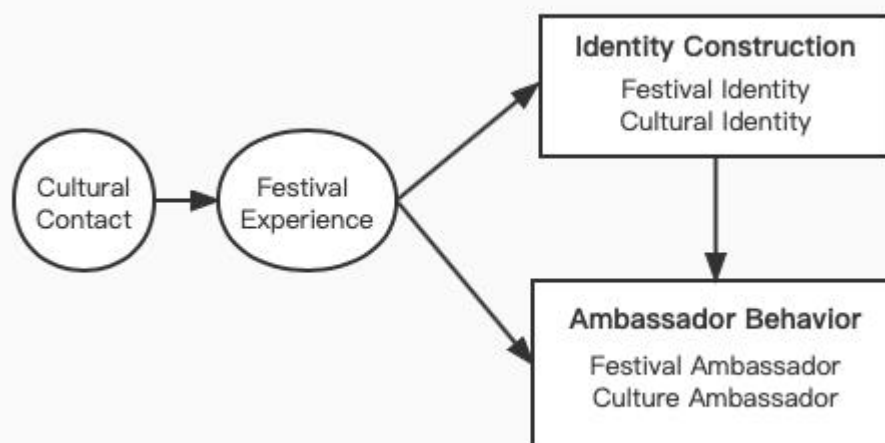

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model of the Ambassador Behavior of Cultural Festivals

CONCLUSION

The study proposes a conceptual model of ambassadorial behavior to guide local culture promotion in cultural festival tourism experiences. This conceptual model aims to systematically examine the relationship between cultural festivals, cultural contact, festival experiences, identity construction, and ambassadorial behavior. The research has theoretical and managerial implications as they guide the practical design of a thriving cultural festival to ensure that participants experience the festival, build identity and become ambassadors of the festival and of the local culture in which they participate in the festival.

For a cultural festival to succeed, participants must support the development of the culture and the festival itself. As cultural festivals emerge across the world with the aim of not solely encouraging festival participants to maintain their local native culture but also to make it feel accessible to members of other groups, these findings may help stakeholders to

understand better how cultural festivals can contribute to social cohesion and social integration. Future studies should be conducted to test how well the cultural festival experience prototypes develop within the proposed conceptual model.

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