

## Tourist loyalty to a local cultural event: The case of Turkmen handicrafts festival<sup>☆</sup>



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### HIGHLIGHTS

- A comprehensive model of attendee loyalty at a local festival was examined.
- Perceived authenticity influenced perceived quality, value and satisfaction.
- Perceived quality was found to have the direct effect on perceived value, satisfaction and trust.
- Perceived value affected satisfaction, trust and loyalty.
- Satisfaction had the direct effect on loyalty and so did trust.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 24 April 2014

Received in revised form

29 June 2015

Accepted 30 June 2015

Available online 12 August 2015

#### Keywords:

Festival authenticity

Festival quality

Festival value

Satisfaction with festival

Trust in festival

Loyalty to festival

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine a comprehensive model of attendee loyalty at a local festival. More specifically, the research tested a model linking festival authenticity to festival quality, value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty to a given festival. Using convenience sampling method, empirical data was collected at the Turkmen handicrafts festival in Gonbad-e-Kavoos, the most important city in the Turkmen Sahra region, Iran. A sample of 301 domestic tourists who attended the festival was surveyed. Applying structural equation modeling, the findings showed that perceived authenticity influenced perceived quality, value and satisfaction. Perceived quality was found to have the direct effect on perceived value, satisfaction and trust. Perceived value affected satisfaction, trust and loyalty. Satisfaction had the direct effect on loyalty and so did trust.

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## 1. Introduction

Short-term events and festivals are an essential feature of cultural tourism (Chang, 2006; Getz, 2008). In fact, they have become an important part of a destination's portfolio of tourism products (Getz, 2008). Festivals, as one of the fastest growing types of events, have increased with regard to number, diversity and popularity since the 1980s (Getz, 2008; Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006; Yang, Ying Kang, & Cen, 2011). A festival is defined as "the celebration of a specific theme to which the public is invited for a limited period of time. This celebration can be held annually or less frequently, and includes single events" (Grappi & Montanari, 2011, p. 1129).

Festivals are recognized as an effective strategy for host destinations to gain several potential economic, social and cultural benefits (Grappi & Montanari, 2011). They can be seen as a strategy to achieve economic development, a way to create positive image, a stimulator of tourism demand, an expander of tourist seasons, a means to enhance the life and pride of local people, and a way to reinforce social cohesion within the communities (Getz, 2008; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee, 2014; Lee, Lee, & Yoon, 2009; Saleh & Ryan, 1993; Weber & Ali-Knight, 2012). Local festivals have been known as a good means to boost sustainable tourism by facilitating learning about unique cultural heritages, ethnic back-grounds, and local customs (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2011; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010).

Despite political instabilities and unrest in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, cultural tourism has gained popularity across the region. In the region, which has many cultures, events and festivals have increased significantly in terms of their number

<sup>☆</sup> The author acknowledges the editor (Pro. Steve Page) and the distinguished reviewers for their valuable comments on the early version of this research.

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and scope during the past decade (Weber & Ali-Knight, 2012). Iran, as an important country of the region, has a strong potential to develop events and festivals to enhance its tourism potential as a destination. Indeed, there are diverse regions in Iran that hold local festivals during the early spring of every year. The goal of these festivals is to revive the local customs. These festivals, which are a mixture of local handicrafts, foods and traditions of the regions, attract many domestic tourists and play a significant role in the success of the regions. In addition, the festivals contribute economic benefits to the regions, create positive image for the regions, and enhance the life and pride of the residents. Similarly, the Turkmen Sahra region, as an important region of Iran, holds several local festivals during the early spring of every year. Among the festivals, the festival of Gonbad-e-Kavoos city is the most famous.

One of the main ways to achieve success is to build loyalty in attendees (Lee, 2014; Wu, Wong, & Cheng, 2014; Yang et al., 2011). Indeed, customer loyalty is widely recognized as a major element of business success. Various researchers had contributed to develop predictors of attendee loyalty in the festival literature. For instance, researchers had explored the effects of festival authenticity (e.g. Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Shen, 2014), festival quality (e.g. Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2014; Wu et al., 2014), festival value (e.g. Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011), and satisfaction with festival (e.g. Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee, 2014; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012) on loyalty to festival. In addition, it is widely accepted that trust leads to loyalty (Lee & Back, 2008; Wang, Law, Hung, & Guillet, 2014). Therefore, in order to better understand which factors may lead to attendee loyalty, the current research proposed a comprehensive model to test the effects of festival authenticity, quality, value, satisfaction and trust as predictors of loyalty to a given festival. Furthermore, the research examined the relationships among the predictors. The findings provide information for widening the festival literature. Although this research was limited to the Turkmen Sahra region - a particular geographical region - the findings may be applied to different geographical regions and be used by festival managers and tourism marketers.

## 2. Literature review and research hypotheses

### 2.1. Festival authenticity

Authenticity as a concept indicates genuineness, reality and truth as three qualities and may be connected with a region's tradition and culture (Brida, Disegna, & Osti, 2013; Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). There are three types of authenticity in tourists' experiences that have been identified: objective, constructive and existential. Objective authenticity refers to the originality of objects. Contrary to objective authenticity, constructive and existential authenticities are very subjective. Constructive authenticity relates to tourists' perceptions of the objects they visit. This type of authenticity is socially constructed and depends on tourists' viewpoints and perspectives. Constructive authenticity is also reliant on the situation and context, which evolves over time. Existential authenticity is built on the principals of constructive authenticity, but further liberates tourists. It refers to tourists' emotions which are activated by their experiences. In fact, objective and constructive authenticities are object-related, whereas existential authenticity is experience-related (Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

In tourism, authenticity is an expression, which describes tourists' perceived degree of the genuineness of products and experiences (Brida et al., 2013; Shen, 2014). Indeed, authenticity is a

perception or value placed on what is assessed, not a tangible thing (Brida et al., 2013). Authenticity is an important element influencing human behavior, particularly tourist behavior. It is one of the most crucial issues for contemporary tourists. Since contemporary society is inauthentic, quest for authenticity elsewhere has become a significant motivator in tourism (Castéran & Roederer, 2013). Tourists are interested in learning different cultures; therefore, authenticity motivates individuals to travel (Chhabra et al., 2003; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). In the case of cultural products such as festivals, tourists perceive them as authentic if they are made by the local people according to the custom and tradition (Brida et al., 2013; Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Chhabra et al., 2003).

Authenticity is one of the important factors in the success of cultural festivals (Brida et al., 2013). In the contemporary world, cultural festivals have to offer authenticity to meet the need of tourists, because cultural exploration is among the significant motivations for attending festivals (Chang, 2006; Kim, Borges, & Chon, 2006). In other words, one of the reasons to attend a festival is the uniqueness and symbolic meaning of the festival (Getz, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2006). Castéran and Roederer (2013) indicated that "even if some tourists expect to be entertained regardless of the authenticity of a tourist site, authenticity matters to most visitors" (p. 154). Authenticity is a vital factor in assessing the quality and value of cultural products and experiences (Chhabra et al., 2003; Kim & Jamal, 2007). Furthermore, one of the major elements resulting in satisfaction with cultural events is the authenticity perceived by attendees (Brida et al., 2013; Chhabra et al., 2003; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Authenticity also connotes trustworthiness (Robinson & Clifford, 2012) and results in loyalty (Brida et al., 2013; Castéran & Roederer, 2013).

Several researchers investigated the role of authenticity in the festival literature. For example, Chhabra et al. (2003) found that most of the tourists came to the event to purchase authentic goods, and were eager to pay more money to purchase them. Kim and Jamal (2007) examined the experience of highly committed tourists to the festival. Their findings showed that authenticity was central to understanding the experience of regular, repeat festival-goers who took their participation seriously. Brida et al. (2013) deduced that tourists were more likely to spend if they perceived the event and the products sold to be authentic. Robinson and Clifford (2012) found that perceived foodservice authenticity in the festival, as a dimension of satisfaction with festival, was positively correlated with revisit intention. Castéran and Roederer (2013) concluded that visitors were motivated to return to the event if the event was perceived as loyal to its origins. The findings of the research by Shen (2014) in which event authenticity was measured by two dimensions, namely food-related authenticity and overall authenticity, showed that food-related authenticity influenced revisit intention.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.** Festival authenticity has a positive and direct effect on festival quality.
- H2.** Festival authenticity has a positive and direct effect on festival value.
- H3.** Festival authenticity has a positive and direct effect on satisfaction with festival.
- H4.** Festival authenticity has a positive and direct effect on trust in festival.
- H5.** Festival authenticity has a positive and direct effect on loyalty to festival.

## 2.2. Festival quality

Perceived quality refers to superiority or excellence of a product or service as perceived by consumers (Lee et al., 2009; Rigatti-Luchini & Mason, 2010; Song, Lee, Kim, Bendle & Shin, 2014a; Wu et al., 2014). In other words, quality indicates the performance of a product or service (Wu et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2010). Crompton and Love (1995) who proposed the first conceptualization to measure festival quality, pointed out that five types of relationships had been used to evaluate quality in tourism, which are as follows: attribute expectations, attribute expectations and importance, attribute performance and importance, attribute performance and expectations, and attribute performance, expectations and importance. They also argued that there are two types of quality: performance (opportunity) and experience. Performance quality can be defined as the quality of attributes of a service, which are under the control of the supplier. In contrast to performance quality, experience quality involves both the attributes provided by a supplier and the attributes brought to the opportunity by a visitor.

In the case of festivals, attendees first evaluate the performance quality. Based on the results of this evaluation, the attendees then perceive the experience quality (Cole and Illum (2006). "A festival's performance quality refers to the characteristics of products (including the event design and programmed entertainment, activity, and performance) and services (for example, catering, facilities, merchandising) that are provided at the festival" (Savinovic, Kim, & Long, 2012, p. 684). Festivals' attributes are the key components in evaluating festivals by attendees. Quality is an important element providing successful tourist experience. Indeed, one of the key strategies for the survival and success of any business is to deliver superior quality to customers (Song et al., 2014a; Wong et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2014). Improving the quality leads to increased visitations and revenues (Yuan & Jang, 2008). Quality is also recognized as an underpinning element of competitive advantage (Wong et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2014). Consequently, festivals have to deliver high quality to their attendees to succeed (Lee, 2014; Saleh & Ryan, 1993).

There is much empirical research exploring the role of quality in the festival literature. For instance, Baker and Crompton (2000) found that performance quality was a significant determinant of attendee satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Cole and Illum (2006) deduced that performance quality influenced experience quality, which in turn resulted in attendee satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Lee, Petrick, and Crompton (2007) found the significant relationship between festival quality and behavioral intentions. Yuan and Jang (2008) concluded that festival quality significantly predicted satisfaction with festival. Rigatti-Luchini and Mason (2010) found that experiential quality affected functional value and revisit intention. Wu et al. (2014) concluded that festival quality had the significant effect on visitor satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Wong et al. (2014) found that festival quality affected attendee satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, there appears to be recognition of a significant effect from quality to value, satisfaction and loyalty in the literature. Furthermore, it is accepted that quality is a good determinant of trust (Wang et al., 2014).

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H6.** Festival quality has a positive and direct effect on festival value.
- H7.** Festival quality has a positive and direct effect on satisfaction with festival.
- H8.** Festival quality has a positive and direct effect on trust in festival.
- H9.** Festival quality has a positive and direct effect on loyalty to festival.

## 2.3. Festival value

Perceived value is defined as an individual's perception of the difference between the benefits and the sacrifices (Kim, Kim, & Goh, 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011). Kim et al. (2011) pointed out that value can be identified in four things: "(1) value is low price, (2) value is whatever one wants in a product, (3) value is the quality that the consumer receives for the price paid, and (4) value is what the consumer gets for what he/she gives" (p. 1161). "According to the equity theory, a customer evaluates what is fair, right, or deserved for the perceived cost of the offering, including monetary payments and nonmonetary sacrifices such as time consumption, energy consumption, and stress experienced by customers" (Yang et al., 2011, p. 30). The prevailing approach to value is the trade-off between quality and price (Rigatti-Luchini & Mason, 2010), indicating that perceived quality enhances value, whereas monetary (e.g. price) and non-monetary sacrifices (e.g. time, effort, search cost) decrease value (Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011; Yoon et al., 2010).

There are five types of value: functional, emotional, social, epistemic and conditional. Functional value is the utility of an experience for functional or practical performance. Emotional value refers to affective states or feelings associated with an experience. Social value relates to the utility of an experience's association with a particular group. Epistemic value is the utility of an experience to arouse curiosity or satisfy a desire for knowledge. Conditional value relates to the utility of an experience as the result of a particular situation or particular circumstances (Lee et al., 2011). In the case of festivals, attendees evaluate festival value by mentally trading off between the benefits (functional, emotional, social, epistemic and conditional) which they receive and the sacrifices in terms of time, money and effort.

According to the goal and action identification theories, consumers usually classify their goals based on their importance and control their actions so that they go in the highest ranked goal's direction. Since the highest ranked goal is considered as having the most value, consumers tend to maintain and continue relationships with the exchange partners who deliver superior value (Lee et al., 2009). If consumers receive the benefits they want from an experience, they assess the experience positively, and thus the experience has the ability to change the consumers' consumption and purchase behaviors. Value is of vital importance, because it is widely accepted that perceived value is a critical factor for developing long-term relationships with consumers (Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011) and gaining a competitive edge for businesses (Kim et al., 2011). Consequently, festivals have to deliver superior value to their attendees because of the great influence of perceived value on the experiences, perceptions and behaviors of attendees (Yoon et al., 2010).

Some empirical efforts have been made to investigate the role of value in the festival literature. For example, Gursoy et al. (2006) found that both utilitarian and hedonic values influenced festival attendance. Lee et al. (2007) concluded that festival value resulted in attendee satisfaction and loyalty. Lee et al. (2009) deduced that festival value was a significant predictor of loyalty for both first-time and repeat visitors. Rigatti-Luchini and Mason (2010) found that festival functional value affected visitor satisfaction and revisit intention. Yoon et al. (2010) deduced that festival value influenced attendee satisfaction. Grappi and Montanari (2011) found that hedonic value led to visitor satisfaction. Lee et al. (2011) concluded that both functional and emotional values influenced attendee satisfaction. Their findings also suggested that only emotional value influenced behavioral intentions. Kim et al. (2011) found that festival value resulted in visitor satisfaction and revisit intention. Yang et al. (2011) deduced that festival value significantly predicted

behavioral intentions. Thus, there appears to be a consensus that value is a predictor of satisfaction and loyalty in the literature. Furthermore, it is enunciated that value results in trust (Lee & Back, 2008; Lee et al., 2011).

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H10.** Festival value has a positive and direct effect on satisfaction with festival.

**H11.** Festival value has a positive and direct effect on trust in festival.

**H12.** Festival value has a positive and direct effect on loyalty to festival.

#### 2.4. Satisfaction with festival

Satisfaction refers to a consumer's overall evaluation of his/her consumption experience (Kim et al., 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). According to Mason and Paggiaro (2012), "satisfaction is a partly affective and partly cognitive evaluation of the consumption experience" (p. 1331). From a cognitive perspective, what makes an experience satisfying or dissatisfying depends on the expectations of consumers and actual performance of an experience. Consumers are satisfied if the experience's performance is higher than their expectations and dissatisfied if the performance does not meet their expectations (Chang, Gibson, & Sission, 2013; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Song et al., 2014a). From an affective perspective, what makes an experience satisfying or dissatisfying depends on the arousal of feelings which is caused by the experience (Chang et al., 2013; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee & Back, 2008; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012).

On the other hand, based on the equity theory, satisfaction happens when consumers get more value than what they spend in terms of money, time and effort (Yuan & Jang, 2008). According to Lee and Back (2008) and Rigatti-Luchini and Mason (2010), there are two types of satisfaction: transaction-specific and overall satisfaction. Transaction-specific satisfaction can be defined as the instant judgment of a consumer about his or her most recent consumption experience. Overall satisfaction is a consumer's overall evaluation of a product or service, which is based on the total purchase and consumption experience. In the case of festivals, satisfaction with festival refers to overall evaluation of an attendee about his or her experience in a festival.

Satisfaction is one of the most important elements influencing consumer behavior; therefore, a high level of customer satisfaction is a major concern for all businesses (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Customer satisfaction is necessary to achieve business success (Kim et al., 2011), because satisfied customers are less likely to switch to something different (Grappi & Montanari, 2011). Consequently, to be successful, festivals have to offer satisfactory experiences to their attendees (Savinovic et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2014) and meet their needs and wants (Chang, 2006; Grappi & Montanari, 2011), because satisfaction is a major element affecting attendees' experiences (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012) and a vital factor for building long-term relationships with attendees (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Song et al., 2014a).

There is much empirical research investigating the role of satisfaction in the festival literature. For instance, Song et al. (2014a) concluded that visitor satisfaction determined visitor trust. Chang et al. (2013) investigated the loyalty process of residents and tourists. Their results showed that residents who were satisfied with the festival were more likely to revisit the festival. Kim et al. (2011) and Savinovic et al. (2012) found that visitor satisfaction led to revisit intention. Lee, (2014) concluded that

attendee satisfaction affected revisit and recommend intentions. Previous research also deduced that attendee satisfaction was a significant predictor of attendee loyalty (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Cole & Illum, 2006; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Wu et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2010; Yuan & Jang, 2008).

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H13.** Satisfaction with festival has a positive and direct effect on trust in festival.

**H14.** Satisfaction with festival has a positive and direct effect on loyalty to festival.

#### 2.5. Trust in festival

According to Song et al. (2014a), trust can be defined as "willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (p. 215). Trust is also defined as "generalized expectancy of how an exchange partner will perform in the future" (Lee & Back, 2008, p. 336). In other words, trust indicates generalized expectancy of how a product or service will perform its stated functions in the future. In fact, trust occurs when a consumer understands that a product or service will fulfill its obligations. The definitions on trust include two general streams of trust in the literature. First, trust is regarded as a belief or hope about trustworthiness of an exchange partner attributed to his or her expertise and reliability. Second, trust is considered as a behavioral intention, which indicates a dependence on an exchange partner and an uncertainty on the trustor (Lee & Back, 2008; Wang et al., 2014). According to Wang et al. (2014), there are two types of trust: cognitive and affective. Cognitive trust refers to willingness of a consumer to rely on the functional competence of a product or service, whereas affective trust denotes a consumer's feeling toward the competence of a product or service based on the level of care and concern which the product or service provides.

"Trust functions to reduce customers' anxiety in decision-making dilemmas which then leads to reduction in transaction costs caused by information search and inspection" (Wang et al., 2014, p. 2). It develops positive and favorable attitudes toward a product or service. Consumers attribute trust to a product or service based on their consumption experiences. When consumers are satisfied with a product or service, they shape the confidence that the product or service will deliver what is promised. Consumers also believe that the product or service has much less perceived risk than unfamiliar products or services (Lee & Back, 2008). In fact, the only reason which makes trust a major element in social and commercial relationships is that there is uncertainty or risk (Lee & Back, 2008; Song et al., 2014a; Wang et al., 2014). Since trust reduces risk in exchange relationships, festivals have to gain their attendees' trust. Trust in festival, as the confidence of attendees in the reliability of a festival, occurs when the attendees perceive that the festival will deliver what is promised in the future.

Trust is one of the influential determinants of consumer behavior (Song et al., 2014a; Wang et al., 2014). It is widely recognized that trust is a crucial element in developing and sustaining any relationship (Song et al., 2014a; Wang et al., 2014). Building and maintaining trustworthy relationships with consumers is viewed as a good strategy for business success, because one of the most important reasons of long-term relationships between consumers and brands is trust. In other words, trust leads to loyalty (Lee, 2014; Lee & Back, 2008; Wang et al., 2014), because if consumers trust a product or service, they will purchase the product or service continually and recommend it to others. There is no empirical research regarding the role of trust in the festival literature. However, in the conference literature, Lee and Back



(2008) investigated the impact of attendee trust on loyalty. Their findings revealed that attendees who trusted the event were more likely to be loyal to the event.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H15.** Trust in festival has a positive and direct effect on loyalty to festival.

## 2.6. Loyalty to festival

Loyalty is defined as “deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Lee & Back, 2008, p. 338). According to Yang et al. (2011), consumers frequently develop an attitude toward a product or service, which is based on the evaluations of prior experiences. Based on the attitude, the consumers decide to stay with or leave the product or service. The process of loyalty includes four stages. First, consumers believe that a product or service is preferable, because its features are superior to those of the other ones (cognitive loyalty). Next, based on cumulative satisfaction after having used the product or service, consumers shape an emotional attachment to the product or service (attitudinal loyalty). After development of the attachment, consumers are more likely to remain committed to the product or service in spite of situational factors and marketing promotions related to the other products or services. Then, consumers express a repurchase intention of the same product or service (conative loyalty). Finally, these stages result in eventual patronage (behavioral loyalty) (Lee, 2014; Wong et al., 2014).

Loyal customers have favorable behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions refer to intentions of an individual to perform a particular behavior in the future (Song, You, Reisinger, Lee & Lee, 2014b; Wu et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2011). They are good predictors of the future behaviors (Kim et al., 2011; Song, Lee, Kang, & Boo, 2012; Song et al., 2014b). According to Lee et al. (2007), a thirteen-item battery had been developed to measure behavioral intentions. The battery consisted of items such as intention to last relationship with a brand in the future, intention to complain when problems occur, and intention to pay a price premium and remain loyal to a brand even when its prices increase. The thirteen items were divided into five dimensions as follows: loyalty to brand, tendency to switch, willingness to pay more, external response to a problem, and internal response to a problem.

Building long-term relationships with customers has become an integral part of today's business, and loyal customers are seen as an important asset of any business. Indeed, loyalty of customers is recognized as a major strategy for the survival, profitability and success of any business (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2010), because loyal customers constitute a desirable stable revenue source and are regarded as a significant reference group for prospective customers. Furthermore, they have valuable benefits as follows: “low switching behavior to competitors, less cost to retain loyal consumers than to create new ones, willingness to pay a price premium, and positive word-of-mouth advertising” (Lee et al., 2009, p. 692). Consequently, festivals have to build loyalty in their attendees to succeed (Lee, 2014; Yoon et al., 2010).

Drawing on the above literature, this research conceptualized the theoretical model as depicted in Fig. 1.

## 3. Research area

### 3.1. The Turkmen Sahra region and the Turkmen handicrafts festival

Turkmen Sahra that means plain of Turkmen, is a region in the

northeast of Iran. This region is bordered by Turkmenistan to the north and the Caspian Sea to the west, and consists of the cities of Gonbad-e-Kavoos, Bandar-e-Turkmen, Agh Ghala, Maraveh Tappeh, Kalaleh, Simin Shahr, Gomishan, Negin Shahr, Anbar Olum, Incheh Burun and Faraghi (see Fig. 2). In the region, Turkmens are in the majority. Turkmen is one of the authentic tribes in Iran, which belongs to the Turkic people. It can be said that the Turkmen Sahra region is the most authentic region in Iran, because Turkmens who live in the region, have carefully conserved all their traditions, language and culture.

In the Turkmen Sahra region, as in other Iranian regions, several local festivals are held during the early spring of every year. Since the most important city of the region is Gonbad-e-Kavoos, the best festival is held in the city. The festival of Gonbad-e-Kavoos is an ethnic, small-scale and two-week festival, which is held at the Qabus Park. Having the tallest brick tower (the Qabus Tower, a UNESCO world heritage site) in the world, this park is the most famous park in the city. The festival is mainly organized by the local people. In the festival, several Turkmen pavilions are set up by some local people to exhibit the Turkmen handicrafts to the attendees. The festival of Gonbad-e-Kavoos is a successful local festival which is growing in popularity. It can be said that roughly 25–40000 domestic tourists attend the festival annually. In 2012 and 2013, this festival was visited by 27000 and 40000 tourists, respectively. It is worth to note that one of the major elements resulting in the success of the festival is the authenticity of the festival as the vast majority of handicrafts are made and offered by the local people (see Fig. 3).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Data collection procedure

This research was carried out in Gonbad-e-Kavoos city. The data was collected at the Turkmen handicrafts festival during the early spring of 2014. Domestic tourists who attended the 2014 Turkmen handicrafts festival and were leaving the festival were asked to take part in the survey under the guidance of the researcher. The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted during the late mornings and early evenings at two of three entry and exit points of the Qabus Park. Since the population of tourists was unknown, convenience sampling method was used. 350 questionnaires were distributed to the tourists. Among the questionnaires obtained from the 334 respondents, 33 ones were incomplete and thereby were eliminated. Finally, 301 questionnaires were usable, resulting in 86% effective response rate.

### 4.2. Measurement instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect empirical data for this research. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, items for measuring the constructs were extracted and the questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part had the questions relating to the demographic characteristics of respondents. The second part had the questions for measuring the items. In the second part, respondents were asked to rate the significance of the items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree).

Festival authenticity was measured by five items: unique products, local staff, traditional presentation, unique atmosphere and unique festival, which were adopted from previous research (Brida et al., 2013; Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Shen, 2014). Festival quality was measured by eight items: product diversity, reasonable prices, professional staff, clean environment, good design, good location, sufficient facilities and well organization, which were

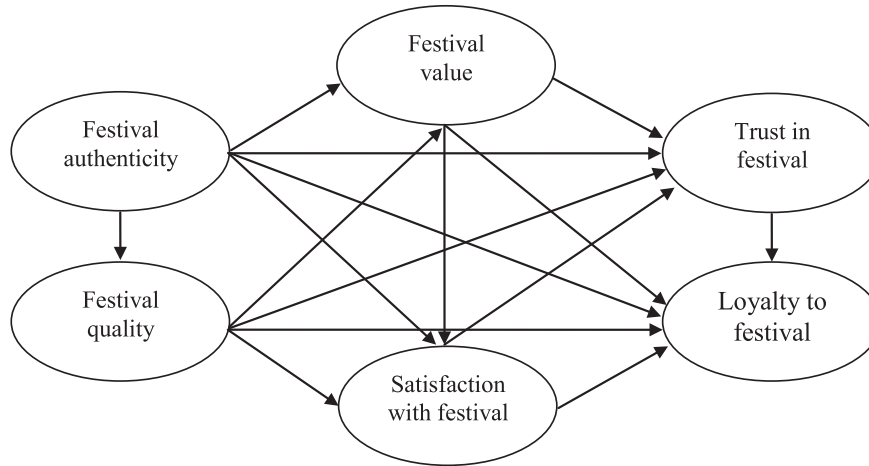


Fig. 1. The theoretical model.

taken from Wu et al. (2014). Festival value was measured by three items: value for time, value for money and value for effort, which were adopted from previous research (Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011; Yoon et al., 2010). Satisfaction with festival was measured by three items: right decision, meeting expectations and pleasure, which were taken from previous research (Lee, 2014; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Wu et al., 2014). Trust in festival was measured by two items: confidence and belief, which were adopted from Song et al. (2014a). Loyalty to festival was measured by three items: revisit intention, recommend intention and willingness to pay more, which were taken from previous research (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Lee, 2014).

4.3. Reliability and validity of measurement scales

Reliability and validity of the measurement scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), respectively. Reliability is supported if Cronbach's alpha value is 0.7 or above. Validity of the scales was assessed through convergent and discriminant validities. Convergent validity is supported if t-values are more than |1.96| at the alpha = 0.05 level, standardized factor loadings are above 0.5, and fit indices of

measurement model are as follows:  $\chi^2/df$  between 1 and 3, RMSEA <0.08, NFI >0.90, NNFI >0.90, CFI >0.90, IFI >0.90, GFI >0.90, AGFI >0.90 and PGFI >0.50. Discriminant validity is supported if chi-square difference between unconstrained and constrained model for all pairs are significant (Vieira, 2011).

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the threshold of 0.7, suggesting that the scales had high reliability. Most of the fit indices were within the recommended thresholds, indicating an acceptable fit. T-value and standardized factor loading of all items exceeded the thresholds, supporting the convergent validity. Furthermore, correlations among the constructs were lower than 0.7, a signal of measure distinctness. A number of CFA models was performed for each pair of the constructs. The results showed that the chi-square differences were significant, supporting the discriminant validity. Thus, reliability and validity of the scales were supported.

5. Results

5.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Among the 301 respondents, 54.8% were female and 45.2% were

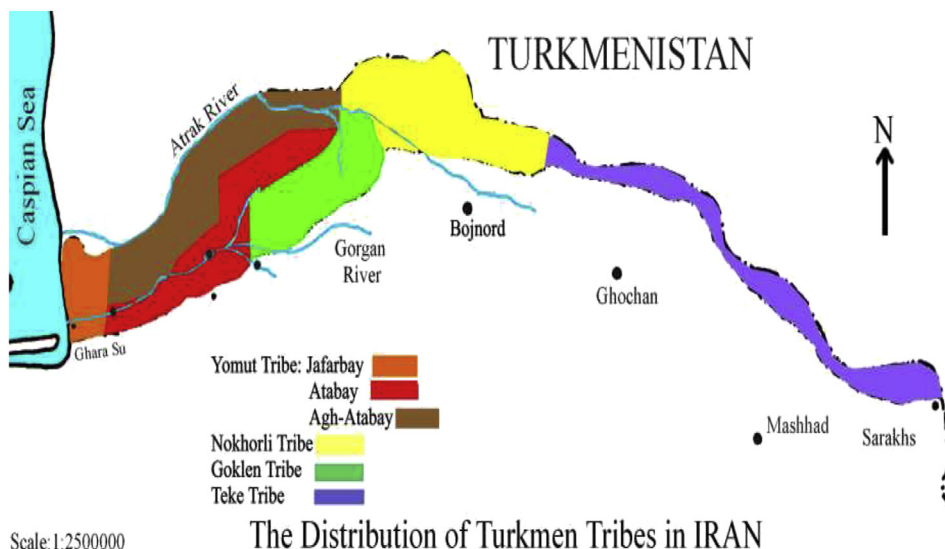


Fig. 2. The Turkmen Sahra region.



Fig. 3. Illustrations of the Qabus Tower and the Turkmen handicrafts festival at the Qabus Park.

male. In terms of age, 39.2% of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years old, 21.9% were 15–24, 20.3% were 35–44, 13.0% were 45–54, 4.7% were 55–64, and 1.0% were 65 or older. 59.5% of the sample had an university degree and over, followed by high school (26.9%), middle school (10.3%), and primary school (3.3%). 27.6% of the respondents had monthly income level less than 5000000, followed by 5000000–9999999 (27.2%), 10000000–19999999 (23.9%), 20000000–29999999 (13.3%), and higher than 30000000 Rials (8.0%).

## 5.2. Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the constructs, including means (M) and standard deviations (SD). The results showed that all constructs had high means, because the values exceeded the mid-scale point of 3. Festival authenticity had the highest mean (FA = 4.64), followed by trust in festival (TF = 4.30), festival quality (FQ = 4.26), satisfaction with festival (SF = 4.25), festival value (FV = 4.21), and loyalty to festival (LF = 3.78). The results of Pearson



**Table 1**  
Reliability and validity of measurement scales.

| Construct                  | Item                     | Mean (SD)    | Standardized factor loading | Std.error | T-value | Cronbach $\alpha$ |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|
| Festival authenticity      | Unique products          | 4.30 (0.592) | 0.62                        | 0.032     | 11.61   | 0.885             |
|                            | Local staff              | 4.79 (0.410) | 0.80                        | 0.020     | 16.35   |                   |
|                            | Traditional presentation | 4.79 (0.405) | 0.79                        | 0.020     | 16.14   |                   |
|                            | Unique atmosphere        | 4.70 (0.460) | 0.91                        | 0.021     | 19.83   |                   |
| Festival quality           | Unique festival          | 4.63 (0.482) | 0.87                        | 0.023     | 18.44   | 0.891             |
|                            | Product diversity        | 4.08 (0.630) | 0.60                        | 0.034     | 11.07   |                   |
|                            | Reasonable prices        | 3.73 (0.768) | 0.73                        | 0.039     | 14.33   |                   |
|                            | Professional staff       | 4.44 (0.542) | 0.68                        | 0.028     | 12.94   |                   |
|                            | Clean environment        | 4.44 (0.566) | 0.77                        | 0.028     | 15.35   |                   |
|                            | Good design              | 4.36 (0.656) | 0.73                        | 0.033     | 14.34   |                   |
|                            | Good location            | 4.85 (0.360) | 0.59                        | 0.020     | 10.77   |                   |
|                            | Sufficient facilities    | 3.82 (0.687) | 0.82                        | 0.033     | 16.94   |                   |
|                            | Well organization        | 4.37 (0.601) | 0.84                        | 0.029     | 17.66   |                   |
| Festival value             | Value for time           | 4.23 (0.658) | 0.89                        | 0.031     | 19.20   | 0.884             |
|                            | Value for money          | 4.00 (0.772) | 0.84                        | 0.037     | 17.51   |                   |
|                            | Value for effort         | 4.38 (0.651) | 0.83                        | 0.031     | 17.33   |                   |
| Satisfaction with festival | Right decision           | 4.30 (0.609) | 0.83                        | 0.030     | 16.92   | 0.822             |
|                            | Meeting expectations     | 3.94 (0.653) | 0.80                        | 0.033     | 15.89   |                   |
|                            | Pleasure                 | 4.52 (0.539) | 0.72                        | 0.028     | 13.62   |                   |
| Trust in festival          | Confidence               | 4.41 (0.603) | 0.87                        | 0.030     | 17.73   | 0.876             |
|                            | Belief                   | 4.20 (0.706) | 0.90                        | 0.034     | 18.67   |                   |
| Loyalty to festival        | Revisit intention        | 3.86 (0.839) | 0.75                        | 0.043     | 14.60   | 0.855             |
|                            | Recommend intention      | 4.01 (0.750) | 0.81                        | 0.037     | 16.40   |                   |
|                            | Willingness to pay more  | 3.48 (0.810) | 0.89                        | 0.039     | 18.64   |                   |

Fit indices of measurement model:  $\chi^2 = 706.32$  ( $P = 0.00000$ ),  $df = 237$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.98$ , RMSEA = 0.081, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.96, IFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.84, AGFI = 0.79, PGFI = 0.66.

correlation analysis showed that there were significant correlations among the constructs, ranging from 0.282 to 0.697.

### 5.3. Hypotheses testing

Path analysis using LISREL 8.8 was conducted to test the hypotheses. The overall fit of the structural model was examined before the assessment of the hypothesized relationships. As shown in Table 3, the fit indices indicated that the model was a good fit to the data. In order to support the relationships, the respective t-values must be greater than |1.96| at the alpha = 0.05 level (Vieira, 2011).

As shown in Table 3, the results revealed the positive and direct influence of festival authenticity on festival quality ( $\gamma_1 = 0.32$ , t-value = 4.88,  $p < 0.05$ ), value ( $\gamma_2 = 0.12$ , t-value = 2.17,  $p < 0.05$ ), and satisfaction ( $\gamma_3 = 0.13$ , t-value = 2.85,  $p < 0.05$ ). Festival quality had the positive and direct effect on festival value ( $\gamma_6 = 0.62$ , t-value = 8.24,  $p < 0.05$ ), satisfaction ( $\gamma_7 = 0.29$ , t-value = 4.28,  $p < 0.05$ ), and trust ( $\gamma_8 = 0.27$ , t-value = 3.33,  $p < 0.05$ ). Festival value was found to have the positive and direct impact on satisfaction ( $\gamma_{10} = 0.57$ , t-value = 8.54,  $p < 0.05$ ), trust ( $\gamma_{11} = 0.36$ , t-value = 3.55,  $p < 0.05$ ), and loyalty ( $\gamma_{12} = 0.46$ , t-value = 4.38,  $p < 0.05$ ). Satisfaction with festival significantly affected loyalty ( $\gamma_{14} = 0.23$ , t-value = 1.98,  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, trust in festival positively influenced loyalty ( $\gamma_{15} = 0.22$ , t-value = 2.98,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, H1, H2, H3, H6, H7, H8, H10, H11, H12, H14 and H15 were supported.

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

| Construct                       | Mean (SD)    | FA                 | FQ                 | FV                 | SF                 | TF                 | LF |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----|
| Festival authenticity (FA)      | 4.64 (0.393) | 1                  |                    |                    |                    |                    |    |
| Festival quality (FQ)           | 4.26 (0.460) | 0.395 <sup>a</sup> | 1                  |                    |                    |                    |    |
| Festival value (FV)             | 4.21 (0.627) | 0.352 <sup>a</sup> | 0.611 <sup>a</sup> | 1                  |                    |                    |    |
| Satisfaction with festival (SF) | 4.25 (0.517) | 0.418 <sup>a</sup> | 0.626 <sup>a</sup> | 0.697 <sup>a</sup> | 1                  |                    |    |
| Trust in festival (TF)          | 4.30 (0.619) | 0.322 <sup>a</sup> | 0.570 <sup>a</sup> | 0.604 <sup>a</sup> | 0.553 <sup>a</sup> | 1                  |    |
| Loyalty to festival (LF)        | 3.78 (0.705) | 0.282 <sup>a</sup> | 0.479 <sup>a</sup> | 0.667 <sup>a</sup> | 0.583 <sup>a</sup> | 0.554 <sup>a</sup> | 1  |

<sup>a</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

Since attendee loyalty is needed for festivals' success, it is vital to know which factors may influence it. Understanding the predictors of attendee loyalty provides information for festival managers to prioritize their tasks and organize their festivals so that the festivals can better build loyalty in attendees. Therefore, this research proposed a comprehensive model of attendee loyalty at a local festival. More specifically, the research tested the effects of festival authenticity, quality, value, satisfaction and trust on loyalty to a given festival. The research also tested the relationships among the predictors. Applying structural equation modeling (SEM), the model was empirically tested on a sample of 301 domestic tourists attending the 2014 Turkmen handicrafts festival in Gonbad-e-Kavoos, the most important city in the Turkmen Sahara region, Iran.

The findings showed that perceived authenticity influenced perceived quality, value and satisfaction. This means that if the festival was perceived as authentic, it would be more likely to be perceived as high quality and valuable and would also be more likely to have satisfied attendees. Perceived quality had the significant effect on perceived value, satisfaction and trust. The second finding confirms the findings of previous research (e.g. Baker & Crompton, 2000; Lee et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2013; Yuan & Jang, 2008). It seems that attendees who perceived the festival as high quality were more likely to perceive the festival as high value, be satisfied, and trust the festival. In this research, perceived value affected satisfaction, trust and loyalty. The first and



**Table 3**  
Hypotheses testing.

| Parameter  | Estimate | Std.error | T-value | R <sup>2</sup> | Result        |
|--|----------|-----------|---------|----------------|---------------|
| Festival authenticity → Festival quality           | 0.32     | 0.066     | 4.88    | 0.11           | Supported     |
| Festival authenticity → Festival value             | 0.12     | 0.055     | 2.17    | 0.82           | Supported     |
| Festival quality → Festival value                  | 0.62     | 0.076     | 8.24    |                | Supported     |
| Festival authenticity → Satisfaction with festival | 0.13     | 0.047     | 2.85    | 0.73           | Supported     |
| Festival quality → Satisfaction with festival      | 0.29     | 0.067     | 4.28    |                | Supported     |
| Festival value → Satisfaction with festival        | 0.57     | 0.067     | 8.54    |                | Supported     |
| Festival authenticity → Trust in festival          | 0.011    | 0.054     | 0.21    | 0.52           | Non-supported |
| Festival quality → Trust in festival               | 0.27     | 0.080     | 3.33    |                | Supported     |
| Festival value → Trust in festival                 | 0.36     | 0.10      | 3.55    |                | Supported     |
| Satisfaction with festival → Trust in festival     | 0.15     | 0.12      | 1.26    |                | Non-supported |
| Festival authenticity → Loyalty to festival        | 0.036    | 0.052     | −0.69   | 0.60           | Non-supported |
| Festival quality → Loyalty to festival             | −0.072   | 0.077     | −0.94   |                | Non-supported |
| Festival value → Loyalty to festival               | 0.46     | 0.11      | 4.38    |                | Supported     |
| Satisfaction with festival → Loyalty to festival   | 0.23     | 0.12      | 1.98    |                | Supported     |
| Trust in festival → Loyalty to festival            | 0.22     | 0.075     | 2.98    |                | Supported     |

Fit indices of structural model:  $\chi^2 = 706.32$  ( $P = 0.00000$ ),  $df = 237$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.98$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.081$ ,  $NFI = 0.95$ ,  $NNFI = 0.96$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $IFI = 0.96$ ,  $GFI = 0.84$ ,  $AGFI = 0.79$ ,  $PGFI = 0.66$ .

the third findings are consistent with the findings of (e.g. Kim et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2007, 2011; Yoon et al., 2010) and (e.g. Lee et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2011), respectively. It seems that attendees who had received high value were more likely to be satisfied, trust the festival, and be loyal to the festival. Consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g. Baker & Crompton, 2000; Cole & Illum, 2006; Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Wu et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2010; Yuan & Jang, 2008) satisfaction influenced loyalty. This implies that if attendees were satisfied with the festival they were more likely to be loyal to the festival. Trust was found to be a significant predictor of loyalty, which means that attendees tended to be loyal to the festival if they had trust in the festival.

This research had important theoretical implications. The findings enriched the festival literature in several ways. First, the research focused on small-scale festival, which had seldom been addressed. Second, the research explored attendees' perceptions of local handicrafts festival, which had seldom been investigated in the literature. Third, the research focused on the MENA region, which had received little attention. Fourth, the research developed a more comprehensive model of attendee loyalty than any previous research. Incorporating various predictors of attendee loyalty into a model helps to better understand which factors lead to attendee loyalty. Fifth, in addition to the effects of authenticity, quality, value and satisfaction, the research explored the effect of trust on loyalty. Despite the significant effect of trust on loyalty, no research had tested the effect in the literature. Sixth, the research investigated the relationships among the predictors. Although the relationships among quality, value and satisfaction had been investigated in the festival literature, the roles of authenticity and trust had been neglected.

Besides theoretical implications, the findings provided several managerial implications for festival managers. Festival managers must strive to build loyalty in attendees, because attendee loyalty is recognized as a major factor to succeed. As the findings suggested that perceived value, satisfaction and trust were significant predictors of loyalty, the managers can conduct their festivals in a way which the festivals deliver superior value to attendees, satisfy their needs and wants, and gain their trust. For example, offering authentic and quality products which are priced reasonably and not sold in elsewhere can improve perceived value. Satisfaction can be enhanced by providing various products to meet the expectations and needs of a wide variety of attendees. Trust can be enhanced by offering authentic and quality products to perform the stated functions well. Trust is another factor to strengthen the

relationships with attendees. To develop attendee trust, the findings suggested that perceived quality and value are good factors which should be improved. Festival managers can improve the quality in several ways: increasing variety of the products, offering the products at reasonable prices, teaching the staff so that they understand how to behave toward the attendees, providing clean environment, providing well designed festivals, locating festivals in good places especially near the places where tourists visit the most, and making sufficient facilities available to the attendees.

Offering satisfactory experiences is another way to strengthen the relationships with attendees. To do so, the findings suggested that festival managers can focus their resources on enhancing perceived authenticity, quality and value. It is better that the managers give special attention to perceived value more than perceived authenticity and quality, because the findings indicated that the greatest effect of perceived value on satisfaction suggested that the greatest potential for enhancing satisfaction of attendees is by delivering superior value to them. In order to improve perceived value, two predictors, i.e. perceived authenticity and quality, require great attention from festival managers. It is worth to note that the managers must be aware of the great effect of perceived quality on value, because the findings showed that perceived quality had the most significant weight in defining perceived value. The findings also suggested that the managers can pay attention to improving the authenticity of their festivals to enhance the attendees' perceptions of the quality. Perceived authenticity can be improved by, for example, offering local products, using local people in festivals, dressing the staff up as local people, and making the atmosphere unique.

As with any research, the current research had several limitations which must be noted. First, the research was limited to one city of one region. Second, the research was limited to a small-scale and one type of festival (handicrafts festival). Third, the research focused on domestic tourists. Hence, the findings may not be applied to festivals in other regions, of different scales, and of different types. Therefore, future research should be conducted in other regions, scales, and types and focus on international tourists. Fourth, convenience sampling method was used to collect the data. Since a convenience sample does not represent the entire population, a correct sampling method should be used in future research. Fifth, although this research proposed a comprehensive model examining the relationships among festival authenticity, quality, value, satisfaction, trust and loyalty, the research ignored some other constructs. Therefore, future research is encouraged to include the other predictors of attendee loyalty in the model. Sixth, the indirect effects of the construct were not examined.

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