

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

The influence of event attributes on tourist's loyalty: Evidence from the Ashoura event in Yazd City

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have found that the perceived authenticity of cultural and religious events affects event satisfaction and loyalty. Little is currently known about how perceived authenticity is affected by the facilities, such as food and the availability of information, which are independent determinants of satisfaction and loyalty. This study aims to examine the antecedents of event loyalty. Questionnaire data were collected from 315 tourists participated in Ashoura event. This article explores this complex relationship using empirical data collected through a survey conducted during 2017 Ashoura event. The results indicate 53% of the variance of the event loyalty followed by event satisfaction and 35% of it belongs to event perceived authenticity. In addition, the results show that the greater the perceived authenticity with the event leads to the higher the degree of satisfaction with the event as indicated by a parameter estimated as 0.56 ($p < 0.01$). However, the relationship between facilities and event loyalty is no significant ($0.006; p > 0.01$). Based on the findings, the study concluded that facilities influence tourists' loyalty through event satisfaction and perceived existential authenticity.

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INTRODUCTION

Events are drivers of tourism travel, and for many tourists they are the main motivation for visiting a destination (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2013). Modern approaches to consumer behavior research suggest that experiences shape future consumption (Pine *et al.*, and Gilmore, 1999). The impact of tourist perception, destination image and satisfaction on loyalty has been trendy research topic in tourism research. It is very important to determine the destination image while taking decisions for strategic marketing of tourism

destinations. Because it is assumed that it will result in a positive image of a destination, loyalty to tourist destinations and satisfaction felt by tourists, such as variables (Coban, 2012). Travelers with a high level of loyalty represent an important market segment for many tourism destinations, as they are more likely to stay longer at a destination than the first-time visitors, tend to spread positive information through word of mouth (WOM) and participate in consumptive activities more intensively (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). This research focus on perceived authenticity, a subjective construct that has received growing attention from tourism literature (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Robinson and Clifford, 2012). Despite this growing interest

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in the consequences of perceived authenticity, its presumed effect on satisfaction and loyalty, although intuitively rational, has not been tested or validated in any systematic fashion in tourism literature. This paper organized in three sections. Firstly, it presents the theoretical background of the research and propose the hypotheses based on the literature reviewed. Subsequently, it presents research methodology and findings. Finally, it discusses the findings and suggest their implications to improve the tourists' loyalty.

Hypothesis Development

Brown *et al.*, (2017), pointed out that there was a positive relationship between event satisfaction and intention to watch swimming events in the future. Berry (1998) suggested that perceived service quality came before customer satisfaction, and Cronin and Taylor (1992) disagreed by positing that customer satisfaction preceded customer perceptions of service quality. Mensah (2013) examined residents' satisfaction and behavioral intention with local festival. Among the five factors (ancillary services, participation, information, activities, and security and duration on festival) festival activities was the most important factor influencing residents' satisfaction with festival. Anil (2012) found that out of three dimensions (food, festival area, and convenience) that significantly affect visitors' satisfaction, food dimension was the most important factor. Existential authenticity is concerned with the object free aspect of activities or experiences (Kolar and Zabkar, 2010). Wang (1999) suggests existential authenticity comprises of two parts, both inter-personal as well as intra-personal feelings, where the inter-personal part relates to natural feelings and the intra-personal to self-made feelings. Authenticity could be categorized into three dimensions: objective, constructive, and existential (Akhoondnejad, 2016). Existential authenticity pertains to the authenticity that consumer's judge their experiences based on their emotional experiences instead of the objective criteria. Both objective and constructive authenticities are object-related, whereas existential authenticity is experience-related (Akhoondnejad, 2016). Authenticity is

a vital factor in assessing the quality and value of cultural products and experiences (Kim and Jamal, 2007). Drawing from attitude theory and the experience perspective, it postulates that perceived authenticity, through the mediation of experience (emotions), would affect tourist's evaluation on festival experience (satisfaction). As a positive emotional response to a product or service, satisfaction equates to a favorable evaluation of a consumption experience. It is also an important indicator of tourist experiences while participating in tourism activities (Lee and Hsu, 2011). Despite this growing interest in the consequences of perceived authenticity, its presumed effect on satisfaction and loyalty, although intuitively rational, has not been tested or validated in any systematic fashion in tourism literature (Novello and Fernandez, 2016). Various researchers had contributed to develop predictors of attendee loyalty in the festival literature. For instance, researchers had explored the effects of festival authenticity (Shen, 2014), festival quality (Wu *et al.*, 2014), festival value (Yang *et al.*, 2011), and satisfaction with festival (Lee, 2014) on loyalty to festival. As a positive emotional response to a product or service, satisfaction equates to a favorable evaluation of a consumption experience. It is also an important indicator of tourist experiences while participating in tourism activities (Lee and Hsu, 2011). 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, facilities and satisfaction as predictors of loyalty to a given festival and compared it with indirect effect as mentioned above. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Facilities positively affects Event Satisfaction
- H2: Facilities positively affects Perceived existential authenticity
- H3: Event satisfaction positively affects event loyalty
- H4: Perceived existential authenticity positively affects event satisfaction
- H5: Perceived existential authenticity positively affects event Loyalty
- H6: *Facilities positively affects event Loyalty*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research is quantitative research. Data was gathered through a questionnaire. The study was conducted using a sample of tourists visiting the 2017 Ashura event in Yazd, a city in the center of Iran that is famous for religious events like Ashura day. For Shi'a Muslims, Ashura marks the climax of the Remembrance of Muharram, and commemorates the death of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad at the Battle of Karbala on 10 Muharram in the year 61 AH. The massacre of Husayn with a small group of his companions and family members had a great impact on the religious conscience of Muslims, particularly Shi'a Muslims, who commemorate Husayn's death with sorrow and passion. Mourning for Husayn and his companions by his surviving relatives and supporters began almost immediately after the Battle of Karbala. The Commemoration of Husayn ibn Ali has become a national holiday, and most ethnic and religious communities participate in it. The survey was conducted on tourists who traveled to Yazd; to attend the Ashura event. The data collection was conducted within Yazd City—namely, around the Amir Chakhmagh Square and at the main exits of events and activities organized by different religious communities (Pierre *et al.*, 2007). The survey instrument used was developed following a comprehensive review of the relevant literature pertaining to religious and heritage tourism (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Fand Zabkar, 2010; Yoon *et al.*, 2010). Five academic experts who were familiar with the under study topic assessed the content and face validity of the survey. The final questionnaire was translated into three languages: English, Persian, and Arabic. The questionnaire consisted of the following major sections: The first includes questions about the quality of facilities attributes; authenticity; satisfaction and loyalty; and the final section were designed to gather information about the respondents' demographic characteristics and travel behavior. A total of 500 people were approached, and a response rate of 60% was obtained. A total of 315 complete responses were obtained from 340 returned questionnaires.

Facilities: The six items measuring facilities were adopted from Lee *et al.*, (2008) and Yoon *et al.*,

(2010) (Cronbach's alpha: 0.81).

Event Satisfaction: The three items measuring event satisfaction were adopted from Yoon and Uysal (2005) and Lee *et al.*, (2008) event satisfaction measurement, which (Cronbach's alpha: 0.8).

Event perceived authenticity: The items measuring event perceived authenticity were derived from Kolar and Zabkar (2010) three-items measuring an individual's perceived authenticity (Cronbach's alpha: 0.79).

Event loyalty: The items measuring event loyalty were adopted from Lee *et al.*, (2008) (Cronbach's alpha: 0.88).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 16.0. The partial least squares (PLS) technique was also used to test the model recurring to the Smart PLS software. First, an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on all survey items. The results from the factor analyses indicated that the groupings of factors were exactly the same as the instrument factor analyses reported in the past research, and no items were deleted in this stage. Next, the researchers conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the factor structure, and Cronbach's alpha values were used to rate the reliability of the instrument. Standard of being converged validity is based on the average variance of exit (AVE) more than 0.5. Diverged validity was measured by comparing AVE square root to correlations between latent variables (Table 2). Present research used two measures of Cronbach's alpha and combined reliability factor in order to identify questionnaire reliability following. In all variables, Cronbach's alpha coefficients are more than a minimum value (0.7). Unlike Cronbach's alpha assuming implicitly, that indexes have the same weights, combined reliability relies on real factorial loads of each factor, and therefore, it gives a better measure for reliability. Combined reliability must obtain a value more than 0.7 to reflect inner consistency of factors. Tables 1 and 2 represent results of reliability and validity of measuring instrument completely. Measuring tools have good validity (content, convergent, divergent) and reliability (factor loading, composite reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha coefficient). This method, PLS, consists of a statistical modeling-

The Influence of Event Attributes on Tourists Loyalty

Table 1: Convergent validity and reliability of measurement tools

Research variables	Coefficient of Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Loadings factors	Convergent Validity Pc >0.7	Cronbach's Alpha
Facilities	0.51		0.89	0.81
1. Food price was reasonable		0.70		
2. Available traditional food		0.67		
3. Program was varied		0.62		
4. Program related to the Ashoora Day		0.76		
5. Signage enhanced my understanding of direction.		0.80		
6. Availability of travel information for peer review		0.73		
Event satisfaction	0.722		0.82	0.80
1. I am satisfied with my visit to this event.		0.86		
2. Was this visit worth your time and effort?		0.90		
3. Overall, I am satisfied with this event.		0.77		
Event perceived authenticity	0.7		0.82	0.79
1. During my visit, I felt the related history, legends, and historical personalities		0.76		
2. I enjoyed the unique religious and spiritual experience.		0.88		
3. I liked the calm and peaceful atmosphere during the visit		0.86		
Loyalty	0.81		0.86	0.88
1. I will visit this festival again next time.	0.89			
2. I will say positive things about this festival to other people	0.90			
3. I will recommend this event to friends and family	0.90			

Table 2: The correlation matrix and Divergent validity

Variable	Scale composite reliability	Facilities	Loyalty	Perceived	Satisfaction
Facilities	0.86	0.8			
Loyalty	0.92	0.464	0.902		
Perceived	0.87	0.546	0.7	0.84	
Satisfaction	0.601	0.71	0.73	0.85	0.8

based technique through structural equations that allows for the simultaneous estimation of a group of equations,

by measuring the concepts (measurement model) and the relationships between them (structural model), and it has the capacity to address concepts not directly observable (Chin, 1998). Table 3 shows the main methodological

aspects related to the investigation.

Structural Model

In the second step of data analysis, the impact of loyalty on event satisfaction and perceived existential authenticity were examined and also the impact of these mediator variables on loyalty in a structural model. Table 3 shows that t-values

Table 3: Summarizes the Results of Hypotheses Test

Variables Path	Level Impact	Tests Value of t	Path Coefficient
Facilities. → Loyalty	Negative	1.129	0.006
Satisfaction → Loyalty	positive	9.27	0.53
Perceive → Loyalty	positive	5.6	0.35
Perceive → Satisfaction	Strong	11.3	0.54
Facilities → Perceive	Strong	12.3	0.56
Facilities → Satisfaction	positive	6.3	0.3

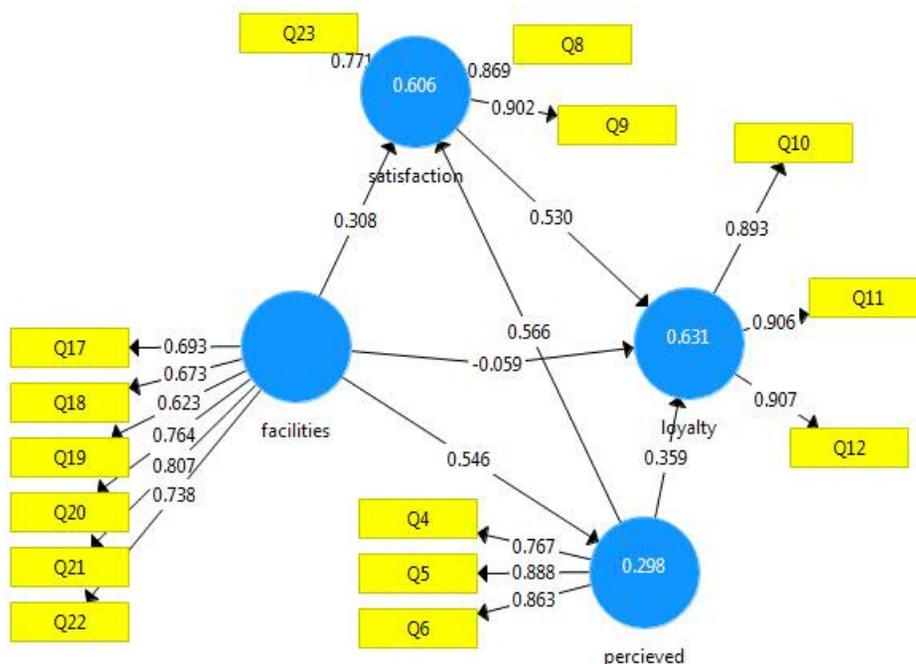


Fig. 1: Results of Hypotheses Test

for the impact of the independent variables are higher than the threshold 1.96 (facilities=6.3; event satisfaction =9.27, perceived existential authenticity =11.3 and 5.6) indicating the significance of the effects. Furthermore, R² for the dependent variable (Loyalty) in the model was 0.89 which confirm the model fits the data well. Finally, global goodness of fit (GOF) was measured to ensure a good fitness of the model (Wetzels et al., 2009). The GOF obtained for the model is 0.7 which shows a high fitness of the model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented below. More females (54.5%) than males (45.5%) were interviewed. Most

respondents were aged between 30 and 35 years (34%). Those with college or university degrees accounted for 33%. In terms of country of origin, Iranian accounted for 80% and 20% European and Arabic people. To test the proposed relationships between the constructs, path coefficient and t-value for each path from independent to dependent variable were analyzed. Table 3 depicts path coefficients, t-values, and hypothesis confirmation/rejection. As the table 3 shows, all the proposed relationships between the variables are confirmed except the relationship between facilities and loyalty. More specifically, facilities were the strongest factor affecting perceived existential authenticity so that it explained 54% of the construct variance. According to the Table 3

and Fig. 1, the mediator roles of event satisfaction and event perceived authenticity was confirmed. H1 and H2 predict that a high level of facilities has a direct positive effect on satisfaction and perceived authenticity. The analysis results support H1 and H2 because a positive and statistically significant relationship was found ($t=6.3$, $\beta=0.3$, $p < 0.01$; $t=12.3$, $\beta=0.56$, $p < 0.01$).

H3 and H5 predict that satisfaction and perceived authenticity have a direct positive effect on loyalty. The analysis supports H3 and H5 because a positive and statistically significant relationship was found ($t=9.27$, $\beta=0.53$, $p < 0.01$; $t=5.6$, $\beta=0.35$, $p < 0.01$). 53% of the variance of the event loyalty followed by event satisfaction and 35% of it belongs to event perceived authenticity. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, the results indicate that the greater the perceived authenticity with the event leads to the higher the degree of satisfaction with the event as indicated by a parameter estimated as 0.56 ($p < 0.01$). The results for H6 show that the relationship between facilities and event loyalty is nonsignificant (0.006 ; $p > 0.01$).

The current study contributes to this debate by assessing the antecedents and consequences of perceived authenticity and event satisfaction in the context of religious event organized in heritage destination. The research model provides an explicit and confirmatory conceptualization of the relationship among the facilities, event perceived authenticity, satisfaction, and loyalty. Theoretically, this study contributes to existing knowledge on events by studying whether the staging of events influences the interpretation of event authenticity and establishing the effects of perceived authenticity on satisfaction and loyalty in religious events. Although this study confirms the positive relationship between event satisfaction and loyalty (Lee and Hsu, 2011), it also demonstrates through a structural model that perceived authenticity has a strong and direct effect on event satisfaction, thereby confirming that the possibility of offering authentic experiences increases tourists' satisfaction (Novello and Fernandez, 2016), while providing support for the importance of authenticity in religious settings. Moreover, the results show that event satisfaction is a critical factor in mediating the facilities impact

on tourists' loyalty. In research model, the mere state of authenticity would not automatically yield higher event loyalty unless it is associated with satisfaction. This mediating effect would suggest that there is an underlying mechanism of need fulfilment through which event authenticity contributes to tourists' loyalty. In other words, the staged event needs to satisfy visitors' expectations (e.g., cultural enrichment, tradition, and spirituality), which may be viewed as major requisites for intentions to revisit or recommend the event.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that facilities influence tourists' loyalty through event satisfaction and perceived existential authenticity. This study provides several contributions to the research and practice. First, the set of factors examined in this study builds a foundation for further research on the factors that create and enhance tourists' loyalty. In addition, this study is among the first researches that explores these factors in religious event particularly in Iran. Current and prospective managers of tourism businesses could apply these factors as a platform to create and improve their business loyalty. Second, the structure of the factors emerging from this study may assist researchers to construct the basis for developing theories about tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Event organizer also need to decisively consider these factors and specifically perceived existential authenticity as the strongest factor influencing tourists' loyalty to destination. First and foremost, and given that present research focused on a religious event of global importance, it would be interesting to fully assess the model by examining other types of global events. Furthermore, the research model only included perceived event and event satisfaction as the mediating factors. Exploring other moderating and mediating factors that influence the relationships between facilities and loyalty has a high potential for future investigation. Finally, this study found that the facilities have no effects on event satisfaction among tourists. This needs to be further examined in the future studies.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy has been completely observed by the authors.

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