

Article

The Effect of Cultural Heritage Tourism on Tourist Word of Mouth: The Case of Lok Versa Festival, Pakistan

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Abstract: Festivals are the most viable source of tourism promotion and provide recognition to different cultures and communities. This paper proposed and examined a holistic model of festival word of mouth (WOM), which is influenced by authenticity, promotion, loyalty, quality, and satisfaction. Accordingly, the current paper investigated the effect of the proposed model with reference to Lok Virsa handicrafts, the most famous festival of the Islamabad region in Pakistan. The findings revealed that the festival quality has direct impact on WOM and promotion. Promotion has a positive influence on loyalty, satisfaction, and WOM. Festival authenticity strongly influences promotion, quality, satisfaction, and WOM. Festival satisfaction is positively related to WOM and loyalty. Whereas, festival loyalty and WOM are significantly associated. The results suggest that festival organizers should deliver the claims and promises in the festival that they have made with tourists. This technique will harvest positive WOM and increase tourist re-visitation to upcoming festivals.

Keywords: festival promotion; festival word of mouth; festival quality; authenticity of festival; festival satisfaction; festival loyalty

1. Introduction

Festivals and events propound enormous advantages to local people and are marked as a key attribute of cultural tourism [1–3]. In fact, they are considered a most persuasive technique to attain economic, cultural, and marketing benefits [2,4]. Festivals have become the core concern of many scholars as this phenomenon is growing promptly in terms of popularity, volume, and distinctiveness [3,5,6]. A large number of festivals have been held widely by diversified communities with the aim of promoting domestic tourism [7–9] such as local customs, cultural heritage [6,10], and ethnic backgrounds [11].

Cultural tourism has received much recognition and eminence in different regions. For instance, the Middle East, Egypt, Jordan, and North Africa. Though most of these countries have been encountering political uncertainty and turmoil, these factors are not considered barriers for the prosperity of the tourism sector in such countries [12–14]. Pakistan is a well renowned country in

the Asian region and keeps a substantial probability to develop its tourism sector by organizing distinguished cultural festivals for potential tourists. Indeed, Pakistan is enriched with a cultural heritage based on diversified provinces that hold a variety of local festivals each year at the beginning of the spring season. The intentions of these local events are to promote and regain the local heritage. Popular festivals, which include handicrafts, cuisines, Skiing, desert rallies, and so on, have gained the attention of both existing and potential tourists [15–17]. Similarly, these festivals have a significant effect on the economy [18–20], increasing the destination life cycle and image [21] as well as improving the community image [2,12].

Likewise, the Punjab region of Pakistan is supposed to be very lucrative as the capital city of Islamabad is located in this region. Many popular festivals are organized in this city and among these, the handicrafts festival arranged by Lok Virsa are the most popular [16,17,22]. The National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (Lok Virsa) was established in 1974 with the mandate of the preservation and promotion of the tangible and intangible heritage of Pakistan. The traditional festival *Lok Mela* has fascinated massive crowds from every walk of life. The 10-day festival is held at the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, more commonly known as Lok Virsa. The festival intends to showcase the work and creativity of approximately 700 artists representing the traditions and heritage of Pakistan. Special events have been arranged for each day, rejoicing the diversified cultural provinces of Pakistan such as Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The festival featured exhibits of artisan work, a stunning amalgamation of provincial cultural stalls, and an exotic bazaar (market) containing many cultural products. The success of the (*Lok Mela*) Handicrafts festival can be perceived from the variety of people it attracted. People belonging to different walks of life joined the festival, including professionals, craft experts, artists, celebrities, diplomats, and media officials. More than 20,000 tourists have visited this festival on an annual basis. The purpose behind the success is that apart from the provision of healthy entertainment, the festival actually associates with the local people, expressing the local history, distinctiveness, and culture. From buzzing bazaars (markets) occupied with traditional arts and crafts such as ornaments, bags, pottery, clothes, and vases, to traditional food kiosks with delicious food (such as *Sajji*, *Biryani*, *Chapli Kabab*, *Saag*, *Khorma*), the *Lok Mela* festival is likely to be a triumph event.

By understanding the antecedents and relationships affecting festival WOM, festival organizers can entice ample festival goers, consequently engendering monetary benefits, increasing the sustainability of the festivals based on loyalty, authenticity, promotion, and quality and, in doing so, creating positive WOM of each festival. Since festivals have been an interesting vehicle to retain quality [6,12,23–27], ensuring festival authenticity [28–30] achieves festival loyalty [27,31–34] and festival satisfaction [6,25,34–37]. These ingredients could only be accomplished by spreading positive WOM about the festival among the attendees [38–41]. Different scholars have contributed to measuring the antecedents of WOM in the existing literature of festivals and examined the impact of festival authenticity, festival promotion, festival quality, festival loyalty, and festival satisfaction in a WOM context. Subsequently, this study adopted a holistic approach and proposed a more comprehensive model of authenticity, quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and promotion as key predictors of WOM for a given festival.

The purpose of this is to examine the popular culture festival of Pakistan and to measure a unique association between variables experienced by visitors. However, no study has measured the effect of these predictors with WOM as a whole. Furthermore, the present study has taken the advantage to calculate the effect of promotion on loyalty, satisfaction, as well as WOM for a given festival.

The successes of festivals are based on customer experiences. Despite the popularity and growth of cultural festivals both in theoretical and practical perspectives, little research has been undertaken on festival loyalty. However, in tourism research, loyalty seems to be a significant factor of the success of festivals. Having knowledge about the determinants of festival loyalty may provide practitioners and organizers a number of opportunities to improve the festival credibility among visitors. This unique

association contributes in the existing body of literature and provides novel insights both from a theoretical and strategic perspective.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

The present study adopts a consumer oriented approach, which provides an integrated framework for tourist behavior about particular festival [42]. From the viewpoint of the service sector, the interface between promotion activities and the consumer is a thorough process that develops a consumer's attitude towards the marketing offer. Hence, as per this definition, the beliefs and attitude of the consumer is the basis to forming a liking or disliking behavior about the product authenticity [43]. The use of this consumer perspective theory is parallel with the notion that authentic festivals and events are perceived as a tool of promotion activity for heritage tourism [44,45]. Based on these empirical evidences, it is clear that a festival's quality has a strong potential to increase loyalty, promotion, and satisfaction, which results in festival WOM. Keeping in view the above explained logic an integrative layout of these variables has been proposed in the form of the conceptual framework, which is supported by the existing body of literature.

2.1. Festival Authenticity

The notion of authenticity is based on three key attributes, existence, truth, and validity, and they can be associated with a country's customs and culture [46–49]. Three kinds of authenticity are perceived by tourists as per their experience: Objective authenticity narrates the validity and genuineness of items. Compared with objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, as well as existential authenticity, remains biased in nature. Constructive authenticity is associated with the beliefs of tourists about the experience of an *item*. It is solely established on the opinions of tourists and their personal judgments. Constructive authenticity varies depending on the circumstances and factors that arise according to the time period. Existential authenticity was built on the basis of constructive authenticity and provides freedom to tourists for building their opinions on the basis of their experiences. Hence, the constructive and objective authenticities are product oriented, whereby existential authenticity is associated with tourist exposure to the object [50,51]. In the tourism context, authenticity has been expressed as a tourist opinion and an exposure to the realness of the products [30,47,52]. Authenticity is a fundamental component that affects human action. Presently, it is supposed to be the crucial issue for modern tourists. As the modern community is not authentic, the search for authenticity has turned to be the notable stimulator for tourism [28]. The previous literature revealed that tourists are involved in exploring various societies; hence, authenticity recommends that individuals roam around and discover different destinations [48–50].

Tourists observe distinctive cultural customs. For instance, festivals are more authentic provided that they originate from the natives. Authenticity acts as a prerequisite for the achievement of any traditional festival [47,48,51]. However, people like to attend festivals due to their distinctiveness and significance [3,8,52]. At present, it becomes necessary to ensure tourists about the authenticity of festivals, which further develops a sense of truthfulness among the potential festival attendees [1,53]. Authenticity significantly evaluates the worth and standard of cultural items and involvements [48,50]. Similarly, authenticity, considered by participants in cultural occurrences, is observed as an important factor for their satisfaction [47,49,53]. Likewise, authenticity indicates a reliability [45], which leads to loyalty as an outcome [28,47,54,55].

Authenticity has been inquired into by various authors who have contributed to the existing literature of festivals. For instance, Belhassen observes that many tourists attend festivities for the sake of buying some authentic products and are ready to pay an additional price for the acquisition of that specific item [46]. Kim investigates the perception of extremely devoted visitors to a festival. The results revealed that authenticity is the key to grasping the opinion of frequent attendees to a festival [53]. Brida concluded that visitors were supposed to pay more if they found authenticity in both the item and the carnival [47]. Robinson established that authentic cuisine service in festivals was clearly associated with

festival satisfaction, resulting in an increase in the probability of re-visitation [49]. Casteran deduced that tourists have been inspired to re-attend the occasion if it is loyal [28]. Akhoondnejad stated that authenticity can put differentiation in products, with the help of a local workforce to form the traditional appearance of festival [12]. Tanford, and Wong [56,57] indicated that authenticity can create major interference in the satisfaction of visitors. Lee, and Ramkissoon proposed that authenticity has a direct influence on the service quality and satisfaction [25,29]. Likewise, Lu concluded the local festival's authenticity ultimately forms visitor satisfaction through the optimistic image of the region [51]. Ovello revealed that perceived authenticity leads tourists towards satisfaction and quality [58]. Akhoondnejad revealed that perceived authenticity enhanced visitor satisfaction, which resulted in them becoming an instrument of loyalty about the festival [12]. Kolar, Robinson, and Ovello investigated whether perceived authenticity creates satisfaction and loyalty towards a festival [42,49,58]. Kolar found that authenticity is an important medium of promotion of the festival, which further shaped the behavior of tourists and provided strategic guidelines for festival managers [42]. Jain identified that the perceived authenticity of festivals generate positive WOM that further leads to the credibility of the destination as well [59]. Likewise, tourist perceptions about festivals are relied on for projected authenticity, which not only spreads positive WOM about a festival, but also motivates a tourist to become part of the specific festival [60].

Consequently, the following hypotheses are projected:

- H1.** *Festival authenticity affirmatively influences the festival quality.*
- H2.** *Festival authenticity affirmatively influences the festival promotion.*
- H3.** *Festival authenticity affirmatively influences the festival satisfaction.*
- H4.** *Festival authenticity affirmatively influences the festival loyalty.*
- H5.** *Festival authenticity affirmatively influences the festival word of mouth.*

2.2. Festival Quality

Perceived quality deals with the dominance and supremacy of the goods or services recognized by the end user [27,61,62]. More precisely, quality determines the enactment and execution of goods or service [6,37]. Crompton [63] presented the first approach to evaluate festival quality from the tourism perspective, and spotted five kinds of associations, which were: the expectations of the attribute; the importance and expectations of the attribute; importance, as well as the performance, of the attribute; the expectations plus the performance of the attribute; and the performance, expectations, and importance of the attribute. The author further classified quality performance into two categories: opportunity and experience. In regard to the festivals, participants initially assessed the performance quality. According to the participants' assessment, it was established that they considered quality more important. Festival characteristics offer a major contribution in the assessment of festivals by the participants.

Quality is a prime feature that gives tourists an effective experience. In fact, for the growth and prosperity of any business, the core is to make sure of the excellent quality to the end users/consumers [23]. The profit of a company and the frequent customer visits can be increased by ensuring high quality [62,64]. Moreover, the quality is likewise perceived as a strengthening component for achieving a sustainable position in the business [27,37,65]. Subsequently, the festival needs to display an extraordinary quality for the visitors if it hopes to achieve the characteristic of quality [66,67]. Abundant studies have examined the influence of quality on festivals. Baker explored an affirmative association between tourist satisfaction and behavior and the quality of the festival [68]. Lee, and Yuan observed that the festival quality meaningfully influences the satisfaction of tourists [26,61]. The environmental quality will spread through WOM of the visitors [24]. Yoon, Cole, and Cole investigated whether, by providing high-quality service, visitors tended to be more satisfied

and planned to revisit the festival, as well as spread positive WOM about that festival [6,23,69]. Chen explored whether better quality increased the satisfaction of visitors, leading to positive WOM [70]. Wong, and Lee proposed that festival quality indirectly affects visitor satisfaction [27,71]. Akhoondnejad explored whether quality affects satisfaction [12]. Furthermore, quality plays a significant role in promoting local festivals [71]. The quality of the food and wine in a festival can act as the main predictor of the promotion of said festival [72–74]. Wong deduced that the quality of festivals enhances the image of the destination [27].

Consequently, the following hypotheses are projected:

H6. *Festival quality affirmatively influences the festival promotion.*

H7. *Festival quality affirmatively influences the festival satisfaction.*

H8. *Festival quality affirmatively influences the festival word of mouth.*

2.3. Festival Promotion

Promotion is defined as “activities, materials, and media used by a marketer to inform and remind prospective customers about a particular offering” [75]. The ultimate objective of a promotion is to attract the target segment to opt into the product or service [76] proposed and acknowledge the various elements included in the promotion mix, which are advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling, interactive marketing, and event and sponsorship marketing. Reference [77] pointed out that these mixed promotional elements are part of an integrated marketing communication used to connect and promote items or services to potential customers.

Festivals are extensively recognized and some factual attempts have been prepared to examine the part that promotion plays in the carnival context; for example, place promotion [78,79]. Festivals are a highly recommended tool for commercialization and tourism promotion [78]. Besculides [80], from a pragmatic point of view, investigated a variety of promotional techniques that can make a festival more appealing. For example, Mehmetoglu suggested that, for the promotional message of the ice music festival, element music can be incorporated to create an appeal and interest among the visitors [81]. Manthiou [82] concluded that advertising strategies, websites, tourism pamphlets, and so forth are vibrant elements for the promotion and communication of festivals. Different festivals such as the wine and gastronomy festival have become a significant tool for the promotion and increase of the tourism ratio in different destinations [83]. From this perspective, wine festivals establish a connection between the tourists and a product (in this case, wine) [84], which not only becomes the reason for promotion but also generates a positive image that ultimately enhances the marketing of a product in that particular region [85]. According to Tang, festival promoters are quite vigilant in choosing promotional strategies intended to grab prospective visitors and eventually boost the marketing return of investment [86]. Several past research articles focus on the contribution of authenticity to a promotion. For instance, Chalip suggested a symbiotic association between festivals and destination marketers, which shows that by adding the images of the destination in the festival promotion, the authenticity of the festival is increased [87]. Gibson found that authentic festivals play a dual role, not only creating a promotional edge for the specific festival but also acting as a vehicle for increasing the recognition of the particular place in which the festival is located [88].

Furthermore, the findings of Gibson concluded that the different strategies of festival promotion have a strong connection with word of mouth [88]. Prior research shed light on the fact that promotion can be a stimulator for positive word of mouth and loyalty [89]. Making a long-lasting association with end users is the core of any business. In this case, Reference [90] proposed that the promotion of a sports festival is efficient in advertising both tourism loyalty and the destination. The satisfaction of the tourists can be achieved through substantial promotional tools, for instance, websites, tour guides, leaflets, and so forth [29]. It has been found that tourist satisfaction is relied on as a powerful communication and promotional aid that upgrades the credibility of festivals [91].

Consequently, the following hypotheses are projected:

H9. *Festival Promotion affirmatively influences festival satisfaction.*

H10. *Festival Promotion affirmatively influences festival loyalty.*

H11. *Festival Promotion affirmatively influences festival Word of Mouth.*

2.4. Festival Satisfaction

Satisfaction expresses an individual's generic evaluation about his/her personal preferences [92–94]. Mason describes satisfaction as “a partly affective and partly cognitive evaluation of the consumption experience” (p. 1331) [94]. The pertinent performance of experience and customer anticipations are actual factors to set an experience satisfactory or unsatisfactory depend on the cognitive domain. If the performance of experience is more compare to expectations, the customers remain content. However, if the attainment does not hold up to their expectations than the customers are dissatisfied [4,35,62,94,95]. The affective approach accentuates the arousal of feelings caused by a satisfied or dissatisfied experience [4,35,95]. In terms of equity theory, a customer tends to be satisfied when he receives more value against the wealth, time, and energy invested by him [60].

Satisfaction has two types: exact and whole satisfaction [93,96]. The prompt verdict of most current purchases is transaction-specific, whereas the buying and usage experience of consumers about a certain product or service encompasses their total satisfaction. More precisely, festival satisfaction states the complete assessment of a festival from the viewpoint of the attendee. Satisfaction is a substantial element affecting consumer behavior; thus, increasing customer satisfaction is the foremost responsibility of the business sector [94]. Business success is based on customer satisfaction [92] because the chances of the customer switching to another brand are minimal among satisfied customers [33,36]. Therefore, effective festivals need to offer satisfactory participation to their visitors [27,37,94,97] and fulfill their necessities besides their desires [1,4] because the experiences of the attendees are majorly affected by their satisfaction [94] and because it is also an essential factor for maintaining long-lasting associations with tourists [4,62]. Lee found that satisfied visitors are loyal towards a festival. References [6,34,63,91] concluded that satisfied visitors usually revisit the festival [98]. Lee, Lee, and Lee investigated into whether satisfied visitors will spread positive WOM [25,34,67].

Consequently, the following hypotheses are projected:

H12. *Festival satisfaction affirmatively influences festival loyalty.*

H13. *Festival satisfaction affirmatively influences festival word of mouth.*

2.5. Festival Loyalty

The notion of loyalty refers to a “deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” [93]. According to Yang, grounded on the assessment of previous experiences, consumers habitually assume a perception towards products and services [5]. The customer's approach to whether or not they choose to stay or leave the commodity is centered on attitude. Loyalty is based on four steps. First, the consumer prefers superior quality products or services, which means, cognitive loyalty. Subsequently, after consuming a product or service and keeping in view of the satisfaction level, consumers develop some emotional bonding (attitudinal loyalty). After developing the aforementioned affection, the consumer stays connected to the product irrespective of the specific reasons plus promotion campaigns associated towards the rest of the goods or services. Formerly buyers have the intention to repurchase specific goods or service (conative loyalty). Lastly, the above measures ultimately lead to sponsorship (behavioral loyalty) [27,67].

Dedicated and committed consumers ensure positive buying intentions. The buying intent is an individual's final specific action [5,35,37]. They remain as worthy indicators of the prospective

conducts [27,32,99]. Lee proposed a thirteen-item battery to calculate behavioral intentions. The battery was used to invent lasting relationships with a brand in the future and to find any objections regarding errors, the intention to pay a higher price, and so forth. Of course, it found that a customer's intention to remain loyal remained even if the price of the brand increased. The five dimensions of these said items are loyalty towards the product, propensity to shift, readiness to spend extra, peripheral reaction towards a difficulty, and inner response to a difficulty [100].

Today, keeping an enduring relationship with loyal and potential customers is a core business objective. A key approach for the persistence, worth, and achievement of a business is dependent on the loyalty of customers [25,27,33,101]. Certainly, loyal consumers are a source of steady income and it is important to attract prospective customer groups. Moreover, the benefits involved with loyalty are "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" [101]. Therefore, to be successful, there is a need to form loyalty in the participants of festivals [32,71]. Lee, Lee, and Fornell deduced that revisiting a festival creates loyalty and that visitors who have had an immense experience spread positive WOM [34,71,102]. Chi, Lee, Bird, Westbrook, Grewal, and Terblanche investigated into whether revisiting showed loyalty towards a festival and whether visitors tended to recommend and circulate positive WOM about those festivals [31,61,75,103–105]. Chang [95] construed that loyalty disseminates positive WOM.

Consequently, the following hypothesis is projected:

H14. *Festival Loyalty affirmatively influences festival Word of Mouth.*

2.6. Festival Word of Mouth

The definitions of Word of Mouth have emerged over time. In recent years, WOM is defined as "face-to-face communication about products or companies between those people who were not commercial entities" [106]. Earlier, Reference [107] defined WOM as "all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers". Various studies have identified the strong correlation of consumers with word of mouth and the effect of experience [108,109]. Another study investigated how the positive word of mouth of visitors can increase the curiosity among prospective tourists [110]. Vigorous tourism activities can be arranged when positive word of mouth about an event evolves [41]. However, positive WOM could be selected as a powerful tool for welcoming new tourists through more reliable feedback about the place which, therefore, regains faithfulness and adherence [111]. An intellectual and intuitive sketch of the destination has a significant effect on WOM with reference to past visitors [112]. As the tourism sector is facing fierce competition both in goods and services, WOM can add meaningful insights for potential visitors [40]. The adaptability for WOM is relatively twenty times greater than that for advertising events and thirty times that for publicized material [113]. "WOM is a communication opposed to those through mass-media channels that pass product knowledge from producers/providers to consumers" [40]. Memorable events can create a strong image in the mind for tourists, through which they circulate positive WOM about the event in face-to-face conversations [38]. Reference [114] compared classical marketing mediums with WOM, reflecting that continual value is achieved through WOM. Positive WOM can allow firms to create healthy relationships with their customers [115]. Consumers disseminate positive WOM if they get the desired experience from a product or service, however, the WOM can be negative if the perceived experience is opposite to their expectations [115–117]. Word of mouth significantly influences the sentiments of visitors [39].

Based on the abovementioned literature, this study develops conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1.

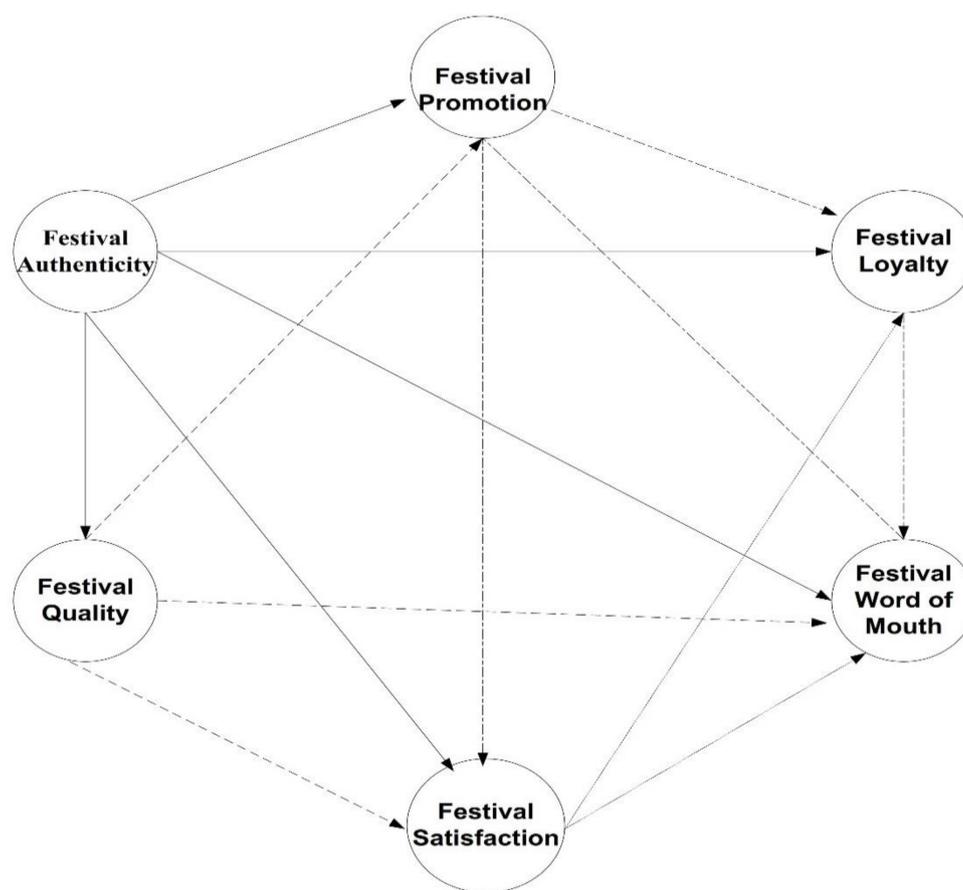


Figure 1. The theoretical model.

3. Conceptual Model and Research Area

Conceptual Framework

In this study, a conceptual model was developed (see Figure 1) drawing on the above (Section 2) details, obtained from the literature. Consequently, 22 items are grouped into 6 categories in the form of questionnaire survey (Please refer to the Appendix A) to measure the concerned constructs (see Figure 1) named as Promotion (PRO), Festival Loyalty (FL), Word of Mouth (WOM), Festival Satisfaction (FS), Festival Quality (FQ), and Festival Authenticity (FA).

4. Data and Methodology

4.1. Data Collection and Sampling

The present research was conducted in Islamabad (the Capital of Pakistan) and the data were gathered from the Lok Virsa Handicrafts Festival held at the start of the spring season in 2016. Local tourists who came to attend the 2016 festival were requested to fill in the questionnaire survey before leaving from the festival. One of the author of the research guide them about the questionnaire survey. The author distributed the questionnaire among tourists in the late morning and evening at two of four entry and exit points of the Islamabad National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage. Though, the tourist population of was not known, so the convenience sampling technique was applied. A total of 350 questionnaires were circulated among the festival tourists. This study used the convenience sampling method because the population of the tourists was unknown. A total of 350 forms were distributed among the tourists, and a total of 299 filled out questionnaires were obtained. Out of the

total 299 received questionnaires, 45 questionnaire sets were found incomplete. Therefore, a total of 254 usable questionnaires were considered sufficient for the path analysis of this study.

4.2. Instruments of Measurement

For the purpose of data collection, a self-administered questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire contained two parts, one of which had questions related to the respondents' demographic characteristics (that is, gender, age, marital, education, income, and reason for visit), whereas the second part of the questionnaire contained questions related to the measurement of manifest variables (also known as items). Therefore, a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree) was used in the questionnaire's second part, representing 22 items based on six constructs (that is, festival promotion, festival loyalty, festival word of mouth, festival satisfaction, festival quality, and festival authenticity), and respondents were asked to rate their experience accordantly. Promotion (PRO) was measured by three items named as frequent exposure, message convince, and important information, which were taken and modified in accordance with previous studies [115]. Festival Loyalty (FL) was also tested by incorporating three items named as revisit intention, confidence, and willingness to pay more, which were adopted from the existing literature [67,68]. Word of Mouth (WOM) was measured by another three items: people's advice, intention to recommend, and discussion of experience, which were adopted from previous research and amended accordingly [71,117]. Festival Satisfaction (FS) was tested through three items named as correct decision, meeting expectations, and happiness, which were adopted from previous literature [37,94] and modified according to the current research requirements [67]. Festival Quality (FQ) was measured through seven items, namely, product variety, subsidized prices, specialized staff, hygienic environment, right design, good locality, and well organized, which were also adopted and altered based on already published studies [37]. Festival Authenticity (FA) was calculated using three items as well, named unique products, present traditionally, and unique atmosphere, which were, again, taken from the existing literature and amended as per the research requirements [28,30,47]. All the scales taken from previous studies were modified as per the requirements of the present research.

4.3. Reliability of the Scales and the Measurement of Validity

The reliability of the internal consistency of the scales was checked by applying Cronbach's alpha (α). Traditionally, Cronbach's alpha was applied to measure the reliability of the internal consistency. Whereas, the validity of the measurement scales was assessed by using the Average Variance Extracted. Mostly, it is used to determine the convergent validity of each latent variable. Commonly, a measurement scale is considered accurate if the value of the Cronbach alpha (α) is 0.7 or above, whereas the validity of the measurement scales is considered accurate if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of each item is above the acceptable threshold of 0.5, with a t -value above 1.96, at a significance level of 0.05, and with a factor or outer loadings greater than 0.5. Furthermore, the favorable values of the other fit indices of the estimated model are as below: an SRMR value less than 0.10 or of 0.08, a value of d_{ULS} above 1, $d_G > 1$, and a value of NIF closer to 1. Table 1 shows the reliability of the scales and the validity measurements of this study.

From Table 1, the results indicate that estimated items are consistent as the Cronbach's alpha (α) value of every construct (FA's $\alpha = 0.756$, FQ's $\alpha = 0.741$, FS's $\alpha = 0.800$, WOM's $\alpha = 0.838$, FL's $\alpha = 0.793$, and PRO's $\alpha = 0.841$), which are greater than the desired value of 0.7, excluding the value of PRO, which is closer to 0.7. The favorable values of the other fit indices of the estimated model (that is, the t -value, the standardized factor loading, SRMR, d_{ULS} , d_G , and NFI) are also above anticipated and recommended thresholds limits, which shows a satisfactory fit. The t -value and the standardized factor loading of all the items exceeded the thresholds and support the convergent validity. According to Joreskog "one could ignore absolute fit index of minimum discrepancy chi-square p value if the sample size obtained for the study is greater than 200" [118]. CFI has been frequently reported in the literature. Mostly, scholars have documented that the value of CFI should be 0.9 or greater than 0.9.

However, in our model the value of CFI is 0.847, which is a little less than 0.9. Therefore, the value of CFI could be considered as satisfactory, which indicates that model the is normally fit but not strongly fit. Furthermore, the χ^2 values were also significant, indicating a satisfactory discriminant validity. Therefore, our findings support reliability (the internal consistency of the measurement scales) and validity (the convergent validity of each latent variable) of measurement items used in this research.

Table 1. The reliability of the scales and the validity measurements.

Constructs	Items	Mean (SD)	Factor Loading	SE	t-Value	Cronbach Alpha (α)	AVE
Festival authenticity	Unique items	1.972 (0.313)	0.858	0.055	15.522	0.756	0.672
	Present Traditionally	1.988 (0.287)	0.875	0.057	15.274		
	Unique Atmosphere	1.996 (0.259)	0.697	0.123	5.664		
Festival quality	Product Variety	1.913 (0.407)	0.484	0.094	5.151	0.741	0.662
	Subsidized Prices	1.961 (0.395)	0.716	0.081	8.794		
	Specialized Staff	1.846 (0.521)	0.568	0.087	6.502		
	Hygienic Environment	2.000 (0.366)	0.614	0.114	5.395		
	Right Design	1.996 (0.338)	0.806	0.060	13.317		
	Good Locality	2.012 (0.371)	0.698	0.092	7.553		
	Well Organized	1.984 (0.366)	0.807	0.053	15.173		
Festival satisfaction	Right Decision	1.992 (0.307)	0.891	0.040	22.516	0.800	0.462
	Meeting Expectations	1.969 (0.342)	0.861	0.043	19.886		
	Happiness	1.969 (0.354)	0.855	0.044	19.442		
Word of mouth	People's Advice	1.992 (0.320)	0.873	0.046	19.035	0.838	0.756
	Recommend Intention	1.976 (0.306)	0.882	0.042	21.134		
	Discuss Experience	2.000 (0.251)	0.767	0.108	7.083		
Festival loyalty	Confidence	1.972 (0.313)	0.915	0.030	30.112	0.793	0.709
	Revisit Intention	2.000 (0.307)	0.905	0.034	26.243		
	Willingness to Pay More	1.988 (0.301)	0.792	0.089	8.932		
Promotion	Frequent Exposure	1.996 (0.314)	0.865	0.046	18.997	0.841	0.761
	Message Convince	1.976 (0.293)	0.791	0.082	9.640		
	Important Information	2.000 (0.281)	0.802	0.087	9.195		

Notes: The quality criteria of the model (fit indices of the measurement model): $\chi^2 = 1885.091$ (p value = 0.00000), SRMR = 0.075, d_ULS = 1.426, d_G = 1.853, NFI = 0.662, CFI = 0.847. Note: χ^2 , SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, NFI and CFI refer to the Chi², the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, the squared Euclidean distance, the geodesic distance, normed fit index respectively and Comparative Fit Index respectively.

Table 2 shows the result of the R² and AVE values. The value of coefficient of determinant R² of Promotion indicates that 83 percent of variation in Promotion is explained by the Festival Authenticity and Festival Quality. The R² value of Festival Loyalty is 0.934, which demonstrates that 93 percent variation in Festival Loyalty is explained by the Promotion, Festival Authenticity, and Festival Satisfaction. A 60 percent variation in Festival Quality is described by the Festival Authenticity. The R² value of Festival Satisfaction is 0.898, which expresses that an 89 percent variation in Festival Satisfaction is due to Promotion, Festival Authenticity, and Festival Quality. The value of R² of Word of Mouth indicates that 93 percent variation in Word of Mouth is because of Promotion, Festival Authenticity, Festival Quality, and Festival Satisfaction. However, the AVE values of the concerned factors are also satisfactory. The AVE values indicate the average percentage variation, which is explained by measuring items of concerned latent constructs (i.e., Promotion, Festival Authenticity, Festival Quality, Festival Satisfaction, Word of Mouth, and Festival Loyalty).

Table 2. Results of R² and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Factors/Constructs	R Square	AVE
Promotion	0.838	0.761
Festival Loyalty	0.934	0.709
Festival Quality	0.608	0.662
Festival Satisfaction	0.898	0.462
Word of Mouth	0.936	0.756

5. Data Analysis and Results

5.1. Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of respondents' demographic characteristics. The data were collected from the 254 respondents and, among them, 69% were male and 31% were female. In the context of the marital status of the respondents, 35.8% were unmarried, whereas 64.2% were married. As for the respondents' age, 37.8% of the respondents were between 25–34 years old, 18.1% were between 55–64 years old, 17.7% of the respondents were between 35–44 years old, 15.4% were between 45–54 years of age, and 11% of the respondents were between 15–24 years old. A total of 48.8% of the respondents had visited this festival 1–2 times and 51.2% had visited it ≥ 3 times. In terms of income, 50.4% of the respondents had an annual household income of 20,000–30,000 \$US, 28% of the respondents had an annual household income of 30,001–40,000 \$US, whereas 14.6% had an annual household income of 41,000–50,000 \$US, followed by 7.1% who had an annual household income of more than 50,000 \$US. Of the total 254 respondents, 19.7% had a primary school education, 18.1% had a middle school education, 44.9% had a high school level education, and 17.3% of the respondents had a university degree.

Table 3. The descriptive statistics of the respondents.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	175	68.9	68.9
	Female	79	31.1	100
Age	15–24 Years	28	11	11
	25–34	96	37.8	48.8
	35–44	45	17.7	66.5
	45–54	39	15.4	81.9
	55–64	46	18.1	100
Marital	Single	91	35.8	35.8
	Married	163	64.2	100
Education	Primary School	50	19.7	19.7
	Middle School	46	18.1	37.8
	High School	114	44.9	82.7
	University Degree	44	17.3	100
Income	20,000–30,000	128	50.4	50.4
	30,001–40,000	71	28	78.3
	40,001–50,000	37	14.6	92.9
	More than 50,000	18	7.1	100
Visit	1–2 times	124	48.8	48.8
	3 or more times	130	51.2	100

5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis of the Constructs

Table 4 indicates the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the constructs. The statistics contain the standard deviations in parentheses form as well as mean values of the constructs that

show the mean of the constructs is around the value of 2. Promotion had the highest mean value ($p = 1.994$), followed by word of mouth, festival loyalty, festival authenticity, festival satisfaction, and festival quality (WOM = 1.991, FL = 1.990, FA = 1.986, FS = 1.978, and FQ = 1.960, respectively). Moreover, the outcomes of the bivariate analysis (Pearson correlation) described the type and strength of the relation between constructs. The bivariate analysis shows strong positive pair wise correlations between FA and FS (Pearson's $r = 0.92$), FA and WOM (Pearson's $r = 0.94$), FA and FL (Pearson's $r = 0.89$), FA and PRO (Pearson's $r = 0.90$), FS and WOM (Pearson's $r = 0.91$), FS and FL (Pearson's $r = 0.93$), FS and PRO (Pearson's $r = 0.92$), WOM and FL (Pearson's $r = 0.91$), WOM and PRO (Pearson's $r = 0.94$), and FL and PRO (Pearson's $r = 0.95$). Additionally, the bivariate analysis indicates moderate positive correlations between FA and FQ (Pearson's $r = 0.75$), FQ and FS (Pearson's $r = 0.73$), FQ and WOM (Pearson's $r = 0.77$), FQ and FL (Pearson's $r = 0.78$), and FQ and PRO (Pearson's $r = 0.76$). Hence, the outcomes of the bivariate analysis (Pearson correlation) indicates that there are strong and moderate positive pairwise correlations between the concerned constructs and that all the pairwise correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. The descriptive statistics and correlation analyses.

Contracts	Mean (SD)	FA	FQ	FS	WM	FL	A
Festival Authenticity (FA)	1.986 (0.233)	1	0.752 ** (0.000)	0.925 ** (0.000)	0.945 ** (0.000)	0.894 ** (0.000)	0.908 ** (0.000)
Festival Quality (FQ)	1.960 (0.264)	0.752 ** (0.000)	1	0.739 ** (0.000)	0.770 ** (0.000)	0.787 ** (0.000)	0.767 ** (0.000)
Festival Satisfaction (FS)	1.978 (0.291)	0.925 ** (0.000)	0.739 ** (0.000)	1	0.917 ** (0.000)	0.936 ** (0.000)	0.928 ** (0.000)
Word of Mouth (WOM)	1.991 (0.248)	0.945 ** (0.000)	0.770 ** (0.000)	0.917 ** (0.000)	1	0.917 ** (0.000)	0.946 ** (0.000)
Festival Loyalty (FL)	1.990 (0.270)	0.894 ** (0.000)	0.787 ** (0.000)	0.936 ** (0.000)	0.917 ** (0.000)	1	0.954 ** (0.000)
Promotion (PRO)	1.994 (0.246)	0.908 ** (0.000)	0.767 ** (0.000)	0.928 ** (0.000)	0.946 ** (0.000)	0.954 ** (0.000)	1

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.3. Hypotheses Testing

In this study, applied structural equation modeling (Path analysis) using the Smart PLS (v 3.2.6) software was used to test the hypotheses of this study. "Smart PLS one of the leading software tools for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)" [119]. It is the robust technique used to measure the predictive hypothesis with a small sample size [120]. Before testing the hypothesis, the overall fitness of the structural model was checked. The t -values needed to be above 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level. Furthermore, the favorable values of the other fit indices of the estimate model are as follows: an SRMR value less than 0.10 or of 0.08, a value of d_{ULS} above 1, $d_G > 1$, and a value of NIF closer to 1.

Table 5 shows the hypotheses tested in this study. The results showed that promotion has a direct positive influence on festival loyalty ($\gamma_1 = 0.607$, t -value = 4.752, $p < 0.05$), festival satisfaction ($\gamma_1 = 0.498$, t -value = 4.596, $p < 0.05$), and word of mouth ($\gamma_1 = 0.517$, t -value = 2.868, $p < 0.05$). Festival authenticity has a direct positive significant effect on promotion ($\gamma_1 = 0.772$, t -value = 10.9294, $p < 0.05$), festival satisfaction ($\gamma_1 = 0.474$, t -value = 4.514, $p < 0.05$), and word of mouth ($\gamma_1 = 0.456$, t -value = 2.876, $p < 0.05$). Festival quality significantly influenced promotion ($\gamma_1 = 0.176$, t -value = 2.261, $p < 0.05$) and word of mouth ($\gamma_1 = 0.056$, t -value = 1.628, $p < 0.1$). Festival satisfaction also has a direct positive significant effect on festival loyalty ($\gamma_1 = 0.366$, t -value = 2.862, $p < 0.05$). Festival satisfaction affirmatively influenced the festival word of mouth ($\gamma_1 = 0.515$, t -value = 0.121, $p < 0.05$). Finally, festival loyalty significantly influences word of mouth ($\gamma_1 = 0.466$, t -value = 3.178, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5. The hypotheses testing.

Parameter	Estimate	SE	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
Promotion → Festival Loyalty	0.607	0.128	4.752	0.000 ***	supported
Promotion → Festival Satisfaction	0.498	0.108	4.596	0.000 ***	supported
Promotion → Word of Mouth	0.517	0.180	2.868	0.004 ***	supported
Festival Authenticity → Promotion	0.772	0.071	10.929	0.000 ***	supported
Festival Authenticity → Festival Loyalty	0.011	0.110	0.103	0.918	Non-supported
Festival Authenticity → Festival Quality	0.780	0.074	10.555	0.000 ***	supported
Festival Authenticity → Festival Satisfaction	0.474	0.105	4.514	0.000 ***	supported
Festival Authenticity → Word of Mouth	0.456	0.158	2.876	0.004 ***	supported
Festival Loyalty → Word of Mouth	0.466	0.162	3.178	0.002 ***	supported
Festival Quality → Promotion	0.176	0.078	2.261	0.024 **	supported
Festival Quality → Festival Satisfaction	−0.003	0.056	0.053	0.958	Non-supported
Festival Quality → Word of Mouth	0.056	0.034	1.628	0.104 *	supported
Festival Satisfaction → Festival Loyalty	0.366	0.128	2.862	0.004 ***	supported
Festival Satisfaction → Word of Mouth	0.513	0.135	0.121	0.000 ***	supported

Note: The others fit indices of the structural model: $\chi^2 = 1877.000$ (p value = 0.000), SRMR = 0.074, $d_ULS = 1.413$, $d_G = 1.842$, RMS_Theta = 0.207, and NFI = 0.663. The asterisks *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10, 5, and 1% levels, respectively. χ^2 , SRMR, d_ULS , d_G , RMS, and NFI refer to the Chi², Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, squared Euclidean distance, geodesic distance, root mean squared, and the normed fit index, respectively.

Hence, this study supported the following hypotheses: H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7, H8, H9, H10, H12, H13, and H14.

Contrary to the above findings, the festival authenticity had an insignificant influence on the festival loyalty ($\gamma_1 = 0.011$, t -value = 0.103, $p > 0.05$). Festival quality also had an insignificant influence on festival satisfaction ($\gamma_1 = -0.003$ t -value = 0.053, $p > 0.05$).

6. Discussion

The model of the festival tourist behavior depicted that the word of mouth of visitors is necessary to achieve festival success. Therefore, it seems important to understand the variables that contribute towards its success and accomplishment. The antecedents of festival WOM provide very useful insights for festival planners to manage their activities and hold their festivals in such a way as to build positive WOM among the attendees. In accordance, the present study provides a conceptual model to deal with such a gap in the tourism context and measure the visitor WOM on a festival held at the local level. More precisely, the study calculated the impact of festival quality, festival authenticity, festival promotion, festival satisfaction, and festival loyalty on the WOM of said festival. So much so, that this research took the initiative to test the direct effect of the promotion of the festival on the WOM of tourists, which is a unique approach in the existing body of tourism research. The study also measured the correlation among the antecedents of festivals by implementing PLS-SEM by taking the local visitors who attended the Lok Virsa festival (2016) held at Islamabad (the capital city of Pakistan) as the respondents of the research.

The findings of the research indicated that promotion has a positive influence on festival loyalty, festival satisfaction, and word of mouth, which shows that effective promotional efforts for a given festival, in turn, increase loyalty, word of mouth, and is more likely to satisfy attendees. These outcomes are similar with results of References [29,87–89]. These references describe that attendees who had acknowledged the aggressive promotion campaigns of festivals seemed to be more loyal, energetically spread positive WOM, and achieved the desired level of satisfaction.

The effective advertising of cultural festival and the use of different marketing tools such as pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, and so on would not only enhance revisitation but can also approach potential tourists via WOM. Subsequently, through different advertising strategies and an appealing website of festival, this displays the authenticity and credibility of the event, which in turn effects tourist satisfaction.

Festival authenticity was found to be a significant predictor of festival satisfaction and word of mouth. This result corroborates the existing literature (for example, References [5,12,49,51,57–60,98]).

The analysis confirmed that if attendees assumed that the festival was highly authentic, they were certain to achieve satisfaction and disseminate positive word of mouth about the festival they had attended. Results indicate that positive WOM about local festivals directly influenced a tourist's level of satisfaction and loyalty. In fact, to develop an understanding about heritage tourism is a key reason of attending such festivals. Extending existing findings to a heritage tourism, this research offers additional information about tourist WOM, which in this research is affected by authenticity, loyalty, quality, promotion, and satisfaction.

Similarly, festival quality was found to be positively related to promotion and word of mouth. This is consistent with the findings of previous research [6,26,27,69–74]. Festival attendees usually go through the promotional and marketing material of the event, which are affected by the quality of the event. Improved quality can lead to healthy promotion and optimistic word of mouth, thereby providing tourists with a good feeling towards the festival.

Correspondingly, consistent with findings of past research [6,25,34,67,95], satisfaction was significantly related to festival loyalty. This infers that tourists who are satisfied with the festival activities and arrangements were more likely to be loyal to the festival and intended to revisit it in the future. The findings further revealed that visitors' psyche, emotions, and leisure are associated with satisfaction, which leads to festival loyalty. From this perspective, the festival managers could consider these factors necessary for the success of an event and as well as to keep the momentum of satisfaction and loyalty.

7. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present research proposed some noteworthy implications. First, the research measured the perception of the people towards a local festival, which has rarely been taken into account [121,122]. Second, it emphasized cultural products (that is, handicrafts), which seems to not be a very common area of investigation in the field of tourism. Third, this study proposed a conceptual model of tourist word of mouth and detailed its effects on the diversified antecedents as a whole—something that has not been taken into consideration before. Fourth, the research targeted the capital city of Pakistan, which has not been measured previously from a tourism context. Lastly, though several key predictors were tested from the perspective of festivals, no other study had explored the direct effect of promotion on word of mouth, which is highly important and seems to be neglected. Apart from the theoretical implications, the insights of this research also offer many useful managerial directions. Festival planners and marketers must understand the worth of WOM for the success of festivals. They should engage the vendors that ensure the quality arrangement of the festival. The success of any festival is based on an effective promotional campaign. Different techniques, for instance, discount offerings, advertisement, and free tickets for first movers can be an attractive way to circulate positive WOM for a festival. Authentic and quality products and services at a subsidized price would lead to re-visitation and satisfaction. It is also recommended that festival managers must improve the authenticity of the festival so as to increase the tourists' opinions about quality; the findings of this research suggested the same. This can be achieved by offering products that are made at a local level that reflect the culture of that specific region, by hiring local people as staff, and by ensuring a place for the local language in the festival: the whole atmosphere should reflect the heritage and values of that specific region. The key role of authenticity in cultural/traditional festival development requires event managers to keep the local traditions, values, place and customs alive and present them in a more authentic context. In this regard, the notion of "stages authenticity" is suggested to reenact and restore heritage tourism. To rebuild the originality and values of traditional festivals can have a substantial effect on tourist perception about heritage tourism. Moreover, managers need to conduct tourists related to learning activities, for instance workshops and lectures to deliver the importance of traditional festivals. Festival managers should be able to get the email addresses of attendees, which could not only help them to obtain feedback from the tourists about the festival, but can also be used as a reference group to target potential tourist segments. Moreover, through social networking sites, awareness about festivals and

other platforms can be enhanced and this can also increase the number of respondents in any specific program [123].

8. Limitations and Future Research

The present study has certain limitations that must be considered. This study is confined to one local festival of a specific region and focused on local tourists only. Since the scope of this research is limited, therefore, the generalizability of the findings cannot be applicable to a large extent. Keeping in view this constraint, future research should be conducted on a wider context, with an increased sample size, including more than one festival from different regions, and concentrating on both local and foreign tourists. The value of NFI of our model was a little low because of some limitations of our study. One of the major limitations of this study is that we have not used the same number of items to compute the constructs. In fact, only 254 respondents were selected with a total of 6 variables and 28 items. Furthermore, we analyzed the data by using Smart PLS software instead of AMOS software. Therefore, this limitation indicates a few directions for the future research. Hence, equal number of items for all constructs, larger sample size, and AMOS software can be used in future research. Though the present research proposed a conceptual model of festival WOM correlating with festival authenticity, festival promotion, festival satisfaction, festival quality, and festival loyalty, future research could include other antecedents of festival WOM in the model. For instance, the post-festival behavior of tourists as a key predictor of WOM can be assessed, or which particular technique of promotion can constitute positive WOM or negative WOM for festivals, could also be looked into. In particular, the present study applied the convenience sampling method for data collection, although the convenience sampling technique is not able to represent the whole population. Therefore, a more accurate technique should be adopted for future research. Future researchers can focus on making amendments in the model and also by changing the sampling technique, which can allow them to generalize their results for the selected population. Moreover, emotional solidarity among the tourists can also be a great predictor that can enhance the user loyalty towards festival.

9. Conclusions

The present research aims to examine the determinants of WOM and its effect on the success of a festival. The conceptual model consists of festival authenticity, festival quality, festival satisfaction and festival loyalty, and is proposed to measure the effect of WOM on the Lok Versa festival of Pakistan. The empirical findings indicate that the promotion of the festival can increase the tourists' loyalty, satisfaction, and WOM [29,87–89]. Furthermore, festival authenticity is necessary to achieve quality, satisfaction, and WOM [49,51,57–60,98]. Satisfaction was proved to be strong predictor of WOM and loyalty [24,25,39]. To conclude, the framework presented in this study throws new light towards a better understanding of the value that tourists place on WOM when engaging in festivals as a key cultural heritage attraction within their destination of choice.

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Appendix A

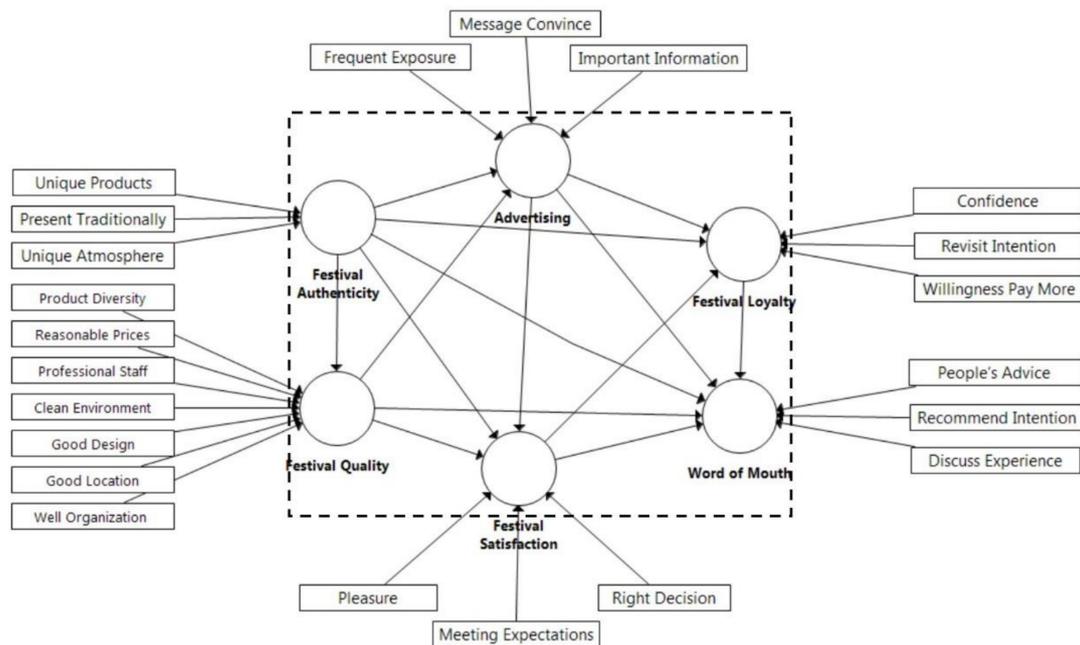


Figure A1. Inner model (structural model) vs. outer model (measurement model).

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