

Visitors' perceived symbol, experience and behavioral intention in folk festival: take Guangfu Temple Fair an example

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Abstract

This article aimed to study (1) the constituent dimensions of visitors' perceived symbol at Guangfu Temple fair (2) dimensions of visitors' perceived symbol impact on visitors' experience and behavioral intention (3) the content of symbol perception. Taking the 10th Guangfu Temple Fair as the case, this paper explores the influence of visitors' symbol perception on experience and behavioral intention for folk festival through structural equation model. A total of 475 valid questionnaires were collected. SPSS and Amos statistical software were used for descriptive statistical analysis, reliability test, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model analysis. The research results were found as follows:

1 The folk symbols of Guangfu Temple Fair have significant attraction for visitors to experience local culture, innovative symbols and social activities. The positive influence of folk activity symbol on affective experience is not strong.

2 The positive influence of symbol perception of entertainment activities on the experience of local symbols, innovative symbols, emotional symbols and social symbols indicates that entertainment activities are the carrier of tourists' experience of localism, creativity, emotional expression and social behavior.

3. Tourists' perception of folk symbols and recreational symbols has a positive effect on the experience of local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience and social symbol experience, and these symbol experiences further positively affect behavioral intention. The organizers of Guangfu Temple Fair use four elements: local, innovative, emotional, and social to attract tourists to participate in the activities of Guangfu Temple Fair.

Based on the above conclusions, we can further promote the development of folk festival tourism from the aspects of symbol shaping, experience activity planning and marketing.

Keywords: *perceived symbol; experience; behavioral intention; Guangfu Temple Fair.*

INTRODUCTION

Symbols are considered to be perceptions that carry meaning (Zhao, 2012), and the typical feature of human society also lies in the invention and application of various symbols. Folk festivals are fields of local cultural symbols, and symbol perception is an integral process in the visitor experience. Related studies have shown that tourism experience has a significant impact on place identity and place attachment (Zhang & Xu, 2022), and that cognitive experience and cultural experience have a positive effect on visitors' behavior (Chen & Cheng, 2021).

The visitors' perceived symbol is the imagination and expectation of tourist destination before traveling. Symbol perception has an essential influence on visitors' experience and behavioral intention. However, there are many folk symbol elements that constitute Guangfu Temple Fair. As symbol consumers, what is the symbol perception of visitors to Guangfu Temple Fair? How does symbol perception affect visitors' experience and whether it promotes behavioral influence? The study of the relationship between visitors' perceived symbol, experience and behavioral intention is a research topic of academic value.

This study empirically tested the constituent dimensions of visitors' perceived symbol at Guangfu Temple fair and their impact on visitors' experience and behavioral intention, providing theoretical support for further clarifying the content of symbol perception, improving visitors' experience and behavioral intention, and providing a thinking path for the planning and management of festival activities.

The results obtained in this study will contribute to the long-term development of Guangfu Temple Fair. At the same time, the

case study of the Guangfu Temple Fair can also provide a glimpse into the construction process of Lingnan folklore symbols, thus contributing to the sorting out of Lingnan folk symbols.

Research Objectives

1. This study explores the constituent dimensions of visitors' perceived symbol at Guangfu Temple fair.
2. This study examined dimensions of visitors' perceived symbol impact on visitors' experience and behavioral intention.
3. This study delves into the content of symbol perception.

Literature review

This study provides a literature review of symbolic perception, and the effects of symbolic perception on experiential and behavioral intentions.

1. In festivals, organizers and visitors are the main actors. The organizers, representing the subjects of power, are the symbol producers of festival activities, and the visitors are the consumers of the symbols (Li, 2020). Visitors gain the perception experience of symbols by participating in festival activities and influence the organizers by forming public opinions through individual experience evaluation. Some scholars believe that tourism experience can reflect the inner feelings of visitors, which is an authentic life feeling of finding one's true self (Wang, 1999). Symbol perception is the act of receiving information and processing it through the senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell, while experience is the act of evaluating and analyzing received information, and giving expression to emotions such as pleasure, novelty, disappointment, anticipation, etc. Visitors' perceived symbol runs through the whole process of tourism experience. Liang

divides the symbol perception of tourism experience into three stages: before the experience, during the experience, and after the experience. She argues that there are two outcomes of symbolic perception through interpretation: the stronger the perception matches the impression of the symbol, the stronger the sense of authenticity, otherwise there will be "culture clash" and "culture shock" (Liang, 2019). The results provide a thinking framework for this study, in which symbol perception runs through the whole process of experience in a chronological manner. Meanwhile, the author is aware that in this process, symbol perception and experience are not a progressive process with clear temporal boundaries, but rather an interlaced, iterative, and reconstructive process of cognition and thinking; in terms of the experience perception, it is also a changing process affected by various interfering factors. Therefore, the complexity and uncertainty of the various variables involved should be fully considered when applying this analytical framework.

2. Experience has different dimensions as it relates to how people feel, there are individual differences, and emotions and circumstances can affect how individuals feel. Some scholars have conducted research related to the experience dimension. H. Schmitt proposes five dimensions: sensory experience, emotional experience, reflective experience, action experience, and associative experience. Zhou et al. categorized the tourism experience into three dimensions: perceptual experience, emotional experience, and reflective experience. Lan, on the other hand, categorized the cruise tourism experience into four dimensions: entertainment experience, educational experience, escape experience, and aesthetic experience. Duan (2017) proposed four dimensions of experience through

Mafengwo's travelogue: sensory, cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic experiences. The visitor's experiential behavior during the experience is the validation process for the full stage of authentic experience. They interact with the symbols of the festival scene through on-site perception, and express their self-feelings through tasting, purchasing, writing, and taking photographs. Through studying visitors' photos, Li (2020) found that visitors' on-site experience has four dimensions: cultural experience, novel experience, emotional experience, and social experience. In summary, researchers on experience dimensions have different views on the classification of dimensions. For the purposes of this study, the experience dimension is more closely related to psychology, cognitive science, and behavioral science.

3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory states that human needs develop from lower to higher levels, and that the needs at each level are interdependent and overlapping, so visitors can get corresponding needs when participating in folk festival activities. Therefore, combining the research results of related scholars, the author attempts to classify the dimensions of experience from the hierarchy of needs theory into five dimensions: physical experience, social experience, novelty experience, emotional experience, and value experience. Physical experience refers to the experience to satisfy physiological needs, such as eating delicious food, which is a low-level individual need and also the most powerful rigid need (Wang, 2015). Interviews revealed that the initial motivation for some visitors to Guangfu Temple Fair was to eat the food. Social experience refers to the experience of individuals to meet social needs, such as going to Guangfu Temple Fair together, sharing and communicating on social media, etc. Novelty experience and emotional experience refer to

the experience that individuals pursue novelty and meet various emotional needs, which are the higher demands in individual needs. Value experience is the experience of individuals to meet the needs of respect and self-realization, and it is the high-level needs of human beings. Individuals' recognition by others in the community is a way to gain respect, which can explain why people are eager to get recognition in a strange society.

4. Festival activities are the media connecting different regions and ethnic groups, and the vehicle for cultural traditions and the practice of local identity. Participation in festival cultural activities and integration into local people's life is an explicit behavior to obtain local identity (Liu & Zhu, 2015). Liu took Guangfu Temple Fair as a created folk festival and conducted an empirical study on its influence on place identity. Her research proves that the organizer's orientation to the purpose of the event organization affects visitors' evaluation of their participation in the event (Liu & Zhu, 2013). In her study, Li (2020) empirically studied the festival experience dimension model and established two corresponding relationships: "local culture" corresponds to "innovative elements" and "personal emotion" corresponds to "social interaction". Both Liu and Li have used relational analysis models in their research on the festival place identity and experience dimension, which provides inspiration for this study. Place identity is the cultural consensus formed among individual members of regional society, which also relies on local cultural symbols. According to the preliminary research results obtained from the collected materials of Guangfu Temple Fair, there are two types of symbols in the scene: folk activities and entertainment activities. Folk activity symbols include sensory symbols and local symbols,

while recreational activity symbols include social symbols, innovative symbols, and emotional symbols. Sensory symbols refer to the symbols perceived through the sensory system - vision, hearing, smell, taste, etc., such as temple fair scenes, music, food, etc., which focus on physiological sensory experience. Local symbol refers to the cultural symbol representing the region experienced in temple fair activities, such as dialect, drama, etc., which is the carrier of identity and value identification and can realize individual value experience. Social symbols refer to entertainment activities and communication behaviors with others in Guangfu Temple Fair, such as games and forums, which are the experiences of individuals seeking safety needs in the community. Innovative symbols refer to the novel things perceived in temple fairs, such as technological elements, exotic customs, etc., which are the individual's experience in cognitive expansion. Emotional symbols are symbols that evoke emotional changes in visitors' experience process, such as touching performances, pleasurable moods, etc., which are the individual experience of life. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, the corresponding relationship analysis model should be found from motivation and behavior patterns. The author corresponding the perception of these five types of symbols to physical experience, social experience, novelty experience, emotional experience, and value experience respectively, and carried out the relationship analysis. In summary, the author has developed a preliminary model of the correspondence between perceived symbols, experiential dimensions, levels of need, and behavioral intentions.

Existing studies show that researchers have made some achievements in using structural equation model to analyze the symbol

perception, place identity and experience of Guangfu Temple Fair. These empirical studies provide useful references for this study, but further research is needed on the relationship between symbol perception, experience and behavior.

Conceptual Framework

In the symbol field of Guangfu Temple Fair, visitors can perceive the symbols of locality, creativity, emotion and sociability, gain the sense of experience through the scite, and take different behaviors according to the outcome of experience. The folk activity of Guangfu Temple Fair includes the folk activity symbol and the recreational activity symbol. Since the recreational activity in folk activity is different from the entertainment activity in other situations and has the character of folklore, this study assumes that the folk activity symbol will affect the recreational activity symbol. Both folk activity symbols and recreational activity symbols contain sensory symbols, local symbols, innovative symbols, emotional symbols and social symbols. Therefore, this study assumes that folk activity symbols and recreational activity symbols have a positive effect on local symbols, innovative symbols, emotional symbols and social symbols. To this end, the following hypothesis are proposed and the research model is established as shown in Figure 1.

H1: Symbol perception of folk activity has a positive impact on symbol perception of recreational activity.

H2abcd: Symbol perception of folk activity has a positive impact on local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience and social symbol experience.

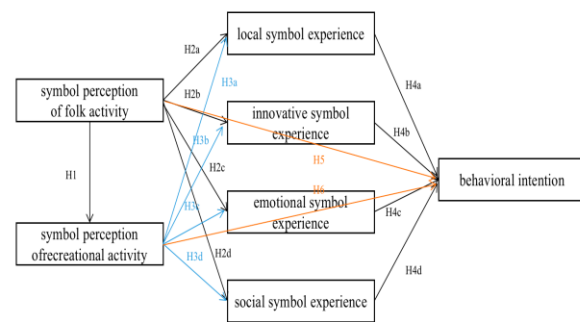
H3abcd: Symbol perception of recreational activity has a positive impact on local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience and social symbol experience.

H4abcd: Local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience and social symbol experience all have positive influence on behavioral intention.

H5: Symbol perception of folk activity has a positive influence on behavioral intention.

H6: Symbol perception of recreational activity has a positive influence on behavioral intention.

Fig.1 Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Design of the Study

The study chose the case of Guangfu Temple Fair held in Yuexiu District of Guangzhou, which has been 12 years since it first be established in 2011, and attracted nearly 5 million people annually before 2019. In recent years, because of the impact of COVID-19, Guangfu Temple Fair was canceled in 2020 and turned to online in 2021. In 2020, "Guangfu Temple Fair metaverse" attracted 1.5 million people to participate.

The research adopted questionnaire to collect data, and use SPSS 23.0 and Amos statistical software to analyze the data. Referring to the concepts and items of previous studies, and combined with the results of in-depth interviews and text analysis, this study proposed the items using the Five-point Likert scale for each question. It's worth noting that physiological experience is not included in the item design of the questionnaire. Because the satisfaction of physiological needs is one of the motivations for people to participate in Guangfu Temple Fair activities, and the samples of this study are all people who have participated in the fair, it is meaningless to collect data from the perspective of participation motivation, but it will be analyzed and explained in the following study.

Data Collection Procedures

Temple fair visitors were selected as the object of the questionnaire. The research conducted a survey from the perspective of visitors to verify their symbol perception of Lingnan culture after the activity. The research materials were analyzed by questionnaire survey. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the 2021 Guangfu Temple Fair was held online. Compared with previous activities, visitors tend to participate online through their mobile phones. The online activities of Guangfu Temple Fair mainly include guessing lantern riddles, punching in red spots, online exhibitions, and others. By participating in the activities, the winners will get lucky draws and cash their prizes at Yuexiu Culture and Art Center. Considering this situation, the researcher chose to conduct a questionnaire survey at Yuexiu Culture and Art Center and activity site and totally collected a total of 475 questionnaires. The field survey was conducted by 4 trained research team members, they collect 225 questionnaires in the interaction area of Guangfu Temple Fair from

February 26 to March 4, 2021. At the same time, an online survey was conducted on Wechat and a third-party online survey website Sojump. Finally, a total of 475 questionnaires were collected for field and online surveys, of which 396 were effective, with an effective rate of 83.3%.

Research Results

Data Description

Among the respondents, 31.3% participated one time, 34.6% participated two or three times, 15.4% participated four to five times, and 18.4% six or more times. In terms of gender, the proportion was 43.7% for males and 56.3% for females. Most of the respondents were aged 18-30 (36.9%), 1.5% below 18, 32.3% between 31 and 45, 22% between 46 and 60, and 7.3% above 60. In terms of education, 5.3% were junior high school or below, 14.6% were in senior high school or technical secondary school, 70.5% were in junior college or bachelor's degree, and 9.6% were master's degrees or above. In terms of occupation, 24.5% were employees of government /institutions, 34.1% were employees of enterprises, 11.6% were students, 0.5% were cultural, educational, scientific, and technological personnel, and 29.3% were others. The samples generally met the basic characteristics of Guangfu Temple Fair groups.

Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

As the research on symbol perception is still in the exploratory stage, this study first uses SPSS23.0 software to conduct exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on 27 items of the questionnaire. KMO value is 0.923, Bartlett sphericity test $p < 0.001$. With an eigenvalue greater than 1 as the criterion for factor extraction, a total of 7 factors are obtained and correspond to the folk activity symbol

perception, recreational activity symbol perception, local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience, social symbol experience, and behavior intention. The 7 factors explained 76.33% of the variation of Guangfu Temple Fair symbols, which had exceeded the 60% extraction limit, indicating that the extraction of 7 factors was acceptable.

In order to further verify the rationality of the above structure, this study used AMOS24.0 statistical software to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the validity of the scale. The overall fitting of CFA model is as follows: CMIN/DF=1.184, and the value is less than 2, indicating that the model has a good fitting degree with the data. GFI=0.936, CFI=0.992, IFI=0.992, TLI=0.991, RFI=0.942, RMSEA=0.022, all indexes reached ideal

levels. In terms of the internal fitting quality, the standardized factor loads of the 27 items in the corresponding dimensions ranged from 0.674 to 0.818, and all passed the significance test at $p < 0.001$. The combination reliability (CR) of each dimension was higher than 0.7, and the mean extraction variance (AVE) was higher than 0.5, indicating that the scale had good convergence validity (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The discriminant validity can be tested by comparing the square root of extracted variance with the correlation coefficient of each variable. The correlation coefficient of each dimension is between 0.257 and 0.492. The AVE of each dimension can be calculated to show that the arithmetic square root of AVE is between 0.736 and 0.859, which are all greater than the correlation coefficient of each variable. It showed that the scale had ideal discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and reliability test of scale

Dimension	Items	Fator load	Mean	Dimension mean
Folk activity symbol perception (SP1) AVE=0.642; CR=0.878	Folk custom brand	0.738	3.90	3.88
	Cultural festivals	0.717	3.87	
	Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritance	0.755	3.89	
	Lantern Festival	0.720	3.84	
Recreational activity symbol perception (SP2) AVE=0.653; CR=0.883	Traditional temple fair	0.787	3.84	3.84
	Image of city	0.768	3.85	
	Cultural and recreational event	0.750	3.80	
	Food activity	0.796	3.86	
Local symbol experience (LE) AVE=0.625; CR=0.870	Experience the distinctive local culture	0.722	3.92	3.97
	Enhance understanding of local culture	0.767	3.98	
	Feel the inheritance of traditional culture	0.767	3.99	
	Feel the difference of local culture	0.674	3.99	
Innovative symbol experience (IE) AVE=0.697; CR=0.902	Experience fun activities	0.808	3.76	3.76
	Experience innovative activities	0.782	3.72	
	Appreciate the modern elements	0.817	3.82	
	I found something unexpected	0.751	3.75	
Emotional symbol experience (EE) AVE=0.738; CR=0.919	Feel the surprise	0.809	3.73	3.70
	Feel good	0.818	3.63	
	Feel relaxed	0.816	3.71	
	Get in the holiday spirit	0.802	3.72	
Social symbol	Opportunities to interact with others	0.780	3.89	3.85

experience (SE) AVE=0.608; CR=0.861	Opportunities to meet new people	0.758	3.80	
	Opportunities to celebrate with others	0.716	3.83	
	Opportunities to bond with friends and family	0.681	3.89	
Behavior intention (BI) AVE=0.542; CR=0.780	I will attend the Canton Temple Fai again	0.769	3.91	3.91
	I would recommend Canton Temple Fai to others	0.769	3.88	
	I will speak positively of the Canton Temple Fai to others	0.771	3.95	

Model Test Analysis

In this study, maximum likelihood estimation method in AMOS24.0 statistical software was

used for parameter estimation and model fitting test, and a structural model was established based on all samples. The analysis results are as follows.

Table 2 Results of SEM

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
H1	Folk activity symbol perception→ Recreational activity symbol perception	0.392	0.059	6.587	***
H2a	Folk activity symbol perception→ Local symbol experience	0.353	0.055	6.395	***
H2b	Folk activity symbol perception→ Innovative symbol experience	0.378	0.066	5.729	***
H2c	Folk activity symbol perception→ Emotional symbol experience	0.180	0.072	2.508	0.012
H2d	Folk activity symbol perception→ Social symbol experience	0.332	0.054	6.129	***
H3a	Recreational activity symbol perception→ Local symbol experience	0.342	0.052	6.582	***
H3b	Recreational activity symbol perception→ Innovative symbol experience	0.335	0.062	5.433	***
H3c	Recreational activity symbol perception→ Emotional symbol experience	0.474	0.070	6.727	***
H3d	Recreational activity symbol perception→ Social symbol experience	0.396	0.052	7.599	***
H4a	Local symbol experience→ Behavior intention	0.207	0.057	3.639	***
H4b	Innovative symbol experience→ Behavior intention	0.204	0.043	4.736	***
H4c	Emotional symbol experience→ Behavior intention	0.181	0.037	4.845	***
H4d	Social symbol experience→ Behavior intention	0.190	0.058	3.299	***
H5	Folk activity symbol perception→ Behavior impact	0.175	0.059	2.957	0.003
H6	Recreational activity symbol perception→ Behavior intention	0.055	0.059	0.933	0.351

The results show that folk activity symbol perception has a positive impact on the recreational activity symbol perception (H1), local symbol experience (H2a), innovative symbol experience (H2b), emotional symbol experience (H2c) and social symbol experience (H2d). Hypothesis 2 influence path coefficients are respectively 0.392 ($P < 0.001$), 0.353 ($P < 0.001$), 0.378 ($P < 0.001$), 0.180 ($P < 0.05$) and 0.332 ($P < 0.001$). Among them, the folk activity symbol perception has extremely significant positive influence on the recreational activity symbol perception, local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience and social symbol experience.

Recreational activity symbol perception has extremely significant positive influence on local symbol experience (H3a), innovative symbol experience (H3b), emotional symbol experience (H3c) and social symbol experience (H3d), supporting hypothesis H3. The influence path coefficients were 0.342 ($P < 0.001$), 0.335 ($P < 0.001$), 0.474 ($P < 0.001$) and 0.396 ($P < 0.001$), respectively.

Local signal experience (H4a), innovative signal experience (H4b), emotional signal experience (H4c) and social signal experience (H4d) all had significant positive effects on behavior intention, supporting hypothesis H4. The influence path coefficients were 0.207 ($P < 0.001$), 0.204 ($P < 0.001$), 0.181 ($P < 0.001$) and 0.190 ($P < 0.001$), respectively.

The folk activity symbol perception has a significant positive influence on behavior intention, supporting hypothesis H5. The influence path coefficient was 0.175 ($P < 0.01$).

The recreational activity symbol perception had no significant influence on behavior intention, and the influence path coefficient was 0.055 ($P > 0.05$). Hypothesis H6 is not supported.

Discussions

Little existing attention has been paid to symbol perception and its influence on experience and behavior intention. This study expands the body of knowledge of existing research by exploratively discovering the dimensions of symbol perception and further discovering the positive effects of symbol perception on experience and behavior intention.

Knowledge from Research

This study found that symbol perception can be divided into folk activity and recreational activity, and experience can be divided into local symbol experience, innovative symbol experience, emotional symbol experience, and social symbol experience. We further found that symbol perception affects experience and behavior intention.

Conclusion

This study proves that the folk symbols of Guangfu Temple Fair have significant attraction for visitors to experience local culture, innovative symbols and social activities. The positive influence of folk activity symbol on affective experience is not strong, that is because visitors participate in folk customs activities is mainly to meet the spiritual needs, rather than emotional expression. Therefore, happy mood is the motivation rather than the main purpose of people participating in folk activities.

The positive influence of symbol perception of entertainment activities on the experience of local symbols, innovative symbols, emotional symbols and social symbols indicates that entertainment activities are the carrier of tourists' experience of localism, creativity, emotional expression and social behavior.

The experience of local symbols, innovative symbols, emotional symbols and social symbols has a significant positive effect on the visitors' behavioral intention. It shows that the organizers of Guangfu Temple Fair use the high-level needs of visitors as the elements of the organizational intention, which can not only meet the needs of visitors but also play a role in guiding visitors.

Overall, the folk symbol of the activity had a great effect on visitors' behavioral intention. The organizers of Guangfu Temple Fair use four elements: local, innovative, emotional, and social to attract tourists to participate in the activities of Guangfu Temple Fair. Recreational activities are the carrier of the above four elements in the folk activities of Canton Temple Fai, but are not the main motivation for tourists to participate in the activities. The hypothesis that symbol perception of recreational activities has a positive effect on behavior is not supported, which may be because visitors who participate in Guangfu Temple Fair are not motivated by entertainment elements.

Suggestions

Limitations of this study. First, due to the impact of the COVID-19, Guangfu Temple Fair in this study was held online, and the number of participants was not enough, so the sampling was affected to a certain extent. However, the symbol construction of Guangfu Temple Fair is a long process. researchers' continuous attention to Guangfu Temple Fair and diachronic research will surely come to a more convincing conclusion. Secondly, this research mainly used the four (local culture, innovation, emotion and social interaction) item design, and add the symbol perception and behavior intention item, this is a new

exploration and need to be examined in future studies.

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