Exploring multidimensional quality attributes of incentive travels

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to develop and validate a multidimensional quality scale for the identification of quality attributes of an incentive event.

Design/methodology/approach – The combined qualitative and quantitative method was used.

Findings – The resulting quality scale comprises 32 items with eight factors: image and attractions, accessibility, site environment, hotel facilities, opportunities for networking and sense of achievement/reward, program, specially arranged program, and local people.

Practical implications - The findings of this study provide implications for practitioners in Taiwan, particularly the government bodies concerned and incentive event organizers, and thus assist the practitioners in making strategic plans and decisions to ensure event quality and overall attendee satisfaction.

Originality/value – The value of this study is the first attempt to develop and validate a scale for capturing the quality of incentive events.

Keywords - Event quality; Incentive travel/event; Mainland Chinese; Scale development

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Incentive travels (one of the MICE segments), interchangeably used with incentive events, are a fast-growing MICE industry (Jafari, 2000). The Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE, 2013a) estimates that the incentive event market in North America is worth over USD 10

billion per year. Based on a survey of 112 event planners from 22 countries by SITE (2013b), a majority of planners expect that the number of incentive travels will be substantially increased in the next one-to-three years. Incentive events bring a great number of visitors to destinations (Xiang and Formica, 2007) and often generate higher spending (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Jafari, 2000; CEC, 1996), thereby leading to significant economic benefits for the hospitality and tourism industries.

In Taiwan, most incentive travels come from mainland China; the majority of the mainland incentive attendees are top sales personnel who possess a high level of consumption power and generate a large amount of tourism revenue for Taiwan. For instance, the Pro-Health (Beijing) tour in 2008 generated USD 18.4 million from 8,000 participants (Lui, 2009); 3,000 attendees of the Sun Hope (Tianjin) incentive event in 2011 spent around USD 11.66 million (TAITRA, 2011); and the Amway (China) incentive travel in 2013 brought 12,000 sales personnel to Taiwan, bringing about USD 33.75 million in economic impact (Lui, 2013). These incentive groups from mainland China significantly boosted both the hospitality and tourism industries, as well as the retailing and transportation industries in Taiwan, thereby contributing to job creation and sustainable economic yields in the country. It is thus essential for destinations to remain competitive in regard to incentive events and to ensure the satisfaction of event attendees.

As the MICE industry grows and brings about a tremendous economic impact on many destinations, the body of MICE literature is fostered in both number and diversity. Unlike conventions and exhibitions, however, incentive travels are highly under-researched (Fenich et al., 2015) within a limited research scope. Mostly published in the 1990s, the extant incentive event literature in hospitality and tourism journals examines the incentive travel market of

particular destinations as case studies (Mehta et al., 1991; Witt et al., 1992), motivational aspects of incentive travel (Hastings et al., 1988; Ricci and Holland, 1992), the demand for incentive events (Sheldon, 1995), and an environmental overview of incentive travel (Fenich et al., 2015; Xiang and Formica, 2007). The current incentive literature is limited to explaining the general features of incentive travel in qualitative and descriptive modes, thus leaving many areas in need of future research.

To further advance the literature on incentive travel, this study aims to develop and validate a multidimensional quality scale for the identification of quality attributes of incentive events, based on the case of mainland Chinese incentive travel to Taiwan. The theoretical role of quality is well recognized in the hospitality and tourism literature. Still, none of previous studies empirically identify and validate quality attributes and underlying dimensions in the incentive travel literature. The development and validation of a quality scale is fundamental to an identification of quality attributes and, consequently, an understanding of incentive travel quality/performance from the perspective of incentive travelers. Moreover, considering that mainland travelers substantially contribute to the hospitality and tourism industry across the world, it is worthwhile to explore mainlanders' perspectives of incentive event quality and thus offer implications to industry practitioners and destination marketing organizations (DMOs), the Tourism Bureau of Taiwan in particular.

Literature review

Incentive event

The Society of Incentive Travel Executives (as cited by Sheldon, 1995, p. 23) defines an incentive event as "a modern management tool used to accomplish uncommon business goals by awarding participants an extraordinary travel experience upon attainment of their share of uncommon goals." Unlike other segments in the MICE industry, incentive travel involves a unique combination of a pleasure trip for attendees and a business event for organizers (Witt et al., 1992), who have paid for the travel expenses in order to motivate their sales force (e.g., sales personnel, dealers, distributors) to, in turn, boost company loyalty and reach sales goals. Employee motivation and reward underlie the concept of incentive travel. There are several incentives used in the industry involving motivating and rewarding sales forces. Shinew and Backman (1995) examine the attractiveness of reward options from the perspective of sales personnel, reporting that an incentive event is preferred to merchandise and cash. In addition, incentive travel is considered to be a more effective tool in motivating employees than other types of rewards (Ting, 2012; Witt et al., 1992). This is because incentive event offers 'trophy value' to trip winners, who perceive the trip as a trophy as they are recognized for their excellent performance and treated as an elite group among their peers (Hastings et al., 1988). Incentive events are designed to provide a company's top achievers with a unique, long-lasting, and memorable experience (Fisher, 2005; Davidson and Cope, 2003). Travel winners enjoy VIP treatment, numerous surprises, and exclusive services, during which their hard work is recognized and rewarded, and their morale and goal-setting can be improved to reach the business goals of the organization when the travel winners return to work (Silvers, 2009; Meany, 2001).

With an understanding of motivational theories, incentive travel can be viewed as an effective medium of successfully satisfying motivational needs (Fisher, 2005; Pizam, 2005).

Expectancy theory, known as Valence Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE), delineates the mechanism wherein people select a particular approach for action out of many alternatives (Vroom, 1964). VIE explains this mechanism in a way that an individual's motivation to work on a given act is contingent upon (1) the valences/values of outcomes that the act will lead to, (2) the instrumentality of the act, and (3) the expectancy that his/her effort will generate the desired performance. According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, people strive to fulfill the needs for esteem (recognition and prestige) and self-actualization (achievement) after the needs involving safety, love, and physiologic are satisfied. Incentive travel is considered to be a powerful motivational tool, as it allows employees to satisfy the needs for peer recognition, self-esteem, achievement, and prestigious status, which are closely associated with high valences, instrumentality, and expectancy.

Quality attributes of incentive events

Perceived quality is defined as "the consumer's subjective judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). Subjective judgment suggests that the evaluation of quality is influenced by personal experience of the product, special needs, and consumption situations. Thus, perceived quality is a user-based attribute (Garvin, 1983), instead of a manufacturing-based attribute with a pre-set standard. Quality is reflected by the performance of service attributes under the primary control of a tourism provider (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Likewise, event quality is viewed as the quality of event performance, signified by event attributes under the control of event organizers. In other words, event attendees evaluate the quality of event performance based on their perception of the event attributes. Event quality is mostly assessed by how event attendees experience and respond to

event attributes (Crompton, 2003). In the context of incentive events, destination attractiveness is the core of the event product and the primary motivator to win the event, which is a critical component of the success of the event (Walker and Walker, 2011; Xiang and Formica, 2007). The other domain of underlying quality attributes, such as program quality, 'wow effect', and opportunity for recognition and networking with a firm's senior management, pertains to the incentive event itself, rather than the destination (Fisher, 2005). Hence, in developing and validating quality attributes, the current study reviews quality attributes of incentive event in two domains: destination and event-specific attributes.

Destination-specific attributes

When selecting a destination for an incentive event, event organizers conduct a site inspection to examine the destination's attributes (Fenich et al., 2015). Destination selection is critical to the success of incentive travel that is used to reward and motivate incentive participants. A destination should be perceived as attractive, safe, and accessible to the participants, in order to reach the intended outcomes of the incentive event (Mehta et al., 1991; Witt et al., 1992). Based on incentive travel literature, the present study reviews destination attributes in the areas of accessibility (e.g., Fisher, 2005; Formica and Goldblatt, 2005; Hankinson, 2005), attractions (e.g., Fenich et al., 2015; O'Brian, 1997; Witt et al., 1992), site environment (e.g., Fenich et al., 2015; Xiang and Formica, 2007), and image (e.g., Davidson and Cope, 2003; Hankinson, 2005). The abovementioned domains of destination are also equally prevalent in the MICE literature as MICE attendees take into account destination attributes as well as event attributes in participation decision-making (Whitfield et al., 2014). On top of the

incentive travel literature, the convention and exhibition literature is therefore used in this study to enrich the literature review of destination-level attributes.

For destination accessibility, an inaccessible destination requires more travel time to be reached and a higher cost for visitors to arrive (Lee and Min, 2013; Wan, 2011). If a destination with poor accessibility is chosen for an incentive event, potential qualifiers for the incentive travel may consider the incentive event to be unappealing and feel less motivated to win the event (Formica and Goldblatt, 2005; Davidson and Cope, 2003). A destination that can be reached with comfort, speed, and reliability is more welcomed by potential attendees, who are thus more encouraged to put in extra effort to win the travel reward (Fisher, 2005; Hankinson, 2005; O'Brian, 1997).

Local attractions are key to an incentive event program. To create a unique travel experience for incentive travelers, the itinerary of the incentive event must reflect various types of attractions concerning the tour program, nightlife, and shopping opportunities at the destination (Witt et al., 1992; O'Brian, 1997). Fenich et al. (2015) conduct in-depth interviews with top executives whose firms offer incentive travels to their employees. Many of the top executives argue that cultural attractiveness and uniqueness of destination are considered in selecting a destination. Prospective incentive event attendees are likely to perceive a destination with a distinct culture and heritage as more appealing, which results in higher participation and motivational force (Davison and Cope, 2003).

The potential qualifiers of incentive events are greatly concerned with site environment, such as safety, security, and weather. Destination safety and infrastructure are a basic set of conditions in the MICE literature when attendees make participation decision (Lee and Min,

2013; Whitfield et al., 2014). If prospective attendees are not convinced that the site environment is secure, they are likely to be discouraged from participating in the incentive travel. Issues, including contagious diseases, political hostility, terrorism attacks, and unpredictable weather, can be perceived as unsuitable elements of an incentive travel destination (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Xiang and Formica, 2007). Additionally, site infrastructure highly affects a destination environment; a destination with a highly developed, reliable infrastructure is more likely to make an incentive travel experience enjoyable. Site environment attributes, such as climate, safety, security, political stability, and infrastructure, are considered to influence destination image (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

Destination image is influential in the selection of vacation destinations (Ramkissoon et al., 2011) and incentive travel destination (Hankinson, 2005) and is defined as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979, p. 18). As individuals highly weigh destination image in destination selection and decision-making (Zhang et al., 2014), destinations that are perceived as being more attractive tend to prompt a higher attendance (Hankinson, 2005; Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2007). Based on the concept of image transfer between a destination and an event, Xiang and Chalip (2006) state that destination image substantially affects event image, suggesting that favorable destination image encourages attendees to travel to the destination for an event (Kaplanidou, 2007). As for incentive destination selection, given that the majority of the incentive award winners in the subsequent year may be the same cohort as the one in the recent trips (Mehta et al., 1991) and prospective attendees may have already been to many destinations, less attractive and unique destination image is deemed to demotivate sales forces to win the travel award (Davidson and Cope, 2003).

Hence, destinations with a novel, exotic image are ideal choices in making an incentive event attractive to incentive winners (Fenich et al., 2015; Hankinson, 2005).

Event-specific attributes

Based on prior incentive event literature, this study reviews event-specific attributes in the field of service quality of local suppliers (Hankinson, 2005; Mehta et al., 1991), hotel facilities (Hampton, 2005; O'Brien, 1997; Xiang and Formica, 2007), program (Fenich et al., 2015; Fisher, 2005; Ting, 2012), and opportunities for networking and achievement (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Fisher, 2005; Ryu and Lee, 2013). Incentive travel aims to provide a unique travel experience for top performers, who are treated as VIPs during the trip to make them feel highly awarded and recognized for their exceptional achievement. Therefore, high quality of facility service and other service contractors is central to enabling incentive travel to exceed the high expectations of incentive event attendees (Hankinson, 2005; Mehta et al., 1991). Mehta et al. (1991) argue that the quality of key service contractors (hotel, ground and entertainment operators, etc.) involved in an incentive event is instrumental in further advancing the incentive travel industry, which needs to embed superb creativity and sophistication in the design and execution of its services.

The hotel industry is the major beneficiary of incentive events, given that event organizers spend more money on hotel rooms and F&B than meeting organizers (Mehta et al., 1991). As hotel facilities are extensively used for various occasions, such as social and recreational functions and seminars, the quality of facilities is critical to the success of incentive events (Davidson and Rodgers, 2006; Fisher, 2005). For example, a variety of recreational programs is employed to ensure that travel participants gain long-lasting memories of their visit

(Hampton, 2005); thus, a hotel with recreational facilities is in an advantageous position to compete with others aiming to host incentive events (O'Brien, 1997). For incentive attendees, who are in nature the top performers of a company, business may need to be handled even during travel. They may therefore prefer a hotel that offers, for example, advanced IT facilities (Xiang and Formica, 2007).

Incentive travel is designed to create an extraordinary travel experience involving a creative and sophisticated program (Fisher, 2005). Thus, attendees often prepare for a trip full of unanticipated pleasant surprises, various activities, and uncommon events, such as novel sporting activities and exotic programs (Fenich et al., 2015; Ting, 2012). Visiting special places or seeing particular people, which are activities that are not usually available for the general public, are often arranged during the journey (Davidson and Cope, 2003). Providing some free time for the attendees is also necessary, so that they can enjoy personal activities (shopping) and visit their favorite places (Davidson and Cope, 2003). With the unique design, structure, and presentation of an incentive event program, attendees can sense that not only has it been worth the extra effort to win the travel award, but also their exceptional achievement has been recognized (Fisher, 2005; Formica and Goldblatt, 2005).

Social value refers to "the social consequences of what the product communicates to others" (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001, p. 216) and "a user image desired by customers and/or the social image the customer desires to project" (Lee and Min, 2013, p. 404), meaning that social value conveys the image of the product user and/or the image that the product user intends to present. The personal social image considerably reflects the social identity of a person that may be more critical than demographic identity (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Ryu and Lee, 2013). The

convention literature (e.g., Kim et al., 2012; Ryu and Lee, 2013) suggests that attendees enhance their social identity by networking with other attendees. For the attendees of incentive travel, social identity is also solidified through social networking opportunities during the incentive travel. For instance, the chance to interact with senior management is less likely to occur for the majority of a big firm's employees. Incentive travel attendees have the opportunity not only to network with the other winning employees (Sheldon, 1994), but also to interact with top ranking management (Fenich et al., 2015; Fisher, 2005). While having the unique opportunity of attending the award ceremony with senior management and socializing with them, incentive attendees naturally increase their social status in the organization. Providing attendees with the opportunity for social networking and peer recognition is an important function of an incentive event. Fisher (2005) also claims that the opportunity of gaining a social identity encourages employees to value the incentive event and to make a considerable effort to qualify for it. Hence, social networking opportunities are considered a pivotal quality of incentive events. In addition, incentive events can bring to attendees a valuable reward for their effort, as well as a sense of achievement and recognition (Rucci and Holland, 1992; SITE, 2013b). The 'trophy value' of incentive travel suggests that winning an incentive event is like winning a gold medal for an athlete who has put a tremendous amount of time and energy into training before a contest (Davidson and Cope, 2003). After returning to work, travel winners tend to share their memorable experiences with the non-winning colleagues, who could consequently be inspired to put a considerable amount of extra effort into winning the next trophy (Fisher, 2005). Given that a sense of achievement and reward for efforts are perceived as being top attributes of incentive travel, opportunities for this sense of achievement and reward underlie the quality of incentive travel as well.

Methodology

Item development

This study adopts the scale development paradigm [as recommended by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis (1991)] that is popularly used in scale development research. The paradigm suggests that the scale is purified by a qualitative analysis (literature review, in-depth interviews, a focus group) and validated by a quantitative analysis (reliability, validity, the dimensionality of the items). The qualitative process of the item development in this study included the following four steps: (1) literature review; (2) in-depth interviews; (3) expert opinions; and (4) a panel of event scholars (a focus group). This process helps to ensure the face and content validity of the initial scales developed. First, the incentive travel literature was thoroughly reviewed to identify potential quality attributes, and items were selected to fit into the context of the incentive event. An initial pool of 30 items was derived from an extensive review of the literature. Specifically, destination-specific quality items were derived from the domains of accessibility (Davidson and Cope, 2003; O'Brian, 1997; Xiang and Formica, 2007; Witt et al., 1992), site environment (Formica and Goldblatt, 2005; Witt et al., 1992), image (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Mehta et al., 1991; Witt et al., 1992), and attractions (Davidson and Cope, 2003; O'Brian, 1997). Event-specific quality items are based on the areas of service of local service contractors (Mehta et al., 1991), hotel facilities (Fisher, 2005; Xiang and Formica), program (Davidson and Cope, 2003; Fisher, 2005; Rucci and Holland, 1992), and opportunities for social networking and sense of achievement and reward (Fisher, 2005; Hastings et al., 1988; Rucci and Holland, 1992).

Second, a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with three incentive event experts for two weeks; field researchers visited each interviewee and assured

their anonymity. Thus, three experts were given the code names of A, B, and C, respectively. Interviewee A has over 10 years of work experience in the travel industry and is currently serving as a section chief at the international affairs division under a government's tourism sector in Taiwan. A's primary responsibility is to support and assist domestic travel operators in attracting incentive travel business to Taiwan. Interviewee B, assistant general manager of a major travel agency in Taiwan, has worked in the travel industry in the U.S. and Taiwan for more than 20 years. Interviewee C worked in the tourism industry in Taiwan for many years before teaching full-time in a university in Taiwan. C now also serves as a consultant for a local travel agency. All the interviewees have had the experience of handling an incentive travel group from mainland China in Taiwan. All interviewees were asked to refine items derived from the literature review for the inclusion of new attributes or the exclusion of existing attributes.

Third, a review of the speeches of two incentive event experts was conducted for two days. Mr. Liang Chang (a mainland Chinese), the general manager of the Shanghai branch of the CITS International MICE Corporation, and Mr. Sammy Yen (a Taiwanese), the general manager of the convention department of Lion Travel Taiwan, were invited by the 7th Asian MICE Forum (AMF) as speakers under the topic of meetings and incentive events in the forum. After a review of the main points in the speeches of the two experts, certain attributes missing and relevant particularly to mainland Chinese incentive attendees in Taiwan were identified; namely, "festivals", "common language", "organic agriculture", "healthy lifestyle", and "professional program planning".

Finally, the generated items were reviewed by a panel of three event scholars, who were invited to be briefed on the study background in a conference room and asked to critically assess

the clarity, conciseness, and relevance of the items and to express their concerns and suggestions regarding the item pool. The whole refining process of items took a half day. All the new and refined items from in-depth interviews, expert opinions, and the event scholar panel were integrated into those drawn from the literature review, leading to a pool of 44 quality attributes.

Data collection

The survey was conducted in Taipei, Taiwan, with the assistance of two domestic travel agencies in February, 2015. Both travel agencies provide tour-guiding services in Taiwan for mainland Chinese incentive travel groups. In order to obtain the most fully formulated viewpoints from the attendees about incentive event, the survey was conducted on the last day of the trip. The survey questionnaires were distributed to the target group by the tour guides. A briefing on the purposes of the research and the content of the questionnaire was provided by the researcher for the tour guides. The survey instrument was operationalized on a seven-point Likert-type scale with an anchor of 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. Although the travel agencies were willing to assist with the survey, for the reason of business confidentiality, they requested that information regarding the names and the total number of mainland Chinese incentive travel groups, who participated in the survey, remain confidential.

Initially collected samples were 409 data, of which 12 data were excluded because of a large scope of incomplete survey responses that could be considered as careless responses. Additional nine samples were excluded because of illogically consistent responses (Dillehay and Jernigan, 1970), suggesting that the respondents had probably not seriously answered the questionnaires. The final number of valid questionnaires for data analysis was thus reduced to 388 samples. The demographic results indicate that the profile of the age groups is as follows:

21-30 (43.5%); 31-40 (37.8%); and 41-50 (18.7%). The gender ratio of the participants was 40% (male) and 60% (female). With regard to education levels, approximately 95% of respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher. Around 5% had only a high school diploma. The monthly salary range of the respondents was CNY 10,000 - 12,000 (4.7%), CNY 12,001 - 14,000 (12.2%), CNY 14,001 - 16,000 (14.2%), CNY 16,001 - 18,000 (64.1%), and CNY 18,001 or above (4.9%).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

As suggested by DeVellis (1991), the whole data sample was randomly divided into two subsamples. The larger subsample (n = 205) was used to identify underlying dimensions and to reduce the scales by EFA. The smaller subsample (n = 183) acted as a holdout sample for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). EFA was conducted by principal axis factoring and oblique rotation to identify underlying factors and items for the final factor solution. Items with factor loadings below 0.4 and communalities less than 0.5 were deleted. Factors with eigenvalues less than 1 were not selected, and a scree plot was reviewed for a visible elbow to determine the number of factors to be derived. After the items were reviewed, the following twelve items were removed: climate, organic agriculture, reputable, novel, exotic, healthy lifestyle, amount of cultural/heritage attractions, full of pleasant surprises, variety, in-depth itinerary, meeting influential members of senior management, and networking opportunities. The scale reduction resulted in 32 items under an 8-factor solution (see Table 1). Explaining 70.01% of the variance in the data, the eight factors were labeled as follows: (1) image and attractions; (2) local people; (3) opportunities for networking and sense of achievement/reward; (4) program, (5) accessibility; (6) hotel facilities; (7) site environment; and (8) specially arranged program.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

CFA (Table 2) was conducted to confirm the underlying dimensions and items extracted, and to guide model re-specification (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). The 8-factor solution with 32 items was confirmed with all significant factor loadings. Goodness-of-fit indices [$\chi 2$ = 1,395.90 (df = 406), RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.92] indicated that the proposed measurement model fit the data well (Hair et al., 1998).

Insert Table 2 About Here

As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Baumgartner and Homburg (1996), the following four nested models were developed to test the relative adequacy of the competing measurement models (Table 3).

Model 1 (study model): Eight distinct but correlated dimensions of incentive event quality.
Model 2: Eight distinct but uncorrelated dimensions of incentive event quality.
Model 3: Five-factor structure of incentive event quality.
Model 4: Single-factor structure of incentive event quality.

Model 1 (study model) showed reliable goodness-of-fit indices, whereas the other three competing models presented inadequate goodness-of-fit indices. This indicates that Model 1 was more significantly improved than the others, confirming that Model 1 is the best fit among the four.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Scale validation: reliability, construct validity, and nomological validity

Convergent validity was evidenced by average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The CFA results also supported convergent validity because the factor loadings for all indicators in Table 2 were significant, at $p < .05$ (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In addition, the construct reliability of all eight factors exceeded the recommended level of 0.70, suggesting an acceptable level of reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Finally, the AVE value for each construct was higher than the squared correlation coefficients under corresponding inter-constructs, supporting discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Insert Table 4 About Here

Nomological validity examines "the extent to which predictions based on the concept which an instrument purports to measure are confirmed" (Zaltman et al., 1973, p. 44). Nomological validity is demonstrated by showing that study constructs act according to their roles, as predicted by theory. The prediction is tested with the antecedents and consequences associated with research concepts (Tepper et al., 2001). Quality scale is significantly related to the concepts of satisfaction and behavioral intentions (loyalty) in the literature on business, hospitality, and tourism. The current study tested nomological validity by correlating the quality scale with attendee satisfaction and behavioral intentions, as suggested by Pons et al. (2006). All correlations were significant at the predicted direction, as derived from the theory (see Table 5), resulting in the establishment of nomological validity for the quality scale.

Insert Table 5 About Here

Test of method biases

To evaluate nonresponse bias, the perceptions of the survey participants who fell in the first 10% of the received questionnaires were compared with those who fell in the last 10% of the received questionnaires; this checked statistically different mean values for each attribute on the basis of the completed survey dates (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The statistical test showed a nonsignificant difference at the $\alpha = .05$ level, indicating that nonresponse bias was a negligible issue in this study.

Following the process by Schriesheim (1979) and Podsakoff et al. (1984), a one-factor examination was conducted as a post hoc test for common method bias. This examination was performed by subjecting all data to a principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Common method variance appears when a single factor is confirmed in factor analysis or when one factor explains more than 50% of the variance (Lings and Greenley, 2005). The one-factor analysis in this study generated an 8-factor structure with the first factor accounting for 15.03% of variance; thus, common method variance is not an issue in this study.

Discussions and conclusion

Conclusion

The resulting quality scale comprises 32 items with eight factors. Three destination-specific factors are represented by image and attractions, accessibility, and site environment, while four event-specific factors are signified by hotel facilities, opportunities for networking and sense of achievement/reward, program, and specially arranged program. The dimension of local people is considered to be a hybrid of destination and event-specific factors in that the service quality of local suppliers (an event-specific attribute) is found under the domain of local

people. These findings contribute to the body of incentive travel literature with the following theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical implications

The value of this study is the first attempt to develop and validate a scale for capturing the quality attributes and dimensions of incentive travels. The extant literature on incentive travel is quite limited and outdated, mostly examined in qualitative or simple descriptive mode. Although the important attributes of incentive travel sparsely spread out over the literature, the quality attributes of incentive events are not empirically examined and verified. The current study exhibits the first quantifiable empirical results of incentive travel quality attributes and underlying dimensions using a stringent psychometric test in developing and validating a multidimensional quality scale. For a rigid qualitative psychometric test, as suggested by Churchill (1979) and DeVellis (1991), this study develops items from the literature review that are subsequently refined by in-depth interviews, expert opinions, and expert panels (focus group). For a quantitative psychometric test, the derived items are validated with the testing of scale validation (construct and nomological validity and reliability) and method biases (non-response bias and common method bias). A series of those tests consequently validates the psychometric properties of a quality scale in this study.

Quality attributes and dimensions vary with the types of industries (Buttle, 1996), suggesting that quality attributes are different across the types of MICE events. The results of this study also support the notion that event-specific quality dimensions vary across incentive travels, conventions/meetings, and exhibitions. In the convention and exhibition literature, quality attributes and domains are already identified and empirically adopted in examining

phenomenon associated with conventions and exhibitions. Educational opportunities and networking opportunities are commonly found as convention-specific dimensions in the convention literature (Lee and Min, 2013; Yoo and Chon, 2008). In the exhibition literature, exhibition-unique quality domains involve products, networking, information, reputation (Whitfield and Webber, 2011), booth management and attractiveness, booth layout and function, registration, and exhibition content (Chen and Mo, 2012). Consequently, event-specific dimensions of incentive travel are found to be significantly different from those of conventions and exhibitions, apart from networking opportunities. However, the networking opportunities of incentive event are in nature different than convention and exhibition. Networking and sense of achievement/reward, the most strongly associated with satisfaction and behavioral intentions in Table 5, belong to the same dimension. Considering those attributes under the dimension, incentive attendees are given opportunities to network with their senior management, which gives the feeling of heightened social status and peer recognition. This gives rise to a sense of achievement/reward, explaining the rationale behind networking and the sense of achievement/reward falling into the same dimension.

Destination-specific attributes of incentive travel, however, are very similar to those of convention and exhibition; accessibility, site environment, and attractions are also observed in the convention and exhibition literature (Chen and Mo, 2012; Jin and Weber, 2013; Lee and Min, 2013; Yoo and Chon, 2008). The notable nature of incentive travel destination lies in image and attractions. In convention and exhibition events, wherein business nature and business motivation are stronger than in incentive travels, destination attributes are generally overshadowed by event-specific attributes, although destination image and attractions are deemed as quality attributes of convention and exhibition. Unlike convention and exhibition,

incentive event is significantly related to destination image and attractions (as evidenced by the second strongest correlation with satisfaction and behavioral intentions in Table 5), given that a pleasure trip is provided for excellent sales force as an incentive.

Those identified attributes and dimensions provide a step forward in developing a better understanding of incentive event quality and contribute to the body of incentive travel literature with an extended insight into the representative quality dimensions and attributes of incentive travels. In particular, the validated scale acts as a basis for researchers to conduct more empirical research on incentive travel. For example, given that event quality represents the quality of event performance, as reflected by event attributes (Baker and Crompton, 2000), event researchers can conduct importance-performance analysis (IPA) to identify significant attributes of incentive travel. Also, quality acts as the antecedent of satisfaction, value, and behavioral intentions or loyalty (Crompton and Love, 1995; Oliver 1997). This enables researchers to examine which quality dimension of incentive travel predicts satisfaction, value, and behavioral intentions the most (least) using regression analysis or SEM. As quality attributes are known to be theoretically intertwined with consumer behavior in the business and marketing literature, the validated quality scale of this study can trigger more subsequent research on incentive traveler behavior, consequently contributing to the theoretical development of incentive travel literature.

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide implications for practitioners in Taiwan, particularly the government bodies concerned and incentive event organizers, and thus assist the practitioners in making strategic plans and decisions to ensure event quality and overall attendee satisfaction; this thereby helps maintain the role of Taiwan as an appealing and significant incentive event

destination for mainland Chinese. For incentive event organizers, the findings of this study can assist in the strategic planning of itineraries for mainland Chinese incentive events in Taiwan. To ensure incentive attendee satisfaction, the itinerary can include a mix of group and individual itineraries, free time to visit other places, a choice of different travel routes, and special events. In fact, such an itinerary has already been initiated by certain travel agencies or event organizers in Taiwan. However, for those practitioners who have not designed the itinerary in the aforementioned way, the suggested itinerary could act as a reliable reference in the planning of itineraries for mainland Chinese incentive groups. In addition, as a special program was perceived as a quality dimension of an incentive event, event organizers, together with local service contractors, should search for or develop more special programs to make an itinerary more appealing. For instance, an arranged visit to Back Cihu (located in the north of Taiwan and built in the 1960s for the family of the first president of Taiwan) for Amway China incentive tours is a specially arranged program. Back Cihu is a unique venue, tightly sealed in the past due to the political background between mainland China and Taiwan; thus, visiting the venue creates a privileged atmosphere for incentive travelers, in turn promoting the sense of recognition and achievement for their efforts.

Furthermore, the resulting quality scale and dimensions in this study allow incentive event organizers to identify a checklist in organizing incentive travel. The checklist can assist them in pinpointing areas of concern in which the quality performance is inadequate; more attention can then be paid to those particular areas in order to significantly improve their quality. For instance, given that safety and security are critical to incentive attendees, event organizers should check every potential risk factor. When they arrange ground transportation, for example, a coach bus should be carefully considered in regard to safety, including the maintenance record

of the vehicle, insurance, the driving record of the driver, and a contingency plan in case of accident. Also, event organizers should conduct a rigorous site inspection to check the quality of hotel facilities in the areas of information technology, recreation, guest rooms, and social functions. To hire reliable local suppliers, event organizers should carefully assess potential suppliers, including with a reference check, track record, and referral from other event organizers.

The study findings also provide Taiwan's government with implications regarding the promotion of Taiwan as an incentive travel destination. When designing destination advertising materials, the Tourism Bureau can focus on such themes as Taiwan's various attractions (night markets, shopping and entertainment places, and festivals), the friendly, warm, and considerate attitude of Taiwanese people, and the common language between Taiwan and mainland China, so as to create an appealing image of Taiwan for the mainland travelers. In addition, the Public Health Bureau can pay extra attention to the hygiene and sanitation conditions of the street food in night markets which mainland Chinese travelers love to visit. Also, the government can consider issuing a special permit to allow incentive travel groups to visit some exclusive places that are rarely opened to the general public, as the groups are believed to bring about a tremendous economic impact on Taiwan.

This study shows that "looking forward to visiting" and "seems familiar but not quite so" are two image attributes from the perspective of mainland Chinese incentive attendees. This implies, however, that such impressions may gradually fade away and eventually disappear one day as more and more mainland Chinese travel to Taiwan. For destination promotions of an incentive event, all stakeholders (including local suppliers and government) should meet on a

regular basis to address areas of concern and develop a long-term strategic plan so that Taiwan continues to remain a sustainable and competitive destination for incentive events.

Limitations and future research

This study has limitations. The findings may not be generalized to other destinations because the current study is limited to Taiwan from the perspective of mainland Chinese incentive event attendees. The resulting quality attributes and dimensions should therefore be interpreted carefully. Future research is advised to adopt the current quality scale in order to examine which dimensions are more or less associated with the satisfaction and behavioral intentions of incentive attendees. This would provide an opportunity to test and fine-tune the scale developed in this study. Also, this study did not examine social desirability bias, although it did test nonresponse bias and common method bias to identify any self-report bias. Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggested that survey participants tend to present themselves in a favorable situation, in which case their true opinions may be disguised, leading to social desirability bias. It is thus recommended that future research examine social desirability in regard to scale development research.

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Table 1.
Results of exploratory factor analysis

Factors	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Image and attractions (eigenvalue: 7.48; % of variance: 22.66)	
1. A place looking forward to visiting	0.78
2. Variety of attractions	0.70
3. Local delicacies	0.65
4. Shopping opportunities	0.57
5. Seems familiar but not quite so	0.56
6. Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	0.54
7. Festivals	0.53
Factor 2: Local people (eigenvalue: 3.80; % of variance: 11.53)	
1. Warm attitude	0.97
2. Friendliness	0.96
3. Considerate	0.95
4. Service quality of local suppliers (hotel, ground operator, etc.)	0.68
Factor 3: Opportunities for networking and sense of achievement/reward (eigenvalue: 3.27; % of variance: 9.92)	
1. Reward for effort	-0.91
2. Sense of achievement	-0.79
3. Increase in social status	-0.77
4. Long-lasting, positive memories	-0.74
5. Peer recognition	-0.73
Factor 4: Program (eigenvalue: 2.17; % of variance: 6.59)	
1. Group tour mixed with individual traveling	0.77
2. Free time to visit other places	0.71
3. Choice of different itineraries	0.59
4. Professional program planning	0.55
Factor 5: Accessibility (eigenvalue: 1.84; % of variance: 5.57)	
1. Comfort of transport	-0.85
2. Travel time	-0.84
3. Reliability of transport	-0.53
Factor 6: Hotel facilities (eigenvalue: 1.77; % of variance: 5.36)	
1. Guestroom facilities	0.85
2. Information technology facilities (e.g., in-room wireless internet)	0.68
3. Event facilities	0.61
4. Recreational facilities	0.57
Factor 7: Site environment (eigenvalue: 1.46; % of variance: 4.44)	
1. Safety and security	0.72
2. Reliable infrastructure (i.e., transportation, buildings, and telecommunication system)	0.71
3. Common language	0.46
Factor 8: Specially arranged program (eigenvalue: 1.29; % of variance: 3.91)	
1. Access to exclusive places and people	0.81
2. Full of special events (e.g., novel sporting activities)	0.59

Note: Total variance explained = 70.01; Kaiser–Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.84; Bartlett's test of sphericity = $p<0.001$.

Table 2.
Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Factors	Factor Loading	t-Value
Factor 1: Image and attractions		
1. A place looking forward to visiting	0.82	9.87
2. Variety of attractions	0.70	9.21
3. Local delicacies	0.65	9.15
4. Shopping opportunities	0.68	9.08
5. Seems familiar but not quite so	0.67	8.98
6. Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	0.79	9.70
7. Festivals	0.62	NA
Factor 2: Local people		
1. Warm attitude	0.97	12.51
2. Friendliness	0.98	12.54
3. Considerate	0.95	12.36
4. Service quality of local suppliers (hotel, ground operator, etc.)	0.55	NA
Factor 3: Opportunities for networking and sense of achievement/reward		
1. Reward for effort	0.88	15.38
2. Sense of achievement	0.80	14.22
3. Increase in social status	0.75	13.41
4. Long-lasting, positive memories	0.82	14.53
5. Peer recognition	0.70	NA
Factor 4: Program		
1. Group tour mixed with individual traveling	0.85	11.48
2. Free time to visit other places	0.83	10.70
3. Choice of different itineraries	0.77	11.02
4. Professional program planning	0.60	NA
Factor 5: Accessibility		
1. Comfort of transport	0.98	NA
2. Travel time	0.85	13.42
3. Reliability of transport	0.41	7.54
Factor 6: Hotel facilities		
1. Guestroom facilities	0.90	NA
2. Information technology facilities (e.g., in-room wireless internet)	0.65	12.83
3. Event facilities	0.74	14.60
4. Recreational facilities	0.61	11.77
Factor 7: Site environment		
1. Safety and security	0.86	NA
2. Reliable infrastructure (e.g., transportation, buildings, and telecommunication system)	0.97	18.57
3. Common language	0.53	10.60
Factor 8: Specially arranged program		
1. Access to exclusive places and people	0.65	6.50
2. Full of special events (i.e., novel sporting activities)	0.87	NA

Note: All factor loadings are significant at $p<0.000$. Parameters are fixed at 1.0 for maximum-likelihood estimation. Thus, t-values were not obtained (NA) for parameters fixed at 1.0 for identification purposes.

Table 3.

Model fit indices for competing measurement models

Nested Models	$\chi 2$/df	RMSEA	CFI	NNFI
Model 1	1,395.90/406	0.06	0.92	0.92
Model 2	1,536.64/434	0.08	0.84	0.83
Model 3	2,640.08/424	0.11	0.70	0.67
Model 4	5,869.94/434	0.18	0.24	0.19

Table 4.

Correlations (squared correlations), reliability, AVE, and mean

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8
IA	1.00							
LP	.14(.02)	1.00						
ONAR	.36(.13)	.12(.01)	1.00					
P	.30(.09)	-.08(.00)	.14(.02)	1.00				
A	.19(.04)	.22(.05)	.07(.00)	.17(.03)	1.00			
HF	.14(.02)	.36(.13)	.21(.04)	.01(.00)	.17(.03)	1.00		
SE	.33(.11)	.35(.12)	.32(.10)	.01(.00)	.21(.04)	.28(.08)	1.00	
SP	.30(.09)	.18(.03)	.21(.04)	.17(.03)	.14(.02)	.11(.01)	.06(.00)	1.00
CR	.84	.95	.90	.75	.85	.78	.76	.72
AVE	.51	.78	.63	.59	.62	.54	.65	.59
Mean	6.53	6.59	6.50	5.88	6.19	6.35	6.65	4.96
SD	.43	.47	.53	.54	.57	.47	.46	.57

Note: IA=Image and Attractions; LP=Local People; ONAR=Opportunities for Networking and Sense of Achievement/Reward; P=Program; A=Accessibility; HF=Hotel Facilities; SE=Site Environment; SP=Specially Arranged Program; CR = Construct Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; SD= Standard Deviation. Mean values are based on seven-point scales.

Table 5.
Nomological validity of quality scale

	IA	LP	ONAR	P	A	HF	SE	SP
AS	.33	.32	.48	.12	.17	.26	.29	.23
BI	.35	.19	.51	.19	.15	.18	.32	.17

Note: All correlations are significant at $p<0.01$.
IA=Image and Attractions; LP=Local People; ONAR=Opportunities for Networking and Achievement/Reward; P=Program; A=Accessibility; HF=Hotel Facilities; SE=Site Environment; SP=Specially Arranged Program; AS =Attendee Satisfaction; BI = Behavioral Intentions.