

Importance of Wine Festival Characteristics in Determining First-time and Repeat Visitors' Festival Experience

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Abstract

This paper assesses festival attractiveness for first-time and repeat visitors to a food and wine festival held during April 2007, in the well renowned Swan Valley wine region on the outskirts of Perth, Western Australia. Data were collected from 116 randomly selected visitors attending the festival using an intercept approach at the major nodes of the festival. Overall, the majority (70%) were first-time visitors to the festival, but repeat visitors to the Swan Valley region (77%). The overwhelming majority were visiting the region not specifically for the festival (87%), and would have visited the region if the festival were not on during their visit (91%). The top five of the 19 attributes used to assess the attractiveness of the festival were wine tasting, food quality, location, timing, and food variety. First-time and repeat visitors differed on the attributes relating to the level of security and crowd control mechanisms available at the festival with first-time visitors exhibiting higher levels of satisfaction with the level of security and with crowd control efforts compared with repeat visitors. Results and implications are discussed and future research directions are proposed.

Key words: Festival, special events, first-time and repeat visitation, wine region.

Introduction

Food and wine, whilst basic to human existence, have been elevated through a range of marketing strategies to interest beyond that of subsistence. An area attracting increasing attention is the interest consumers are exhibiting in wanting to know the origins of food products, that is, they are interested in knowing in which regions or destinations food products are grown or produced (Schamel, 2006). This trend has developed further into an interest in food and wine festivals which provide the awareness of both the product and its destination region (Hall *et al.*, 2000). Conversely, research has investigated as to whether food and wine festivals encourage subsequent visits to the region or destination where known farms and wineries are located (Houghton, 2001). However, research has shown that whilst tourism organisations are aware of this and are marketing their food and wine festivals to a range of visitor groups, the majority of festival visitors tend to be local, with an increasing number of these festival visitors being repeat visitors to the region (McKercher, Mei and Tse, 2006; Shanka and Taylor, 2004). Therefore research into festival visitors is needed to enable festival managers to develop marketing strategies to target the appropriate festival visitor market and, with the increasing number of festivals being staged, to develop an enhanced festival experience (Lee *et al.*, 2007; Yuan *et al.*, 2005). This research project investigates first-time and repeat visitors' evaluation of a food and wine festival in a well known 'new world' wine region in Western Australia.

Literature Review

Festivals organised within the precinct of wine producing regions create a unique synergy between wine, special events and leisure travel, producing an appropriate venue for those interested in wine and those looking for participation in a unique festival (Yuan *et al.*, 2005). As a special event, festivals generally aim to cater for a variety of festival attendees' needs. This requires a combination of a number of different activities such as wine tasting, food stalls, arts and crafts, entertainment, and hence creating a unique offering that attract tourists for diverse social and cultural experiences (Axelsen, 2006; Litvin and Fetter, 2006). These event experiences can take a number of forms; however, the growth of food and wine festivals has established a strong attraction for locals and tourists. Ravenscroft and van Westering (2001) address the principal theoretical issues regarding the significance of wine consumption as social practice and the significance of tourism to wine consumption, presenting the scope to further investigate wine and food festivities in regional wine and food producing areas in conjunction with social practice of celebration. Whilst research is showing that a large proportion of festival visitors are in fact local visitors (McKercher *et al.*, 2006; Shanka & Taylor, 2004), Anwar and Sohail (2004) highlight one of the objectives of festivals is to make tourists come back. Therefore, it is important to compare the perceptions of first-time and repeat visitors, and to engage them to come back to the recurrent experiential product (Prentice and Andersen, 2003).

Study Methods

A three-page questionnaire comprising questions related to respondents' travel experiences, specific festival experience, and background information was developed from event evaluation attributes nominated by Allen *et al.* (2005:456). The adapted attributes were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=poor to 5=excellent). An intercept survey administered by trained research assistants over two week-ends of the festival in April 2007 was conducted by randomly selecting festival visitors who were asked if they were willing to participate in the survey. Those willing were then given the questionnaire to complete after which it was collected. Ethical and content issues were addressed by the relevant ethics committee before the distribution. The majority (53%) of 116 respondents were females. Fifty-four per cent were in the 44⁺ year's age category. Forty-four per cent attended the festival with one or two persons, mainly with family members or friends (77%). Attendees mainly relied on personal information (word-of mouth) about the festival (36%) and 93% travelled to the festival by private vehicles. Seventy-seven per cent were repeat visitors to the Swan Valley region while 70% were first-time visitors to the festival. Eighty-seven per cent indicated they were not in the Swan Valley specifically for the festival, while 91% indicated they would have visited the Swan Valley region if the festival was not being staged.

Results and Discussion

Of these 19 attributes, wine tasting, food quality, location, timing, and food variety were identified as the top five attributes. On the other hand, transport was the least rated feature, as evidenced by the 93% respondents using private vehicles. Component analysis with Varimax rotation, eigenvalue 1.0 and factor loadings .55 were applied to reduce the 19 attributes to a small number of factors (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Five factors accounting for 75.7% of total explained variances were extracted. However, three attributes that could not meet the

stringent criteria were dropped from further analyses. The five factors with 16 attributes (labelled *amenities*, *atmosphere*, *location*, *gastronomy*, and *logistics*) are presented in Table 1. Factor 1 consists of five attributes and accounts for 23% of total explained variance while Factor 2 with four attributes contributes about 15% of the explained variance. Likewise, Factors 3 to 5 with three or two attributes contribute 14%, 13% and 11% respectively of the explained variances. All five factors show acceptable levels of alpha coefficients ranging from .91 to .72.

Table 1: Factor analysis results of TOTV festival attributes (n = 116)

Factor	Variables	Mean ^a	Loadings	EV	Variance	()
<u><i>F1: Amenities</i></u>	Crowd control	3.88	.87	3.66	22.9%	.91
	Security	3.85	.87			
	Service	3.95	.79			
	Amenities	3.77	.69			
	Toilet facilities	3.77	.68			
<u><i>F2: Atmosphere</i></u>	Uniqueness	3.60	.82	2.33	14.6%	.79
	Atmosphere	3.89	.70			
	Information/signage	3.41	.68			
	Attractions	3.49	.65			
<u><i>F3: Convenience</i></u>	Location	4.23	.84	2.28	14.3%	.79
	Timing	4.12	.81			
	Parking	4.05	.78			
<u><i>F4: Gastronomy</i></u>	Food variety	4.10	.85	2.14	13.4%	.88
	Food quality	4.28	.85			
<u><i>F5: Logistics</i></u>	Accommodation	3.34	.83	1.68	10.5%	.72
	Transport	2.86	.79			

KMO = .77; Bartlett's $\chi^2 = 509.88$; df = 120; Sig. = .000. ^a1 = poor to five = excellent.

Correlations between factors

Results of Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) indicate positive and significant correlations between the five factors. These correlations range from small to large. For example, correlations between convenience and amenities, gastronomy and atmosphere, and logistics and gastronomy were small (r.27 ~ .29); between convenience and atmosphere, gastronomy and amenities, gastronomy and convenience, and logistics and atmosphere were medium (r .30 ~ .45); between atmosphere and amenities was large (r = .56). There was no significant correlation between logistics and convenience (Table 2).

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and correlations

Factors	Means (S.D.)	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1: Amenities	3.85 (0.76)				
F2: Atmosphere	3.63 (0.98)	.56 **			
F3: Convenience	4.15 (0.68)	.28 **	.33 **		
F4: Gastronomy	4.18 (0.83)	.43 **	.29 *	.30 **	
F5: Logistics	3.10 (0.94)	.42 **	.45 **	.98	.27 **

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Groups Compared

Demographic and travel characteristics were examined as to whether groups differed on the evaluation of any of the identified factors. Age group, first-time or repeat visitation to the Swan Valley region, and tour group (self or with others), indicated statistically significant differences between groups on Factor 1, Factor 4 and Factor 5 (Table 3). Those who attended the festival with family or friends indicated higher mean score for the amenities factor (Factor 1) compared with those who were visiting the festival on their own or with partner. The mean score for the first group was 3.96 compared with a mean score of 3.39 for the second group. Older visitors attached a higher mean score for the gastronomy factor (Factor 4) compared with younger age group. The mean score for 35 years or older group was 4.37 whilst that of the 34 years or younger group was 3.91. First time visitors to the Swan Valley region had a higher mean score on the logistics factor (Factor 5) compared with repeat visitors to the region with mean scores of 3.60 and 2.96 respectively.

Table 3: Factors and demographic characteristics – group differences

Factor name	Demographics	t-value	Mean scores of ...
Factor 1	Group composition	-2.764 ^b	Family, friends etc... > self/with partner
Factor 4	Age	-2.508 ^a	35 or older > 34 or younger
Factor 5	Swan Valley	2.388 ^a	First time visitors > repeat visitation

^a $p < .05$;

^b $p < .01$

Implications and Conclusion

Increased tourism, increased interest and knowledge in food and wine production, increased interest in food and wine producing regions, and the social trend for people to attend more events, in particular special events, has provided the social context for the increased staging of a range of food and wine festivals. This is shown by the range of venues, from hotels and conventions centres to market squares, which are providing the contexts for staging food and wines festivals. However, wine producing regions are able to provide the unique geographical and spatial contexts for staging food and wine festivals thus enhancing the unique social, cultural and gastronomic experiences that are provided by a festival experience in an original destination or regional food and wines producing setting. Thus, whilst there is an increase in interest in food and wine events, and the number of events being staged, there is now increasing competition for festival visitors. This results in the need for festival managers, in addition to regional tourism authorities, to understand the visitor markets to destinations

and regional festivals, and investigate the factors that will convert regional tourists into festival attendees. In order to increase the attraction for the repeat visitor market to attend their events, festivals should be marketed according to the specific needs of the market. As this research and previous research has shown, a high proportion of visitors to the many regional festivals are repeat visitors.

The findings of this research show statistically significant differences in first time and repeat visitors' evaluation of the festival. This should be taken into consideration in the development and planning of marketing strategies for the region and their events calendar with the aim to enhance the visitor experience. This in turn will generate an increase in repeat visitors the majority of whom are local visitors to the region. This is more significant when viewing many 'new world' wine regions that are located on the urban periphery, often in close proximity to large urban population bases who will develop repeat visitation behaviours to their local food and wine producing regions.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study were based on the staging of a food and wine festival. It would be of value to the festival organisers to undertake a longitudinal study of the festival to develop an understanding of these attributes in a temporal context. Additionally, the views of the visitors intending to go to the festival as opposed to those who were just in the region for general tourism purposes could be further analysed for marketing purposes. The original festival staged in the Swan Valley focused on wine, whilst this festival has developed based on food and wine; hence, the interactions between food and wine provide an area of further research investigation (Yuan *et al*, 2005). It would also be of interest to examine cooperative efforts between both public and private sector organisations involved in the festival. This could be accomplished in conjunction with the local marketing groups such as the local tourism organisations. Due to

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