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MULTIVARIATE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF WINE FESTIVAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE

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SUMMARY

Purpose

Travel for the purpose of visiting festivals represents a fast-growing segment of the tourism market and is a unique opportunity for destinations development based on the fact that festivals provide various economic benefits to the local community. Festivals can have a significant effect on promotion and brand awareness of a destination and are capable of generating significant tourism income. Organizing festivals can attract visitors to the destination outside of the main tourist season and possibly even to destinations and regions they would not otherwise consider visiting. Festival environment can provide a unique and memorable experience to the visitors based around their specific interests. Providing memorable experiences to festival visitors leads to multiple positive outcomes and should be the focus of festival organizers and researchers.

Wine festivals combine elements of wine and festival tourism and are a perfect opportunity to create unique experiences. They are defined as special events which are based on showcasing local wines, food and culture. Wine festivals are usually held in picturesque settings within wine regions which only adds to their attractiveness and makes them an ideal platform to create memorable experiences. Visiting wine festivals can be a main motive for travel to a certain destination as well as a specific experience that visitors want to immerse in during their stay at a destination. A comprehensive literature reviews has revealed a limited amount of research that views wine festival visitors experience as a multidimensional construct.

Experience economy research has been based on the assumption that consumption has a hedonistic component and that decisions on purchases (or travel) are made with a combination of rational (cognitive) and irrational (emotional) elements. Multidimensional model of consumer experience has been originally proposed by Pine and Gilmore

(1999) which consisted of four dimensions (escape, education, entertainment and environment) and has since been the base of a large number of tourism studies that have empirically tested the concept in various tourism settings. Research has shown that tourism experiences are subjective to the consumer and context specific. In other words, experience and its underlining dimensions will greatly vary depending on the platform on which they are created (i.e., restaurant, festival, resort, shopping) and will depend on the different kind of socio-demographic and psychological characteristics of the consumer.

Therefore, purpose of this research is to conceptualize a theoretical framework that explains the experience of wine festival visitors through its dimensions, antecedents and consequences. From an empirical standpoint the goal of the research is to segment wine festival visitors based on the developed framework within the experience economy context.

Methodology

In order to test the proposed research hypotheses, an empirical study based on primary data was conducted using the self-administered survey method. The used questionnaire was based on a comprehensive review of previous research on: tourism experience, festival experience, wine tourism experience and wine festival experience.

The questionnaire was designed in English, Croatian, German, Spanish and Italian language. It consisted of 44 items regarding the visitors' experience, motivation, interest and knowledge about wine, satisfaction, memories and behavioral intentions. In order to check content validity, clarity and comprehensibility as well as to determine the exact time needed to complete it, a pretest of the questionnaire was conducted on a sample of seven members of academic and five members of non-academic community.

Sampling strategy was based on the assumption that there are different types (segments) of wine festival visitors so for purposes of data collection three distinctly different wine festivals were chosen. Data was collected between May and June of 2019. And 462 usable questionnaires were collected. Empirical analysis was carried out using univariate (average scores, coefficient of skewness and kurtosis for all variables), bivariate (ANOVA, Chi Square, Pearson correlation coefficient) and multivariate (factor analysis, cluster analysis) statistical methods.

Findings

Based on extensive literature review six wine festival visitor experience dimensions were proposed: cognitive, affective, social, sensory, value and service experience. Results of the research confirm the proposed multi-dimensional theoretical framework of wine festival visitors experience while the correlation of wine festival visitors experience and experience outcomes seems to be positive and significant.

In conclusion, based on results of the research visitors wine festival experience is a multidimensional construct that is a result of visitor's interactions with the festival environment and is depended on visitor's motivations and involvement with wine.

Proposed framework builds on existing knowledge and broadens the scope of experience dimensions outside of the most often cited 4E experience economy model. Additionally, research results are in line with suggestions of researches who point out the fact that experience needs to be measured contextually (based on where they are created) and individually (based on type of consumer).

To better understand the nature of subjective wine festival experiences wine festival visitors were segmented into four significantly different groups (business visitors, explorers, devotees and companions) using motivation as segmentation criteria.

The identified groups of visitors are significantly different in their motivation, experience and behavioral intentions regarding the visited wine festival and destination.

Business visitors are motivated by buying wine and experience the festival mostly through its social component(dimension). They are not highly interested or knowledgeable about wine and view wine festivals as networking opportunities. Their future intentions will revolve about extension of the business activities that brought them to the festival (i.e., buying wine).

Explores represent a segment of consumers interested in tasting new wines and engaging in casual social activities at the festival. They view wine as important addition to their trip and will visit different wineries and other festivals but won't travel exclusively for them. In a certain way they represent the "classic" tourist with higher than average interest and knowledge about wine.

Devotees are a visitor segment that in literature is often referred to as wine lovers or enthusiasts. They visit wine festivals to experience their senses being stimulated, their knowledge expanded, their emotions triggered and their need for socialization fulfilled. They have above average interest and knowledge about wine and have plans to return to the festival, to buy wine at the festival as well as to visit wineries that were present at the festival. More than any other visitor segment, the devotees highlight the need for creation of multidimensional memorable experiences.

Companions are uninterested participants of wine festivals. Their role is one of support and companionship for visitors belonging to other segments. Their festival experience is based on the social and the emotional dimension. They lack any significant interest or knowledge about wine and will return to the festival only if needed again in their companionship role.

In conclusion, based on the results of this research it seems wine festival experience will significantly differ between specific groups of visitors attending the festival.

Originality of the research

Although this research builds on prior knowledge of the experience economy concept and expands the framework of what wine festival experience is considered to be, as in any research project, there are limitations that need to be taken into account when generalizing the results. Convenience sample of visitors as well as the scope and type of festivals used in data collection can be improved to better represent the general population of wine festival visitors. Additionally, experience creation is viewed as a process and data was collected in single point in time during the festival. Future research should focus on measuring experience dimensions in different points in time and use findings to propose a more comprehensive theory of the experience creation process.

While positive and significant relationship between experience and managerial outcomes has been established it is necessary to test the strength and type of influence different dimensions have on satisfaction, memories and behavioral intentions of wine festival visitors.

Regardless of these limitations the proposed wine festival experience framework can be used as a baseline for future research of wine festival attendees, their motivations, experiences and behaviors. In managerial terms, based on the results of this research, recommendations have been given to festival organizers, wineries and destination management organizations for the purpose of developing visitor experience management strategies and modifying business models to better suit the specific fragmented wine tourism market.

Keywords: experience economy, visitor experience, festival tourism, wine festival, visitor segmentation

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