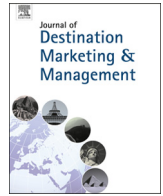




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Research Paper

Experiencing the destination brand: Behavioral intentions of arts festival tourists

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the brand experiences and travel patterns of arts festival tourists with a focus on gender-based differences. The researchers administrated a questionnaire based survey at the Kaohsiung Spring Arts Festival in Taiwan and analyzed the findings using two forms of factor analysis: exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The results indicate that respondents' future behavioral intentions are best explained by two factors: (1) emotional experience, and (2) behavioral experience. In seeking to strengthen destination competitiveness and prompt positive post-purchase behaviors, it is suggested that festival managers should focus on enhancing the brand experiences of visitors. The study findings can inform the cultural tourism sector about consumer preferences and developing appropriate marketing strategies, thereby providing visitors with opportunities to experience the brand attributes that characterize arts and culture festivals within the wider destination context.

1. Introduction

According to the [World Travel and Tourism Council \(2016\)](#), the tourism industry contributed 9.8% of global GDP in 2016. Tourism contributes substantially to employment and to wellbeing across the globe. The total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP may amount to as much as three times its direct contribution. The tourism outlook for the coming decade is positive with an expected annual growth rate of 4%. Tourism demand is impacted by economic circumstances and lifestyle changes, with a greater emphasis on the visitor experience. Tourism has increased particularly rapidly with Asia and has provided the emerging middle classes with opportunities to enhance social relationships through relaxation and recreation. Within the broader context of leisure travel, [Jafari \(1992\)](#) and [Calinao and Lin \(2016\)](#) have reported that culture and arts related activities occupy a growing market share. This trend provides destinations generally and cities in particular with an opportunity to attract tourists by capitalizing on their cultural distinction.

Many cities and larger towns in Taiwan have developed festivals that manage to convey a sense of locality, notably by incorporating culinary and related components. Such festivals make potential contributions to destination brand building, consistent with the symbiotic relationship between festivals and destinations. The focus of the current

study is Kaohsiung Spring Arts Festival (KSAF), a notable initiative which projects a cosmopolitan and innovative image for Taiwan's second city. Featuring performing artists from Taiwan and overseas, the festival producers set out to create memorable and touching experiences and a unique atmosphere. In its five years of operation, KSAF has become the most noteworthy festival for delivering the Kaohsiung brand. Similar approaches have been adopted across Taiwan, thereby expanding overall destination appeal, enhancing the island's tourism market positioning, delivering economic benefits, creating jobs and extending the tourist season.

KSAF is a successful regional arts and cultural festival in the Asian context. Held annually between February and July, it attracts in excess of 30 domestic and international performing arts events in locations across the city involving diverse forms and styles. The performances draw from diverse sources ranging from contemporary Hong Kong (*Last Supper*), *The Ugly Duckling* from the USA, *To Sleep To Dream* and *The Little Match Girl* from the UK and *La Rue des Reves perdus!* from France. Such variety is indicative of the capacity of the performing arts to extend beyond the interests of individual countries and territories and to overcome language barriers through multilingual delivery. The Festival's mix of local and cosmopolitan elements makes it particularly worthy of examination. Festivals offer the potential to enhance destination viability and [Connell and Meyer \(2015\)](#) observed that they offer

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relatively more opportunities than other tourist attractions to stimulate off-peak demand. Festivals enhance urban amenity for both residents and visitors through their role in destination marketing and by incorporating new design technologies which enhance the visitor experience (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). In the wider context of destination brand development, Chernatony and McWilliam (1989) have advocated a focus on quality and value to provide prospective visitors with assurance. The connection with the visitor experience is critical. The brands which are most distinguishable from alternatives are those that offer a connection with the self-image of participants. In this context, branding can support product differentiation and hence strengthen destination competitiveness (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Keller, 1993). The preceding section suggests that festivals are directly associated with destination brands and that visitor experiences are central to this connection.

Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) have shown that brand experiences evoke inner responses and behavioral responses amongst visitors through the course of the travel consumption process. Payne, Storbacka, Frow, and Knox (2009) also noted that providing functional benefits minimizes consumer dissatisfaction and that brand building should consequently focus on delivering experiences. The delivery of outstanding brand experiences allows providers to differentiate their offerings from those of competitors (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011). Positive brand experiences lead progressively to consumer brand loyalty, and to profit enhancing brand recommendations (Chiou & Shen, 2006). In emphasizing the importance of word of mouth communications, Barnes, Mattsson and Sorensen (2014) have argued that brand experiences are critical determinants of the prospects of re-visitation. Their assertions about the importance of brand experiences in tourism draw support from both scholars and practitioners.

Various scholars have identified the role of gender in influencing patterns of tourist information gathering and decision making (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007). Research by Ford (1991) and by Gibson (1996) concluded that men and women have different leisure motivations and preferred holiday experiences. This suggests that gender-based perspectives offer further prospects for an enhanced understanding of tourist attitudes and behaviors. As a defining and life-long element of human identity, gender impacts on traveler characteristics such as values, cultures, beliefs and behaviors. Meng and Uysal (2008), for example, revealed that tourists' choice of destination differ between genders. The central role of women in travel decision making has been widely noted. Women are more involved in everyday spending decisions than their male counterparts, and may account for 80% of purchase decisions including travel (Jucan & Jucan, 2013). In Carr's (1999) survey of women travelers, 58% of the respondents participated in trips with a historic and/or cultural dimension. Despite such diverse insights, tourism researchers have given minimal attention to the impact of gender on brand experiences. Such potential are worthy of investigation in light of the growing number of tourists who travel in single gender groupings (Leontidou, 1994). In the present study, the authors have approached gender as a demographic variable for market segmentation purposes based on the sex of the respondent and have not undertaken a wider exploration of gender as a sociological construct within the social sciences context. The contribution of the present research may be considered as more aligned to the business and marketing of tourism.

The present investigation addresses the knowledge gap about the relationship between gender, tourism brands and the arts by exploring how men and women react to brand experiences with particular reference to arts and culture festivals. The findings offer potential marketing and management insights by examining various dimensions of the brand experience in the destination context. In addressing these issues, the study aims to: (1) analyze the key elements of the tourist brand experience in the case of KF, and (2) examine the influence of gender on tourist brand experiences and behavioral intentions. Understanding brand-related experiences in the context of Asia's

growing arts and festivals market can potentially contribute to more effective and integrated destination management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Arts and culture festivals

Getz (1991) characterized festivals as a one-off or non-recurring special activity, formed by a combination of organizational planning and financial sponsorship in addition to more general and routine activities. Shone and Parry (2004) argued that festive activities are non-routine and are different from the characteristics of daily life, including recreational, cultural, personal and organizational objectives. Tourism-related festivity has been growing in Taiwan. According to the Ministry of Transportation and Communications statistics, the introduction of a five-day working week tourism policy stimulated a new industry trend of weekend breaks. This initiative stimulated the prospect of additional festival patronage. Adding to the evidence of an active relationship between festivals and destinations, Grappi and Montanari (2011) identified the former as an effective marketing tool or medium to generate economic, social and cultural benefits for host areas. The multifaceted nature of the phenomenon makes it worthwhile to investigate the interconnections between festivals, destinations and brands. Salzburg Festival in Austria and Avignon Art Festival in France are internationally renowned events that research has shown to produce community benefits, develop local identities, attract publicity, maintain traditional cultures, and generate tourism revenues (Huang, Lin, Li, & Guo, 2015). The broad category of arts and cultural tourism extends to museums, galleries, arts festivals, buildings, historic sites, literature and art performances, and folk culture (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009). Based on the strong relationship that has been established between cultural events and local identities, festival visitors have an opportunity to acquire local insights. Edinburgh in Scotland exemplifies the preceding phenomena. As a well-established destination where 15 or more national and international festivals are held annually, Edinburgh has acquired the designation 'City of Festivals'. The Edinburgh International Festival is particularly noteworthy. Previous researchers have shown that the festival supports enhanced quality of life for Edinburgh residents and contributes to culture, society, and the economy.

A growing number of cities in Taiwan have been involved in the staging of festivals, a symptom of the growth of arts related leisure across Asia. The developments are consistent with the international phenomenon of nations and cities building their reputations and favorable image by staging a spectrum festivals that range from sport, culture, arts, religion and cuisine to business (Aitken & Campelo, 2011; Dickinson & Shipway, 2007; Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009). The current study of KSAF, has a focus on tourist participation. As the largest such festival in Southern Taiwan, KSAF was developed, hosted, and marketed to stimulate the provision of amenities in Kaohsiung City. KSAF has established itself as a credible international arts festival that supplements local patronage with increased international visitation. Since its establishment in 2010, KSAF has hosted many well-known performing arts groups, with programming extending to art, music, theater, dance and traditional opera. Its goal is to enhance Kaohsiung as a cultural center and to establish the city as a cultural and creative hub (Jiang, 2016).

2.2. The festival brand experience

In exploring how brand experiences influence travel decisions researchers have concluded that tourists' brand experiences are significant determinants of satisfaction, decision making and future behaviors (Chiou & Shen, 2006; Morrison & Crane, 2007). Pine and Gilmore (1998) characterized consumer experiences as entering a new phase of economic offerings and service provision. In contributing to

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