



Conceptualizing Wine Festival Visitor Experience

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Received: July 30, 2023

Revised: July 8, 2024

Accepted: July 18, 2024

Keywords:

Visitor experience;
Festival experience;
Experience economy;
Wine tourism;
Festival tourism



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Abstract: *Festivals attract visitors outside of the tourist season and to destinations they would not otherwise visit because they provide memorable experiences based on visitor's special interests. Wine festivals combine elements of wine and festival tourism and are a perfect opportunity to create unique experiences. Experience economy suggests that decisions on purchases (or travel) are made with a combination of rational (cognitive) and irrational (emotional) elements which are subjective and context-specific.*

The purpose of this research is to conceptualize a theoretical framework that explains the experience of wine festival visitors through its dimensions, antecedents and consequences.

Results show that the wine festival experience is a multidimensional construct and a result of visitors' interactions with the festival environment and is dependent on visitor's motivations and involvement with wine. The proposed conceptual framework builds on existing knowledge, broadens the scope of experience dimensions and provides a framework for empirical examination of wine festival experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary tourism is showing a growing trend of travellers seeking experiences based on their specific interests (Liu, 2020). Specializing in special interests such as health, wine, or food has become crucial to stay relevant in the modern tourism industry (Liu, 2020; Molina et al., 2015). Traveling to festivals allows travellers to act and feel differently than they do in their everyday life which makes them ideal opportunities to create memorable experiences (Van Vliet, 2012). Wine festivals are an important part of the wine tourism industry (Mitchell & Hall, 2006), but most research has been focused on the economic and social importance of festivals in their wine regions (Cambourne et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2001; Houghton, 2002; Mitchell, 2006; Mitchell & Hall, 2004; Taylor & Shanka, 2002) while research focusing on the wine festival experience has been lacking in quality and quantity (Kruger & Viljoen, 2021).

Providing memorable experiences to wine festival visitors can have multiple positive outcomes such as recommendation (online and mouth to mouth), desire to revisit, brand loyalty, and enhanced purchasing and thus provide the wine region with new revenue streams that help with the long-term sustainability of the economic model based around wine tourism experiences (Huang, 2008; March & Wilkinson, 2009; O'Neill et al., 2002). The wine festival experience consists of subjective and objective reactions to the festival environment so festival organizers need to plan festivals in such a way that they engage visitors both cognitively and emotionally (Akyıldız et al., 2013; Arnould et al., 2004). For the experience to cause a certain reaction or behaviour it is important to achieve the state of full immersion from the visitors. That can be done only through the holistic and multidimensional view of experience creation (Kruger & Viljoen, 2021).

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Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conceptualize the dimensions of the wine festival visitor experience and propose a framework that will allow future researchers to measure and explore the concept through a multidimensional view.

2. SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM

In recent times travel trends have shifted towards shorter more frequent trips planned around special interests (Liu, 2020; Quintal et al., 2017) which are becoming increasingly important in the process of choosing both destinations and activities during their stay (W. Lee et al., 2017; Siczko et al., 2020). One of the main characteristics of special interest tourism is the diversified offer that is not entirely based around the summer which is the traditional tourist season so it represents an alternative to mass tourism and it offers solutions to general tourism industry problems like extreme seasonality and over tourism in well-established destinations while allowing smaller yet undiscovered areas to showcase its resources (Lee & Bai, 2016; Wen & Wu, 2020).

Services and products offered within different types of special interest tourism are tailored toward small groups and individuals who have the motivation to experience something unique and memorable on their travels (Filipović, 2021). Literature on special interest tourism points out that special interest tourism is also responsible, ecological, authentic, and highly local (Jadrešić, 2010). It serves as a tool for the growth of the local economy which, unlike in the case of mass tourism, can adapt and offer products and services that are in the spirit of individual responsible travel (Geić, 2011).

2.1. Festival Tourism

Festivals are types of events that gather relatively large groups of people in a public place within a certain period during which they are provided with a memorable experience planned around a specific topic. They contain elements of local culture and include multiple stakeholders from the local community (Getz, 2012). Festivals are also defined as planned events that serve as a platform for networking, discussion, and presentation of goods and services but also as events that popularize festival themes with opportunities for social and cultural interaction between visitors (Mijoč, 2022).

According to Getz (2007), festivals play a key role in the tourism industry as they create memories and stories, distract visitors from mundane everyday life, and make visitors happy and excited while celebrating creativity and life. They are a special kind of social activity that gives us meaning and separates us from other forms of life (Getz, 2007). Festivals have a key role in the economic growth of destinations as they bring revenue in the form of overnight stays, expenditure at stores and restaurants, etc. That revenue creates jobs and supports small business development (Getz, 2007).

Festivals provide experiences to visitors related to emotions, learning, senses, behaviour and belonging which are found in other tourist attractions as well (Andersson & Getz, 2009). Festival experiences are created as a result of thoughtfully planned services, programs, environments and other characteristics of the festival. Organizers who deliver on these experiences will create satisfaction, positive emotions and memories and are more likely to have a high percentage of return visitors (Getz, 2012).

Festival experiences are a result of the interaction of visitors and the festival environment defined by the expectations and motivations of the visitors (Morgan, 2008; Robertson et al., 2008).

In that sense festival environment is a platform on which the visitors interact with the social, physical and service aspects of the festival. The stimulus that visitors receive from the festival environment will differ significantly between different groups of visitors so some of them will be emotionally involved, others preoccupied with trying to absorb knowledge and some may be completely disinterested. For that reason, it is crucial to observe and study festival experiences as a multidimensional concept that depends both on the festival environment and the visitors themselves.

2.2. Wine Festivals

As wine is becoming a more important part of the lifestyle of people in developed urban areas so has the interest in visiting wine-growing regions (Fernandes & Cruz, 2016). Wine has become a key element in building promotional strategies for destinations that are located within wine-growing regions and the presence of wineries, vineyards and cellars enhances the appeal of the destination for travelers gathering information and planning their travels (Ye et al., 2017). Visiting a wine festival can be a primary reason for visiting a destination but also just an activity while on vacation. In both cases, it acts as a unique experience based on local wines and food (Yuan et al., 2005).

If the goal of a wine festival is creating a loyal base of customers that will return to both the festival and destination then the key element of planning must be focused on how to provide visitors with a unique memorable experience (Anwar & Sohail, 2004) that consists of more than “just” wine tasting (O’Neill et al., 2002).

2.2.1. Wine festival experiences

The complexity of researching wine festival experiences is based on the fact that wine tourism activities draw a wide array of individuals with different motivations and levels of involvement with wine (Ali-Knight & Charters, 2001). Even though most people want to taste and buy wine during their visit to a wine-growing region the need to satisfy irrational hedonistic needs and the need to experience something unique are the key to understanding the underlying primary motivations of wine tourists. The history, culture and authenticity of wineries, vineyards, cellars and festivals are key components of a holistic wine experience (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012). In other words, wine experiences are a product of a place and people that live there and are created together with the visitors.

The holistic experience of visiting a wine festival includes elements of emotional, sensory, cognitive and social experience (Schmitt, 2003). They can be internal (motivation, attitude, involvement) or external (wine tourism offer in the area, specifics of the wineries, festivals) (Quintal et al., 2017). The distinction between internal and external stimuli that cause certain behavior is key to understanding the role of experience in the process of value creation in wine tourism (Mitchell & Hall, 2006).

The wine festival experience needs to be studied as a multidimensional holistic concept that encompasses elements of the time and place it is held in as the wine experience itself can be created in many contexts such as tasting wine at home, at a wine bar, wine cellar or even just envisioning or remembering it from an experience. Pikkemaat et al. (2009) notice that the most common expectation of a visit to a wine region is one of the memorable unique experiences mostly

revolving around aesthetic and entertainment dimensions. Wine festival experience research is mostly descriptive or general and fails to encompass all the elements that are part of a multi-dimensional holistic concept of creating a wine festival experience (Kruger & Viljoen, 2021).

As shown in Table 1 festival experience research encompasses multiple dimensions that change within the research context.

Table 1. Overview of research on festival experience dimensions

Authors	Sample	Methodology	Questions	Measurement	Experience dimension
Akyildiz and Argan (2010)	n = 59, music festival visitors, Turkey	Researcher administered a structured questionnaire, pen and paper	24	5-point Likert scale	sensory, cognitive, conative, emotional
Park et al. (2010)	n = 420, film festival visitors, South Korea	Researcher administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	16	5-point Likert scale	environment, learning, escape, entertainment
Mason and Paggiaro (2012)	n = 380, wine festival visitors, Italy	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	25	5-point Likert scale	environment, emotional, product offer
Akyildiz et al. (2013)	n = 300, local festival visitors, Turkey	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	16	5-point Likert scale	emotional, escape, social
Papadimitriou (2013)	n = 452, carnival festival visitors, Greece	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	12	10-point Likert scale	social, environment, service
Manthiou et al. (2014)	n = 338, festival visitors, USA	Self-administered structured questionnaire, online	16	7-point Likert scale	environment, education, escape, entertainment
Ballantyne et al. (2014)	n = 441, music festival visitors, Australia	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	16	5-point Likert scale	social, festival theme, atmosphere, escape
Lee et al. (2015)	n = 105, religious festival visitors, South Korea	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	8	7-point Likert scale	emotional, authenticity
De Geus et al. (2016)	n = 565, national festival visitors, Netherlands	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	18	7-point Likert scale	affective, cognitive, physical, novelty
W. Lee et al. (2017)	n = 450, wine festival visitors, SAD	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	16	7-point Likert scale	value, escape, service, aesthetic

H. Lee et al. (2017)	n = 450, festival visitors, South Korea	Self-administered structured questionnaire, email	27	7-point Likert scale	escape, playfulness, togetherness, environment
Dash and Samantaray (2018)	n = 300, festival visitors, India	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	19	5-point Likert scale	environment, education, escape, entertainment
Marković (2019)	n = 191, Christmas festival visitors, Croatia	Self-administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	22	7-point Likert scale	cognitive, conative, affective
Culha (2020)	n = 186, food festival visitors, Turkey	Researcher administered structured questionnaire, pen and paper	13	5-point Likert scale	environment, education, escape, entertainment

Source: Own research

Wine festival experience has been viewed by researchers as a multidimensional construct however there is no consensus on what those dimensions are and how should they be used in quantitative research (Table 1). However, certain common themes can be found in the reviewed literature. Based on the literature review six wine festival visitor experience dimensions are proposed: cognitive, emotional, social, sensory, value and service experience.

Sensory experiences reflect subjective reactions to stimuli provided by the festival environment which in the case of wine festival can be the smell and the taste of wine or the beautiful scenery of the vineyards or cellars where the festivals are held.

Emotional experiences are a result of visitors' interaction with the festival environment which can vary in intensity and direction (both good and bad emotions). They are often followed by physical reactions and are a very good predictor of visitors' future behaviour.

Cognitive experiences are considered the first phase in creating experiences which in turn cause an emotional response (experience). They are observed through learning, thinking, and processing information sent to visitors through the festival environment.

Social experiences represent visitors' interaction with their social surroundings including their companions, other visitors as well as festival staff and exhibitors. Social experience along with emotional and cognitive experience determines the psychological state of the visitor and sets the path for his interaction with the social environment at the festival.

Value of experience can't be viewed through classic concepts i.e., value for money but needs to include an irrational subjective aspect of value such as novelty (experiencing something new and unique). Novelty or experience value has its roots in the fact that visitors will travel for festivals that are special and not available to them in their domicile.

Service experience is thought to be crucial as service staff interacts with the visitors through the whole process of experience creation and is key for the festival product to be delivered in a way that will not interfere with the expectations and desires of the visitors.

The above six dimensions represent a theoretical framework that outlines a multidimensional construct “wine festival visitor experience” which is in line with the previous experience economy research 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. Scale items that can be used to measure the experience dimensions are shown in Table 2 below. They are drawn from previous research concerning visitor experience and adapted to suit the context of wine festival visitor experience.

Table 2. Scale items for measuring wine festival experience dimensions

Authors	Experience dimension	Measurement	Scale items
De Geus et al. (2016)	Sensory	7-point Likert scale	The festival stimulated all my senses The environment of the festival provides sensory stimulation The environment of the festival has a specific unique feel
Kim and Song (2011)	Emotional	7-point Likert scale	I got emotionally recharged at the festival. I enjoyed myself at the festival. I did not feel anything while visiting the festival.
Rivera et al. (2015)	Cognitive	7-point Likert scale	I learned something at the festival. The festival has awakened my curiosity. The festival brought interesting ideas to mind.
Chang and Horng (2010)	Social	7-point Likert scale	I like to participate in festival activities with other visitors. I don't like other visitors interrupting my conversation with the exhibitors. I enjoy sharing new products with friends and family who are with me at the festival.
Prebensen and Rosengren (2016)	Value	7-point Likert scale	I experienced new things at the festival. I have the impression that this festival is different from others. This festival is a unique experience.
Manthiou et al. (2014)	Service	7-point Likert scale	Interaction with the exhibitors makes me feel like I'm treated with respect. Festival service employees serve me friendly and kindly. The overall service provided at the festival is excellent.

Source: Own research

3. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to propose a theoretical framework for measuring a multi-dimensional wine festival visitor experience. Based on the literature review a six-dimensional view of the wine festival visitor experience was proposed alongside the scale items that can be used in a questionnaire in the following quantitative research. The scales that exist in the literature were not constructed with the specific purpose of measuring wine experience in a wine festival context. The paper builds on the most cited 4E (education, entertainment, escape, aesthetic) model and addresses the need to adapt the measurement of experience to the context where the experience is created, in this respect it being the context of a wine festival.

Further work should be done on improving and developing the questionnaire itself. It should include both socio-demographic and psychological traits (motivation, involvement and similar) of the visitors as previous research has shown that these variables influence the creation of experiences. In other words, the questionnaire should include both antecedents and outcomes of the

wine festival experience (satisfaction, loyalty, future behaviour). The six dimensions of experience can be looked at in more detail as well as a sensory experience can include different sub-dimensions such as taste, smell, etc.

Future research should test the suggested framework and questionnaire using exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis to make sure that the proposed model fits its intended purpose. Additionally, structural equation modelling can be used to determine the nature of the effect that these experience dimensions have on satisfaction, memorability and future behaviour of the wine festival visitors (both intended and actual behaviour). Both direct paths (effects) between the variables and possible mediation variables should be taken into account.

Researchers should keep in mind that there are various types of visitors to a wine festival and that their experiences may vary and type of the effect it will have on their behaviour is also expected to be different. Quantitative research using methods like cluster analysis should be done to identify different segments of wine festival visitors and use the questionnaire to try and measure the multi-dimensional experience differences among identified segments.

Lastly, the creation of experiences is viewed as a process. To accurately measure and understand wine festival experience it needs to be measured at various points in time during the process of experience creation. Expectations, actual visits, and post-visit experience should all be considered.

Above mentioned factors and research directions point to the main limitations of this research. The paper focused on six dimensions deduced from previous research that was not focused on measuring the specific context of wine festival experience. It was mostly measured at one point in time and included limited dimensions and almost no exploration of subdimensions of experience. While this research builds on the existing framework of measuring experience much more is needed in the way of future development of the measurement instruments and analysis to be able to grasp all the complexities of the process that creates memorable experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

Events such as wine festivals provide destinations with an opportunity to create memorable experiences for visitors, build relationships, loyalty, brand awareness, and create revenue streams that will boost small businesses and the rest of the local economy. A necessary step in achieving these goals is understanding the very nature of what a festival visit experience is. The purpose of this conceptual study was to explore the multidimensional nature of the wine festival experience and propose a theoretical framework for future quantitative and qualitative research. The results of the study can also be used by managers who want to enhance their understanding of what experience economy is supposed to be and how it should be applied to different contexts.

The results of the conceptual research propose a multi-dimensional theoretical framework of wine festival visitors' experience. Wine festival visitors' experience is a result of visitor's multiple interactions with the festival environment and is dependent on visitor's motivations and involvement with wine.

The proposed framework builds on existing knowledge and broadens the scope of experience dimensions outside of the most often cited 4E experience economy model which includes education,

environment, esthetic and escape dimensions. Additionally, the framework is in line with the suggestions of researchers who point out the fact that experience needs to be measured contextually (based on where they are created) and individually (based on the type of consumer).

The framework and proposed questionnaire can be used as a baseline for future research on wine festival attendees, their motivations, experiences and behaviours. Empirical confirmation through quantitative research is necessary. Development of scale items as well as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis can be used to assess the fit of the proposed theoretical model. Future research should focus on measuring experience dimensions at different points in time and use findings to propose a more comprehensive theory of the experience creation process. While a significant relationship between experience and marketing outcomes has been discussed it is necessary to measure and test the strength and type of effect different dimensions have on satisfaction, memories and behavioral intentions of wine festival visitors.

Acknowledgment

This paper is the result of the scientific project “Tourism Experience Measurement in Physical and Virtual Space”, which is supported by the University of Rijeka (project ZIP- UNIRI-116-1-21).

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