

Festival visitors' expenditure: a comparison of visitor expenditure at the Vryfees Arts Festival

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Abstract

The study on which this article is based, aimed to compare festival visitors' expenditure at the Vryfees National Arts Festival for two respective years. Surveys were conducted at the festival in 2011 and 2013 and frequency tables were used to draw a profile of visitors. A *t*-test was conducted to compare festival visitors' expenditure on several aspects including accommodation, food, beverages, shows, retail, stalls, transport and parking. Results indicate that the overall spending of festival visitors in 2011 and 2013 remained mostly the same. This serves as an indication for festival organisers to re-consider the festival offering in an attempt to increase visitor spending, compete effectively in the festival market and to have a greater economic effect on the host community.

Keywords: festival, expenditure, economic impact, tourism, Vryfees

Introduction,

Over the past decade South Africa has realised an explosion of festivals and events (Watkins, 2015). According to Saayman (2015), more than 600 festivals, large and small, are staged annually in South Africa. Examples of these are the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK), Innibos Lowveld National Arts Festival, Vryfees (Free State) National Arts Festival, Gariep Arts Festival, Grahamstown National Arts Festival and Tulbagh Arts Festival. Festivals are able to make a substantial contribution to local economies (Saayman, 2015). It is estimated that each festival hosted in South Africa brings in at least R10 million to the South African economy stimulating further economic activity such as job creation (Saayman, 2015).

The use of local festivals as an instrument for tourism development and promotion has gained worldwide momentum in recent years. Examples of such festivals include "The New France Festival" in Quebec (Arellano, 2011: 1); the Hultfredsfestivalen in Swenden (Getz & Mossberg, 2006: 316), and the Calgary Folk Music Festival in Canada (Getz & Mossberg, 2006: 316) The most obvious reasons for the popularity of the local festival as a promotional and developmental tool lies in the fact that festivals increase the demand for local tourism (Oh & Lee, 2012: 2). In

addition, successful festivals can help to recreate the image of a place or contribute toward the exposure of a location by trying to get such place on the tourism map (Arellano, 2011: 1). Finally, the strategic placement of a festival on the local tourism calendar can help extend the tourism season (Getz, 1997: 303).

With more than 600 festivals of various types (e.g. community festivals, arts festivals and cultural festivals) being staged annually in South Africa, festivals are competing with each other in terms of attracting visitors, popular artists and funding, which affect festivals' future sustainability and profitability (Kruger & Saayman, 2012: 147). Visitor spending is an important consideration for festival organisers since it directly influences a festival's profitability and may also have an effect on the strategic planning of facilities and amenities (Brown et al., 2010:61). Thus, to compete effectively, it is imperative that festival organisers understand festival visitors' expenditure. An understanding of visitors' expenditure is even more important in poor economic conditions where potential visitors' income is challenged by the high cost of living (Burger, 2015:10).

In ideal circumstances, visitor expenditure need to increase to keep up with the increase in the cost of living and to contribute to local economies. Should there be little or no significant increase in festival visitors' expenditure, new strategies have to be developed whereby visitor spending can be increased in order to result in greater economic effect for the community (Kruger et al.,2012:11). It is therefore argued that knowledge of the level of visitor expenditure could assist festival organisers to determine when measures need to be taken in order to increase visitor expenditure. Little research which compared festival visitors' expenditure for two separate years could be found. The purpose of this research was therefore to provide a comparison of visitors' expenditure for two respective years.

To achieve the above-mentioned purpose, this article will firstly give an overview of the related literature on visitor expenditure. This will be followed by a discussion of the research methodology as well as the results from the empirical research. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

Contextualising the research

To gain a better understanding of visitor expenditure in a festival context it is useful to review the related literature. This will be done by defining the concept "festival" and indicating its significance to tourism destinations, followed by an explanation of visitors' expenditure and the factors affecting it. Finally, the importance of visitor expenditure pertaining to festivals and destinations is discussed briefly.

Defining the concept "festival" and indicating its role in the tourism industry

Festivals serve as visitor attractions and are an important part of the tourism industry (Saayman, 2004: 26). Despite the fact that the term "festival" has been defined extensively in literature, there seems to be inconsistency with regard to the definition of the word "festival". This is mostly due to the differences between festivals in terms of size and nature. The majority of researchers however agree that festivals are celebrations (Kruger & Petzer, 2008: 113; Williams & Bowdin, 2007: 187; Jackson & O'Sullivan 2002: 327), that they are limited in duration (Williams & Bowdin,

2007: 187; Van Zyl, 2005: 55), and that they are tied to a specific theme (Kruger & Petzer, 2008: 113). Van Zyl (2005: 55) furthermore states that festivals are held annually, each with its own purpose and involving a sequence of activities over a short period of time. From this it is clear that the purpose of most festivals is to celebrate a specific theme such as music, food, art and heritage at a specific time of year and only for a short duration which is on average three days to five days.

The hosting of festivals offers several benefits to tourism destinations. As indicated in Table 1, numerous positive outcomes might accrue from hosting festivals. Festivals can assist local communities with strengthening community identity as well as by protecting the social and cultural aspects of the local communities. Additionally, the staging of festivals enhance destination awareness (Getz, 2007: 309), destination positioning (Arellano 2011: 1), destination branding (Arellano, 2011:1), and destination image (Oh & Lee, 2012: 2). One of the most important effects of festivals on host destinations is the influence that festivals have on the local economy of host destinations (Getz, 2007: 309). This effect occurs in the form of visitor expenditure which in turn determines the festival's profitability as well as the economic impact it has on local economies.

Table 1: The benefits of festivals to destinations

Sources	Benefits
Yoon, Lee & Lee (2010: 335)	Community cohesion
Nicolson & Pearce (2000: 237)	Reducing seasonality
Kim, Uysal & Chen (2002: 128)	Preserve sensitive cultural and social environment
Slabbert & Saayman (2011: 197)	Improve the marketing efforts of a destination
Getz (2007: 309)	Generate income and expenditure
Morgan (2007:113)	Increase positive economic impact

According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2015: 2), the South African tourism industry has experienced an increase in both domestic and international tourism expenditure from 2011 to 2013. StatsSA (2015: 2) reports the increase as follows: domestic tourism expenditure increased from R71 747 000 in 2011 to R94 183 000 in 2013, and international tourism expenditure increased from R60 545 000 in 2011 to R62 596 000 in 2013. Overall, it could thus be concluded that visitor expenditure in the tourism industry is increasing. Is this however true for festivals?

An explanation of festival visitors' expenditure

The tourism industry consists of social, cultural and economic aspects, which include the movement of people, nationally and internationally, outside their normal environments for reasons that are personal or business-related. These people are referred to as visitors and tourism revolves around their activities of which visitor expenditure is one (World Tourism Organisation 2015). According to Smith (2005:37), visitor expenditure can be defined as the money that visitors spend before, during and after a trip as part of the overall trip experience. In terms of festivals, visitor expenditure can therefore be viewed as the expenses incurred by visitors in order for them to attend and enjoy the festival (Gibson & Connell, 2012: 64).

According to Brown et al. (2010: 61), visitors' spending at festivals is not only confined to the specific event or festival. Saayman and Rossouw (2010:269) and Brown et al. (2010:61) explain that festival visitors spend money on admission fees, transport, accommodation, retail, meals, entertainment, attractions and so on, which contribute to the local economy. These findings are also supported by Brown et al. (2013: 61) and Thrane (2002: 281). It is thus not only the festival itself that might benefit from the income generated by festival activities but also the local community and host destinations. The income generated from ticket sales, supplying accommodation, and food and beverages amongst others, are injected into the local economy resulting in an economic multiplier effect or economic impact on host communities (Labuschagne, 2014:25).

Several event and festival-related studies have emphasised the importance of visitor expenditure in terms of both the economic impact on host destinations (Saayman & Saayman, 2006; Strydom et al., 2006; Gursoy et al., 2004) and the factors affecting visitors' expenditure at festivals (Brida et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2008). Even though evidence from numerous studies (Oberholzer et al., 2011: 77; Thrane, 2002: 281) suggests that visitors' spending at festivals have a positive impact on local economies, there are also findings that contradict this. Gursoy et al. (2014:177) for example found that, although events and festivals contribute to the local economy, the contributions may not be significant. This finding is supported by Li et al. (2013). In order for festivals to have a greater economic impact, Saayman and Rossouw (2010:256) state that festivals need to attract more visitors and increase the duration of their stay, which in turn will result in an increase in spending. An increase in visitor expenditure is critical for festivals to compete effectively and to keep up with the increase in the cost of living.

Visitor expenditure furthermore is affected by various aspects. This has been the focus of several studies. Aspects such as socio-demographic characteristics, mode of transport, purpose of trip, geographic origins and perceived authenticity have all been identified as factors that influence visitor expenditure (Thrane, 2002: 281). In addition, Kruger et al. (2012: 16) identify income, marital status, level of education, travel motives, length of stay and size of travelling group as factors influencing visitors' expenditure. According to Kim et al. (2008:387), a clear understanding of the factors influencing visitors' spending might assist festival organisers in planning their marketing campaigns for successful festival management. In addition, a proper understanding of these factors can have a positive effect on the volumes and patterns of visitor expenditure (Kruger et al., 2012: 17; Kim et al., 2008:390). Identifying the factors affecting festival visitors' expenditure is thus a key function in attracting more visitors as well as increasing visitors' spending.

The importance of visitor expenditure

Festivals and destinations rely heavily on visitor spending as a source of income, especially during the current challenging economic times with sponsorships and government grants being on the decline (Kruger et al., 2012: 11).

Visitor spending therefore is a critical variable for determining the economic impact of tourism on tourism destinations as well as the profitability of tourism destinations and festivals

(Frechtling, 2006:2). Festival profitability is an important consideration for both destinations and festivals, especially during tough economic times and even more so in an increasingly competitive festival market environment (Hu et al.,2013:468). Brown et al. (2010:61) also state that visitor expenditure at a destination and festival is an important consideration in the strategic planning of festival and destination facilities and amenities. In addition, Li et al., (2013:235) note that events are increasingly being utilised by policymakers to stimulate economic growth.

From the above it becomes clear that festivals are able to have a positive economic impact on the local economies of host destinations. Visitors' expenditure and the factors influencing it need to be monitored to determine the extent of visitor spending on the festival and on local communities. Additionally, it might assist festival organisers to determine whether or not the festival is feasible and sustainable

Methodology

Quantitative research was conducted by means of an empirical survey. In addition, the research was of a descriptive nature since the aim was to describe festival visitors' expenditure in 2011 and 2013.

The questionnaire

A questionnaire consisting of two sections was distributed amongst respondents at the Vryfees. The two sections comprised basic demographic questions (age, gender, occupation, province or country of residence and language) as well as questions pertaining to the spending of respondents on several categories including accommodation, food and beverages, transport, shows, and retail. In addition, there were critical questions about visitors' length of stay and size of the travel group. The first section of the questionnaire was used to compile a profile of visitors to the Vryfees in order to determine the characteristics of visitors, while the second section compared visitors' expenditure for 2011 and 2013.

The sample

The sample consisted of visitors to the Vryfees National Arts Festival in 2011 and 2013 respectively. The Vryfees Arts Festival (formally known as the Volksblad Arts Festival) is just one of many well-known festivals on the South African festival calendar. This festival is hosted annually in Bloemfontein, Free State, during the June/July school holidays. The festival grounds are situated on the campus of the University of the Free State and shows are staged in various venues across the campus. It is a joint initiative of the University of the Free State and Media24 in an effort to develop the festival market in Bloemfontein and to create an increase in income for the local community (Proos & Kock, 2014: 48).

A non-probability sampling method was used, namely convenience sampling based on the willingness and availability of festival visitors to complete the questionnaires. The first survey took place in July 2011 and the second survey in July 2013. At both festivals, questionnaires were distributed at the main festival terrain and at venues on the campus of the University of the Free State where visitors congregated before and after shows. In addition, questionnaires were administered by field workers who were appropriately briefed about the purpose of the research.

The sample size was calculated based on the formula of Krejcie and Morgan (1970:608) who state that as the population increases, sample size increases at a diminishing rate and remains relatively constant at slightly more than 380 cases. Therefore, for a population (N) of 1 000 000, a sample size (S) of 384 is sufficient (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970: 608). Approximately 30 000 visitors attend Vryfees annually (Pretorius, 2012: 16). Taking into account the number of visitors to the Vryfees, 400 questionnaires were distributed for both surveys. From the 2011 survey, 337 questionnaires were collected indicating a response rate of 84%, while 355 questionnaires were received from the 2013 survey, representing a response rate of 89%. The number of useable questionnaires were 330 from the 2011 survey and 327 from the 2013 survey.

Statistical analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed by means of statistical software, namely Statistical Software Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v 20.0). Frequency tables were used to analyse the profile of visitors to the Vryfees for 2011 and 2013. Furthermore, a *t*-test was conducted to determine the differences in visitor expenditure for 2011 and 2013. According to Pallant (2010:105), a *t*-test compares the mean scores of two independent variables to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between them in terms of one continuous variable. In this research, an independent *t*-test was done to compare visitors' spending for 2011 and 2013 on the following aspects: accommodation, food, beverages, shows, retail, stalls, transport and parking. A *p*-value of less than 0.05 is an indication that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean values of two groups.

Results

The results are discussed by referring to the profile of visitors at the Vryfees for 2011 and 2013, followed by the results of the *t*-test for comparing visitor expenditure.

Visitors profile of the Vryfees

According to Table 2, more visitors to the Vryfees were female, mainly Afrikaans-speaking and they originated mostly from the Free State province. In addition, the majority of visitors were in administrative positions such as administrative assistants or were students which might be due to the fact that the festival takes place on university grounds. The average group consisted of five persons in 2011 and seven persons in 2013, and they stayed for an average of four days in Bloemfontein. In general, the profile of visitors to the Vryfees remained more or less the same for 2011 and 2013.

Table 2: Profile of visitors at the Vryfees

Category	Profile of respondents 2011	Profile of respondents 2013
Gender	Male 35%; female 65%	Male 37%; female 63%
Home language	Afrikaans 92%	Afrikaans 88%
Occupation	Administrative 24%; professional 17%; student 13%	Student 32%; administrative 22%
Group size	Average of 5 persons	Average of 7 persons

Province of residence	Free State 87%	Free State 80%
Length of stay (days)	Average of 4 days	Average of 4 days

Results from the *t*-test: comparing visitors' expenditure at the Vryfees for 2011 and 2013

The results of the *t*-test are indicated in Table 3 and show significant differences in the spending of respondents for the following categories, namely: beverages ($p = 0.000$), retail ($p = 0.042$) stalls ($p = 0.003$), transport ($p = 0.007$) and parking ($p = 0.007$). There was an increase in spending from 2011 to 2013 for the items beverages, transport and parking.

Table 3: T-test for comparing festival visitors' expenditure for 2011 and 2013

Variable	Year	N	Mean and standard deviation	T-value	P-value
Accommodation	2011	25	1929 (1894)	0.683	0.498
	2013	26	1529 (2269)		
Food	2011	304	301 (359)	-1.289	0.198
	2013	291	340 (386)		
Beverages	2011	268	166 (210)	-6.460	0.000
	2013	274	318 (325)		
Shows	2011	185	562 (585)	0.069	0.945
	2013	144	557 (654)		
Retail	2011	119	484 (601)	2.047	0.042
	2013	120	350 (385)		
Stalls	2011	225	571 (737)	3.006	0.003
	2013	181	384 (436)		
Transport	2011	101	318 (457)	-2.721	0.007
	2013	81	550 (687)		
Parking	2011	35	17 (13)	-2.779	0.007
	2013	24	34 (33)		
Total	2011	330	1536 (2117)	0.801	0.423
	2013	327	1416 (1684)		

However, for retail and stalls, a decrease in spending occurred from 2011 to 2013, which might be concerning for the organisers of the Vryfees. For the remaining items (accommodation, food and shows), small differences in visitors' expenditure are shown and appear to be insignificant. This means that visitors' expenditure for the years 2011 and 2013 remained more or less the same. Overall, the results show that there was no significant difference in visitors' expenditure between 2011 and 2013. The small differences in expenditure indicate an area of concern for the Vryfees. According Kruger et al. (2012: 79), an increase in expenditure results in greater economic benefits for festivals and local communities. One could therefore argue that

the opposite is also true: a decrease in visitor spending reduces the economic impact of the festival on the destination.

Conclusion and recommendations

Festivals and destinations can benefit greatly from hosting festivals and events in terms of the economic impact resulting from festivals. To realise these benefits there is a need for festivals to perform better in order to remain profitable and sustainable over the long term. Staging a profitable and sustainable festival can however be challenging, taking into account the number of festivals and events staged annually throughout South Africa. One aspect affecting the profitability of festivals is that of visitor expenditure. In order for festivals to compete effectively, festival organisers must evaluate and increase visitor expenditure. Increasing visitor expenditure can be complex though since visitor spending is affected by factors such as socio-demographic characteristics and travel motives. The aim of this research was therefore to compare visitors' expenditure at the Vryfees for 2011 and 2013.

Quantitative research was conducted. The profile of festival visitors to the Vryfees was indicated by means of frequency tables followed by a *t*-test to compare visitors' expenditure. From the results, it appears that the profile of respondents to the Vryfees in 2011 and 2013 mostly remained the same. A significant increase from 2011 to 2013 was noted in spending for the items beverages, transport and parking. A significant decrease in visitors' expenditure however was found for retail and stalls. For the remainder of the items there was little or no significant difference in visitor expenditure. In addition, the average spending per person showed a slight insignificant decrease from 2011 to 2013. Generally, the results indicate an area of concern for festival organisers in terms of festival visitors' spending that needs to be addressed to increase visitor spending. This in turn will result in a greater economic impact on the host destination. It is thus recommended that festival organisers revise the festival's marketing strategies, programmes and facilities to encourage festival visitors to spend more on aspects such as accommodation, food, shows, retail and stalls. More specifically, attention should be given to increasing visitors' expenditure on retail and shows, noting the significant decrease in spending on these aspects. Festival visitors should also be encouraged to stay longer in order to increase their spending. Festival organisers should consider offering post-festival tours of the destination and its attractions to increase visitor spending even more.

Further research is needed to determine the future sustainability and viability of the Vryfees and of other arts festivals in South Africa in general. The factors influencing visitors' expenditure should also be analysed to gain a better understanding of visitors' expenditure behaviour. Profiling the high spenders at arts festivals could also provide valuable insights into the most profitable market segments to be targeted by arts festivals.

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