



New versus returning visitors: the strawberry festival at the Redberry farm in George, South Africa

Dr T. Ramukumba

Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences, Tourism Department

Nelson Mandela University (George campus)

Private Bag X 6531, George, Western Cape Province

South Africa, 6530

E-mail address: Takalani.Ramukumba@mandela.ac.za

Abstract

The aim of this research is to evaluate the differences and or similarities between new and returning visitors at one of South Africa's unique festivals, the Strawberry Festival, which is held annually at the Redberry farm in George in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. New and returning festival attendees are important for the success and well-being of any festival. It is therefore paramount that those who organise festivals must look at both the needs and interests of both the new and also returning visitors. The aim of this research was to look into what differentiates new visitors from returning visitors to the Strawberry Festival but also to determine what the similarities are between these two groups. The study adopted a quantitative research methodology and used questionnaires as a data collection instrument. The results of the study revealed that there were small statistical differences between new and returning visitors to the Strawberry Festival when it comes to spending patterns, quality of entertainment and waiting times to be served at various stations during the festival. The results imply that festival organisers/managers need to be aware of the differences between new and returning visitors so that they can 'tailor-make' festival activities to address the needs of the two market segments.

Keywords: Key words: Festival, new visitors, returning visitors, similarities, differences

Introduction

According to Kruger, Saayman and Strydom (2010) festivals have increased over the past number of years and this has led to high levels of competition for festival attendees and festival sponsors. Given the above levels of competition, Lau and McKercher (2004) suggested that it is therefore important for festival organisers to be cognisant of the types of attendees who attend these festivals. According to these authors, there are significant differences between new festival attendees and returning attendees to a festival, both at a level of composition, and also at the level of travel behaviour. The views of Shanka and Taylor (2004) propels the notion that many festivals that are held annually around the world rely heavily on returning visitors. Given the above, it is therefore crucial and important, that those who organise these festivals should understand the differences and or similarities between new and returning attendees to a festival. The main reason why these festival organisers should be aware of these similarities and differences is that they may influence their marketing strategies, and how they design festivals and ultimately how they promote and market them. The suggested idea here is that if there are significant differences between these two types of festival attendees, it may imply that different marketing strategies should be developed for the different market segments. In this regard, to effectively develop a good marketing strategy for festivals, it is worthwhile to understand and determine which characteristics significantly differentiate new visitors from returning visitors.

Kruger, Saayman and Strydom (2010) proposed that the ability of the festival organisers would go a long way in determining the longevity and survival of festivals. Based on their ability to understand the differences in characteristics and requirements of both new and returning visitors to these festivals, success or failure will result. The idea proposed above emanated from the ideas of Kemperman et al. (2003) who assert that festival managers will be well served if they understand the similarities and differences between new and returning festival



attendees as they will be able to plan, manage and ensure effective marketing and promotions of these festivals. As such, festival managers will also be able to organise festivals that will ensure repeat visitation but also have the ability to attract new visitors.

McKercher and Wong, (2004) and Lau and McKercher (2004) both agreed that there are two types of market segments in festivals, and these are new and returning visitors. In this case, new attendees will represent those visitors who are attending the festival for the first time, whilst returning visitors will represent those who have visited and attended the festival before and are therefore familiar with the festival and will have some degree of the range of experiences provided by the festival.

According to Delamere (2001), both the public and private sectors including the local community members who reside where the festivals take place, view festivals as financial injectors for the the local economies. Saayman (2004) whilst supporting the idea above, provided a different approach and pointed that the contribution of events and festivals to the tourism industry lies on the basis that festivals are by their nature attractions and therefore serve to provide entertainment value and they can attract visitors to the destination who spend money that ends up contributing to the development and growth of the local economies. This idea stems from Prentice and Anderson (2003) who have argued that festivals have gained the characteristics of destinations in their own right, due to them being areas where activities also take place.

Accordingly, this article aims to investigate the differences and/or similarities between new and returning visitors to Strawberry Festival in George and their impact on the sustainable management of the event.

Literature review

According to Arcodia and Whitford (2007), the proper management of festivals can have positive economic, social and political impacts at the communities where they take place including the destination at large. Given the above, it is therefore essential that festival organisers plan properly and select the promotional materials that will ensure maximum return on investment through attracting the potential visitors. Lau and McKercher (2004) noted that returning visitors to a festival may represent a cheaper segment of the market for festivals around the world and are therefore most likely to provide positive returns on investment. The idea above stems from the idea proposed by Oppermann (2000) who noted that there were possible reasons for loyal customers/visitors to a festival to be considered a cost effective segment for maximum return on investment by festival organisers and some of the reasons advanced were as follows:

- It is cheaper to attract repeat visitors than to attract new ones since repeat visitors already have some experience of the festival.
- Festival attendees who makes a return to the festival may provide an indication of satisfaction with the experience at the festival in the past.
- Repeat visitors to a festival are most likely to recommend the festival through word of mouth to others.

However, Petrick (2004b) differs with the opinions above and has indicated that the reasons provided to justify repeat visitors as a desirable market segment are based on assumptions and he argues that there is no empirical evidence to support the reasoning that returning festival attendees are better or different from new visitors. Whilst there are contrasting views on the importance of new and returning visitors to festivals, the underlying factor is that both market segments are crucial for the sustainability of these festivals in the long-term.

Vogt, Stewart and Fesenmaire (1998) noted that attracting new visitors to attend festivals provides a source of income that renders these festivals as agents for economic development



and economic growth. Given the above, the marketing efforts by festival organisers should always try to reach news visitors in a way that convinces them to attend these festivals through the creation of awareness about these festivals. This idea was further supported by Shanka and Taylor (2004) who indicated that if the festival becomes increasingly successful over a period of time, it will have the ability to raise its profile and thereby its ability to attract new visitors will be enhanced.

Thomson and Schoefield (2009) noted that a successful festival largely depends on a careful and well-designed festival strategic plan. In this case, it is thus important that when such a festival strategic plan is developed, consideration be duly given to have the knowledge of the festival itself and the targeted festival attendees so as to make sure that the festival is a resounding success. Based on the above, it is therefore important that festival organisers pay attention to providing high quality and satisfying experience to festival attendees. The high quality offered must be equated to good value for money as this may influence an attendee's decision to attending the festival in future. According to Lee, Petrick and Crompton (2007) if the visitors have a satisfying experience at the festival, they can influence their friends and relatives to attend the festival in future. The same authors went further to suggest that festival organisers should make enough effort to understand what motivates festival attendees to attend a particular festival since competition amongst various festivals is growing. The same authors argue that understanding festival attendee's motives to attend a festival will help festival organisers to provide better services to attendees that will ultimately satisfy their expectations.

According to Li et al. (2008), it is imperative to understand the differences between new and returning visitors because these differences provide festival organisers with information they can use to develop strategies and marketing plans specific to each market segment. The idea above originated from Wang (2004), who indicated that the reasoning is based on the assumption that there are differences between the demands of returning visitors as compared to those of new visitors.

The views of Correia, Oliveira and Butler (2008) are that those who organise festivals should, at all times strive to find the similarities and differences between festival attendees so that they are able to develop marketing strategies suitable for each of these diverse groups. Jang and Feng (2007) cautioned that if festival managers/organisers pay too much attention to returning visitors, they may fall victim to misunderstanding the movement of their target markets and therefore allocate marketing resources inefficiently, and this supported the views indicated above. Therefore, to avoid inefficiency, festival organisers/managers should make efforts to understand the differences between new and returning visitors and in this way, they will be able to understand their entire market segment far better.

Studies about comparing new and returning visitors done by Gitelson and Crompton (1984) concluded that each group of visitors had different motivations for attending the festival and this resulted in different behaviours. Some of these differences between new and returning visitors are further elaborated below:

According to a study done by Kruger et al (2010) the following differences were identified between new and returning visitors to a festival:

- Differences were identified based on age, how much they spend at festivals and their nationality.
- New visitors tend to be younger than returning visitors.

These findings were further confirmed by a study done by Li et al (2008) where he concluded that new visitors were most likely to be younger and single.

In his study, Wang (2004) found that returning visitors and new visitors had different perceptions of satisfaction with their festival experiences. Kozak and Rimmington (2001) who



noted that returning visitors are most likely to be satisfied by attributes of the festival such as feeling safe, cleanliness and availability of parking reached the same conclusions.

Methods

Data for the study was obtained through an on-site survey of the visitors; structured questionnaires were distributed to the visitors at the exit gates after their consent was verbally obtained. This was done to ensure that the visitors would be able to give precise answers since some of the questions required information regarding the after experience of the festival. Although the questionnaire was designed for self-administration, research assistants were available to help explain and clarify any misunderstanding. The perception of the visitors on the services and facilities was collected using the five-point Likert scales. The evaluation of the service and facility elements is used as an indicator of the level of satisfaction of the visitors on the services and facilities. The analysis of the profiles of the participant was done using descriptive analyses.

Results

The results below show the similarities and or differences between new and returning visitors to the festival. The tables below will show the above in relation to various factors that were used to scale the similarities and or differences between the two groups.

Visitor profiles

Table 1: Time of attending the festival

Times attending this festival	Percentage
First-time	51%
Second time	34%
Third time	9%
More than three times	6%
Total	100%

Results in Table 1 above clearly show that the Strawberry Festival had a high number of new visitors (51%) and followed by 33.8% of those visiting for the second time. The least visitors (6.3) were those who were visiting for more than three times whilst those visiting for the third time were only 8.9%.

Table 2: Money spent during the festival

Times attending this festival	How much spent at festival			
	R100 or less	R101 - R500	R501 or more	Total
New attendees	16%	64%	20%	100%
Returning attendees	6%	58%	36%	100%
Total	11%	61%	28%	100%
Chi²(d.f. = 2, n = 236) = 10.67; p = .005; V = 0.21 Small statistical significance difference				

The results of the study as shown in Table 2 above, indicates that in general, new visitors spend more than returning visitors on the various amounts presented with the exception of returning visitors who spent more than new visitors on amounts of R501 or more. In all the other categories of spending amounts, new visitors spent more than returning visitors. However, these results also infer that that both new and returning visitors are economically viable markets at the festival since the spending at the festival showed a small statistical



significant different at 0.21. These findings are similar to those of studies done by Petrick (2004b) and those of Li et al (2008). Both these studies concluded that returning festival attendees are most likely to spend less and therefore can be considered as price sensitive whilst new festival attendees spend slightly more. Wang (2004) reached the same findings, however results of the study done by Alegre and Juaneda (2006) found the opposite to be the case. The contradiction in the results of these studies further strengthen the case to understand the similarities and differences between new and returning visitors to festivals.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on festival attributes

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Quality of food	1.77	2.00	0.72
Quality of entertainment	1.89	2.00	0.79
Cleanliness of restrooms	2.00	2.00	0.93
Availability of parking	1.87	2.00	0.80
Waiting times to be served	2.03	2.00	0.91
Festival's overall atmosphere	1.76	2.00	0.79

In order to determine what festival visitors perceived as being the most important festival attribute in determining satisfaction, the respondents indicated how important each of the six attributes were on a ranked ordinal scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagreed), to 5 (Strongly agreed). Table 3 displays the mean score and standard deviation for all six festival attributes. The highest rated festival factor was waiting times to be served (M=2.03, SD=0.91), cleanliness of the restrooms (M=2.00, SD=0.93), quality of entertainment (M=1.89, SD=0.79), cleanliness of festival site (M=3.46, SD=0.53) and cleanliness of restrooms (M=3.389, SD=0.56). The items festival overall atmosphere and quality of food were rated the lowest.

Table 4: Festival activities and atmosphere

t-Tests: Festival atmosphere vs times attending this festival								
Variable	Times attending this festival	Mean	S.D	Difference	t	d.f.	p	Cohen's d
Quality of food	New attendees	1,80	0,76	0,06	0,67	234	,506	n/a
	Returning attendees	1,74	0,68					
Quality of entertainment	New attendees	2,00	0,83	0,22	2,13	234	,034	0,28
	Returning attendees	1,78	0,73					Small
Cleanliness of washrooms	New attendees	2,10	0,98	0,21	1,77	233	,078	n/a
	Returning attendees	1,89	0,86					
Availability of parking	New attendees	1,88	0,86	0,02	0,21	233	,830	n/a
	Returning attendees	1,86	0,74					
Wait times to be served	New attendees	2,14	0,92	0,24	2,00	234	,047	0,26
	Returning attendees	1,90	0,89					Small
Festival's overall atmosphere	New attendees	1,79	0,84	0,06	0,61	234	,542	n/a
	Returning attendees	1,73	0,74					
Overall Rating	New attendees	1,95	0,65	0,14	1,65	234	,101	n/a
	Returning attendees	1,82	0,61					

The results of the study infer that overall there was no significant difference between the overall satisfaction by the festival atmosphere supported by a mean difference of 1.79 for new visitors and 1.73 for returning visitors. These findings are in sharp contrast to the findings of



the study done by Li et al. (2008) which reached a conclusion that in as far as satisfaction levels are concerned, returning festival attendees tend to be more satisfied when compared to new festival attendees. It is also important to highlight that there were small statistical differences between the new visitors and returning visitors concerning quality of entertainment and waiting times to be served at different stations during the festival.

Concerning quality of entertainment, the new visitors rated their satisfaction higher (2.0 mean score) than returning visitors (1.78 mean score) and this was confirmed by a small statistical difference confirmed by P value of .034 and 0.28 Cohen's d for this variable. Similar results with small statistical difference were observed for waiting times to be served where new visitors rated the factor higher than returning visitors, which was confirmed by a mean score of 2.14 for new visitors as compared to 1.90, mean score of returning visitors. This resulted in a small statistical significance difference confirmed by a P value of .047 and Cohen's d of 0.26 for the variable observed.

Table 5: Times attending this festival and Likelihood of returning next year

Times attending this festival	Likelihood of returning next year			Total
	Definitely would return	Probably would return	Definitely not returning	
New attendees	52%	36%	12%	100%
Returning attendees	52%	38%	10%	100%
Total	52%	37%	11%	100%
Chi ² (d.f. = 2, n = 236) = 0.26; p = .880				

The results of the study show a much closer distribution of views regarding future visit to the festival between new visitors and returning visitors. Both new and returning visitors (52%) indicated that they would definitely make a return to the festival whilst 36% (new visitors) and 38% returning visitors indicated they would probably return to the festival. A small percentage of both, 12% (new visitors) and 10% (returning visitors) indicated that they would definitely not return to the festival. These results infer that the future sustainability of the festival look good since the majority of the visitors indicated that they will return and another significant percentage indicated they would probably return to the festival. This is supported by results with no statistical significant difference between the two groups of visitors confirmed by Chi² (d.f. =0.26) and a P value of .880.

Conclusion and recommendations

The results clearly suggest that it is important to understand the importance of both new visitors and returning visitors to festivals based on contributions they can make to the future sustainability of the festival. The findings in this study share some similarities with some previous research studies conducted in the past but also differ with some findings of past studies. The similarities and differences in the findings are pointers that festivals organisers must continuously strive to understand the similarities and differences between new and returning visitors to a festival in order to ensure that they cater for both segments. In this way, they will ensure the future success and sustainability of these festivals.

References

- Arcodia, C. & Whitford, M. (2007). Festival attendance and the development of social capital. *Journal of Convention and Event Tourism*, 8(2), 1-18.
- Alegre, J. & Juaneda, C. (2006). Destination loyalty: consumer's economic behaviour, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(3), 684–706.



- Correia, A., Oliveira, N. & Butler, R. (2008). New and returning visitors to Cape Verde: the overall image, *Tourism Economics*, 14(1), 185–203.
- Delamere, T.A. (2001). Development of a scale to measure resident attitudes towards the social impacts of community festivals. Part II: Verification of the scale, *Event Management*, 7, 25–38.
- Gitelson, R.J. & Crompton, J.L. (1984). Insights into the returning vacation phenomenon, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 11(2), 199–217.
- Kemperman, A.D.A.M., Joh, C.H. & Timmermans, H.J.P. (2004). Comparing first-time and repeat visitors' activity patterns, *Tourism Analysis*, 8(2–4), 150–164.
- Kozak, M. (2001). Repeat visitors' behaviour at two distinct destinations, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(3), 785–808.
- Kruger, M., Saayman, M. & Strydom, A. (2010). First time versus repeat visitors: the Volkblad Arts festival, *Acta Academia*, 42(4), 92-121.
- Lau, L.S. & McKercher, B. (2004). 'Exploration versus consumption: a comparison of first-time and repeat tourists', *Journal of Travel Research*, 42(3), 279–285.
- Lee, S.Y., Petrick, J. & Crompton, J. (2007). The Roles of Quality and Intermediary Constructs in Determining Festival Attendees' Behavioural Intention. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 402-412.
- Li, X., Cheng, C. Kim, H. & Petrick, J.F. (2008). A systematic comparison of first-time and repeat visitors via a two-phase online survey, *Tourism Management*, 29, 278–293.
- McKercher, B. & Wong, D.Y.Y. (2004). Understanding tourism behaviour: examining the combined effects of prior visitation history and destination statuses, *Journal of Travel Research*, 43, 171–179.
- Oppermann, M. (2000). Tourism destination loyalty, *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(1), 78–84.
- Petrick, J.F. (2004b). Are loyal visitors the desired visitors? *Tourism Management*, 25, 463–470.
- Prentice, R. & Anderson, V. (2003). Festival as creative destination, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(1), 7–30.
- Saayman, M. (2004). *An Introduction to Sports Tourism and Event Management*. 2nd Ed. Potchefstroom: Leisure Consultants and Publications.
- Shanka, T. & Taylor, R. (2004). Discriminating factors of first-time and repeat visitors to wine festivals, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 7(2), 134–145.
- Thompson, K. & Schofield, P. (2009). Segmenting and profiling visitors to the Ulaanbaata Naadam Festival by motivation. *Event Management*, 13(1), 1–15.
- Vogt, C.A., Stewart, S.I. & Fesenmaier, D.R. (1998). Communication strategies to reach first-time visitors, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 7(2), 69–89.
- Wang, D. (2004). Tourist behaviour and returning visitation to Hong Kong, *Tourism Geographies*, 6(1), 99–118.