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Understanding the Role of Culture and Heritage in Community Festivals: An Importance-Performance Analysis

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Understanding the Role of Culture and Heritage in Community Festivals: An Importance-Performance Analysis

Abstract

Festivals can support local communities by bringing in unique visitors who will inject new revenue into the economy. Continued evaluation of festivals is necessary to ensure they are meeting customer expectations, which will generate positive word-of-mouth advertising and repeat visitation. The research reported here used an importance-performance analysis to evaluate a regional festival in South Carolina. Particular attention was paid to the importance of the cultural aspects of the festival. Based on a survey of 212 festival attendees, several recommendations are made to festival planners. Results indicate that cultural aspects of the festival were not very important to attendees.

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Introduction

Properly planned festivals have the ability to attract a variety of consumers to an area and in turn increase the economic impact on the community. Festivals are capable of displaying and honoring cultural traditions, as well as boosting the local economy (Crompton & McKay, 1997). The success of festivals is of particular importance to Extension professionals and educators interested in facilitating community collaboration. This is because funds generated by festivals help sustain the jobs of vendors, provide local tourism related businesses with a spike in revenue, benefit other businesses through indirect and induced spending, and increase taxable revenue for local governments.

In order to sustain or increase the economic benefit to the local community, it is essential to understand the attributes of festivals that are most important to consumers. By understanding the needs of the people visiting the festival, researchers can recognize the reasons participants are coming to the event and what they value enough to spend their money on. A satisfied participant may be further inclined to spend more money than an unsatisfied customer; therefore the monitoring of consumers' interests must be undertaken to determine what will gratify them the most. Satisfied visitors may return to the festival in the future, as well as encourage more visitors to attend through positive word-of-mouth advertising (Dougherty & Green, 2011). Therefore research to determine the most important interests of the festival participants should be studied to ensure positive changes are made to keep consumer satisfaction high.

There are many motives for consumers to attend a festival. These include escaping or relaxing, seeking excitement, experiencing event novelty, socializing, and family togetherness (Getz, 1991). Cultural exploration has also been found to be a significant reason for participants to attend an event (Crompton & McKay, 1997). This can be helpful in educating the public and carrying out Extension's educational mission by attracting people who may not attend an educational class or seminar (Hustedde, 1993). Using an importance-performance analysis (IPA), the study reported here analyzed the relative importance of cultural elements in an agricultural festival and yielded practical implications as to the relative importance of cultural/heritage elements to customer satisfaction.

Literature Review

Cultural festivals aim to act as a dynamic force behind cultural innovation and social bonding, while bringing in financial support (Herrero, Sanz, Bedate, & Barrio, 2011). Heritage and agricultural festivals are types of cultural festivals that promote learning and trying a variety of food. This type of business often represents opportunities for Extension agents to assist farms and small business in opening up new distribution channels and finding new customers. Selling products at these festivals often requires minimal investment of time and capital, while hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of visitors may encounter the products of these businesses for the first time.

Depending on how far a participant has to travel to attend an event, restaurants, hotels, and other local businesses not directly involved in the festival can greatly benefit from the swell of visitors. This injection of funds into the community can have a dramatic affect on the benefits received by the locals. Taxed income can help improve community resources, while the growth in personal income can spur increased spending and economic growth.

An issue with cultural festivals is that they can devolve to displaying popular culture instead of authentic culture (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007). This demonstrates that festival participants may be less interested in learning about heritage than they are about being entertained. McKercher and Chan (2005) advocate that culture as the main reason people visit an attraction is overemphasized. They suggest that poor methodologies and enthusiastic researchers have exaggerated the importance of culture to tourists and that tourists are primarily interested in relaxation and entertainment. It is important that event managers understand the qualities consumers feel are most important to them in order to meet the desires of the participants. By doing so, planners are able to organize events in a way that can attract more tourists and, consequently, more money to the area. A key aspect of cultural festivals is the amount of cultural characteristics displayed at the festival, and it is important for organizers to understand the relative importance of cultural to overall visitor satisfaction.

Therefore, in an effort to both provide practical guidelines for cultural festival planners and to further understand visitors' preferences in agricultural/heritage festivals, the study reported here collected the results of a survey conducted on festival goers at a small heritage and agricultural festival in South Carolina and then used an importance performance analysis to pursue two research objectives:

- O₁: Analyze areas in which the festival may be able to improve visitors overall satisfaction
- O₂: Analyze the relative value of culture elements to overall satisfaction with the festival

Methods

The study used an IPA methodology to analyze the importance of various attributes of the festival. IPAs are frequently used as a tool in event or destination evaluation (Deng, 2007; Lacher & Harrill, 2010; Smith & Costello, 2009) because they give a clear assessment of how well various attributes are performing along with how important they are to overall satisfaction.

Data collection was conducted in a weekend-long festival held in a small town in South Carolina in the fall of 2010. The festival focuses on promoting local agricultural products and culture. A member of every group that passed by the main route through the festival was asked to complete the survey on computers. Surveying took place for a total of 12 hours over 2 days.

Included in the questionnaires was a series of Likert-type questions about the respondent's satisfaction with 12 attributes of the festival and the importance of these attributes to overall satisfaction with the festival. An attribute's importance is determined by asking respondents "Please indicate how IMPORTANT the following elements are to your satisfaction (1 very unimportant to 7 very important)"- followed by a list of the 12 attributes with the seven-point Likert-type scale next to each item. The average value for each attribute was then calculated, and that value is the importance score. An attribute's performance is determined by asking respondents "Please indicate how SATISFIED you were with the following elements of the festival (1 very dissatisfied to 7 very satisfied)"- followed by a list of the 12 attributes with the seven-point Likert-type scale next to them. The average value for each attribute was then calculated, and that value is the performance score.

The importance and performance of each attribute were then compared to the average scores for all attributes, and these comparisons are used to place the attributes into the four categories seen in Table 1. Of particular interest in the IPA are the "concentrate here" category, which indicates the attribute is underperforming despite its relative importance, and the "possible overkill" category, which could indicate that perhaps too many resources are invested in an attribute that is not very important to consumers.

Table 1.
IPA Categories

Attribute's Importance Compared to Mean	Attribute's Performance Compared to Mean	Traditional Name for Category
Higher	Higher	Good Job
Higher	Lower	Concentrate Here
Lower	Higher	Possible Overkill
Lower	Lower	Low Priority

Results and Discussion

A total of 622 groups were approached, and 212 questionnaires were collected, for a response rate of

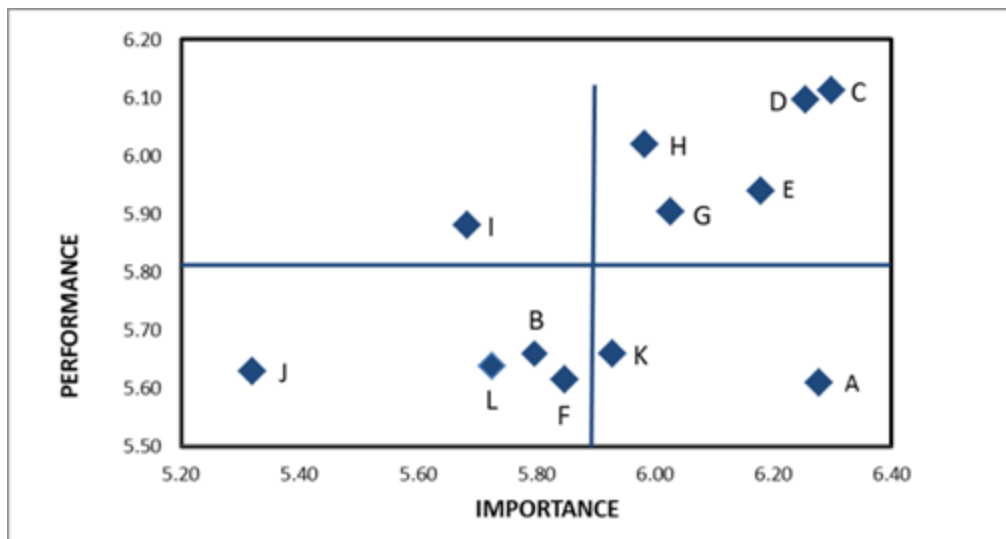
34%. Means for individual attribute's importance ranged from 5.32 (quality of the shows and entertainment) to 6.30 (cleanliness of the festival), and performance scores ranged from 5.61 (cost of food) to 6.11 (cleanliness of the festival). The overall means for importance and performance were calculated as 5.94 and 5.81 respectively. These means mentioned above are used to sort the attributes into the four IPA categories as follows (Table 2).

Table 2.
Attributes Sorted into the Four Categories

Category	Activity	Importance	Performance
Good Job	The cleanliness of the festival	6.30	6.11
	The quality of the food	6.26	6.10
	The variety of arts and crafts	5.98	6.02
	The quality of the arts and crafts	6.03	5.90
	The variety of food	6.18	5.94
Concentrate Here	The cost of food	6.28	5.61
	The variety of shows and entertainment	5.93	5.66
Possible Overkill	The amount of culture showcased in the arts and crafts	5.68	5.88
Low Priority	The cost of arts and crafts	5.80	5.66
	The amount of culture showcased in the food	5.85	5.62
	The amount of culture showcased in the shows and entertainment	5.72	5.64
	The quality of the shows and entertainment	5.32	5.63

This is visually represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
IPA Graphically Displayed



Note: The points respond to: A - The cost of food, B - The cost of crafts, C - The cleanliness of the festival, D -The quality of the food, E -The variety of food, F -The amount of culture showcased in the food, G - The quality of the arts and crafts, H - The variety of arts and crafts, I - The amount of culture showcased in the arts and crafts, J - The quality of the shows and entertainment, K - The variety of shows and entertainment, L - The amount of culture showcased in the shows and entertainment

As for O_1 , there are a number of practical implications that can be drawn from the research. For the festival, there is a major need to evaluate the pricing of food. This attribute was very important to festival goers, but was underperforming in regards to customers' expectations. Working to offer cheaper food may be the quickest way to increase overall satisfaction. Additionally, the importance of festival goers' experience with food appears to be crucially important to overall satisfaction. Of the four most important attributes, three were related to food. Perhaps this should be expected at a festival that emphasizes agriculture, but the results of this report certainly re-enforce the importance.

The shows and entertainment were shown to not be very important to attendees. Three of the six lowest importance attributes were related to shows and entertainment. These items were also generally poorly performing, but given their low importance, it does not seem critically important to invest major resources in improving them. Finally, the festival should work to maintain the cleanliness of the festival because this was the most important attribute to tourists. Attendees were very satisfied with the cleanliness of the festival, and managers should work to ensure that this high standard is maintained.

As for O_2 , it does not appear that culture is of major importance to participants at this festival. All of the three attributes relating to culture scored below the mean value of importance. Of the five least important attributes, three are related to culture. These results indicate that attendees may not value heritage highly at this festival; therefore there is little need to increase the amount of culture featured in the festival. More broadly, this may indicate to other agricultural festival managers that culture may not need to be a high priority in planning festivals. Attendees might be more interested in the quality

of various aspects of the festival along with overall quality issues, like cleanliness.

Conclusion

The question remains as to how applicable these results are to other types of festival. This was a festival focusing on agriculture and local heritage; results may vary for festivals that have different focuses or occur in different states. While studies often emphasize the importance of culture to tourists, it frequently appears that heritage attractions are of secondary importance when compared to more traditional activities or general relationship and enjoyment. This idea is supported by research in a variety of destinations and attraction types (Boley, Nickerson, & Bosak, 2011; Lacher & Harill, 2010; McKercher & Chan, 2005); however, continued investigation could lead to finding venues in which heritage is the principle attraction.

While culture has been seen as a driving force in past studies, the research reported here shows that culture is not of primary importance at this festival. Consumers are clearly interested in the culinary aspects of the festivals, and Extensions offices should encourage local farms to participate in these types of festivals as a method of earning new customers and generating positive word-of-mouth advertising. While past research supports the claim that cultural importance can be exaggerated (McKercher & Chan, 2005; Crespi-Vallbona, & Richards, 2007) we should add that there are other reasons to include local heritage in festivals that go beyond attendee experience. Heritage festivals can stimulate community involvement and provide a strong "sense of place" for residents (Brzuszek, 2004). Planners and Extension agents should think about the overall importance of heritage to the community, along with tourists deciding how much emphasis culture should receive at these types of festivals.

Overall, these results suggest that festival managers should be focusing their efforts on creating an event where participants can relax and be entertained. Emphasizing culture and authenticity may not be a primary concern of participants, and festival managers should not feel that they must force culture into their event if there is not a natural fit. Respondents clearly show a preference for relatively basic attributes such as food quality and general cleanliness. There are certainly events and festivals that rely strongly on culture for attracting attendees, but not having a strong tie to culture should not be considered a major detriment. Managers can work to improve basic services and attractions to ensure that attendees are enjoying themselves and may become repeat visitors, spread positive word of mouth, and increase the overall economic impact of the festival.

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