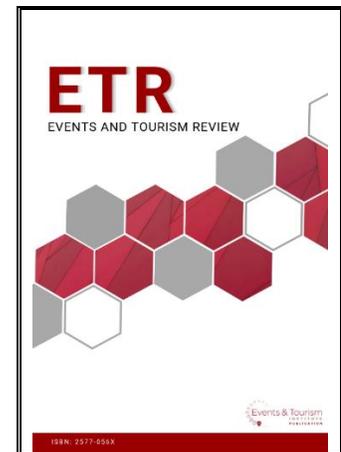


Examining the Visitor Profile and Event Characteristics of a Festival

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Abstract

Festivals and special events serve as important attractors for destinations and provide unique experiences for visitors. The purpose of the study is to examine a visitor profile and event characteristics of the 2015 Louisiana Seafood Festival. Food and beverage and music were the top rated aspects of the festival most important to the attendee. Results showed that the festival made a valuable contribution by attracting nearly 56,000 attendees. The visitor profile provided valuable information on visitor characteristics, event characteristics, and visitor spending. The event organizers can use the visitor profile for marketing and advertising efforts to attract more patrons to the festival.

Keywords: Festivals, Visitor Profile, Event Characteristics, Seafood

Introduction

The festival industry in the City of New Orleans encompasses so much of the city's food, resources, and culture. French Quarter Fest, Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the Essence Festival highlight the city's musical scene while festivals such as the Po-Boy Festival, Decadence Festival, New Orleans Oyster Festival and the Louisiana Seafood Festival highlights the city's food, culture, and natural resources. Festivals can develop social and cultural awareness as well as serve as an economic generator.

Studies have highlighted the need to examine festival for their impact on the community, the attendees behaviors, and determining social, cultural and economic impacts (Kyungmi & Uysal, 2003; Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004, Eraqi, 2007; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Slabbert & Viviers, 2011). This gap is the catalyst for the current study.

The purpose of this study was to provide a visitor profile analysis of the 2015 Louisiana Seafood Festival (LSF). It is the objective of the study to profile the event characteristics of the festival and the travel characteristics of the attendees to the festival. The research questions are:

- 1) What are the event characteristics that are important to the 2015 LSF attendees, and 2) what are the travel characteristics of LSF attendees to the festival?

Ultimately, the implications of this study will provide the organizers with valuable recommendations for future festivals to attract visitors.

Literature Review

Festival Research

Festivals and special events serve as important attractors for destinations and provide unique experiences for visitors. Research shows that it is important to understand the perceptions of residents and try to maximize positive perceptions (Gursoy et al., 2004). Several studies have addressed resident perceptions of the impact of festivals (Andreck, Valentine,



Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Fredline & Faulkner, 2002; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Ohmann, Jones & Wilkes, 2006).

Knowledge regarding the impacts of festivals on communities is growing, and it is important to determine the impacts of the festival on the community (Eraqi, 2007; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Slabbert & Viviers, 2011). Research has focused on understanding attendee behavior or delineating the direct economic impacts of visitation upon host communities and suggested that research beyond economic impacts and motivations were very few. Studies highlighted the need for a research agenda to consider all three aspects of economic, social and environmental aspects (Kyungmi & Uysal, 2003; Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004)

The Louisiana Seafood Festival

The Louisiana Seafood Festival was selected as the festival to investigate. The Louisiana Seafood Festival is a celebration of all the fresh and flavorful seafood from the state of Louisiana. The seafood highlighted at the festival include crab, shrimp, oyster, alligator, crawfish and all fin fish. The festival was founded in 2007 and is eight years old. In the past, the dates for the festival fluctuated during the fall months of September and October. In 2015, the festival locked in the Labor Day weekend dates for three years. Along with the fluctuation of dates, the venue for the festival has also fluctuated. Each year the venue grew larger to accommodate the growing number of patrons. Since 2014, the festival has taken place in the New Orleans City Park Fairgrounds, one of the largest festival venues in the city.

The three-day festival offers the following activities/events: three days of live music, celebrity chef cooking demonstrations, a beer garden featuring a wide selection of craft beers, a kid's tent featuring seafood-themed activities, an arts village, and food and beverage vendors. Admission for the festival is free; however, patrons purchase food and beverage items as well as arts and crafts.

Methodology

Questionnaire Design

Representatives of the Louisiana Hospitality Foundation (LHF), the producer of the Louisiana Seafood Festival (LSF), contracted with the Hospitality Research Center (HRC) at the University of New Orleans (UNO) for the purpose of providing information about attendees to the 2015 LSF festival. The questionnaire was adapted from a visitor profile survey developed and used by the HRC in prior studies (Chacko & Marcell, 2007, Roussel, 2009, Jainchill, 2013). Representatives from HRC, with input from LHF, designed the questionnaire to be administered during the event. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions. Fifteen questions addressed the festival event characteristics, eleven questions addressed visitor attendees travel characteristics, and four questions addressed demographics.

Data Collection and Analysis

A team of surveyors trained in data collection administered the surveys during the festival weekend, September 4-September 6, 2015 via on-site intercept. A total of 600 completed surveys were obtained. The completed questionnaires were forwarded to HRC for

data entry and editing. The HRC analyzed the data using statistical software, results were tabulated and a frequency analysis conducted. Information provided by respondents relative to their experience at the festival (sociological/cultural festival impacts) and demographic characteristics were summarized using simple statistics. Responses to open-ended questions were categorized by hand and then organized based upon the most frequent themes that emerged from visitors' comments. These data collection and analysis methods were successfully used in other festival research studies (Shani et al., 2009; Mcdowall et al., 2014)

The visitor profile provides information presenting the results from each question included in the survey. In some tables, totals may not add up due to rounding. LHF representatives provided 56,000 attendees as the attendance figure of the event, which was used in the visitor profile.

Results and Discussion

Travel Characteristics

Most of the Louisiana Seafood Festival (LSF) attendees were residents of the New Orleans metro area (73.8%). The majority of local attendees to the festival came from Orleans Parish (54.8%) and the second largest set of local attendees came from Jefferson Parish (37.4%). Louisiana (outside the New Orleans metro area) was the top state of residence for out-of-town visitors to the festival (14.8%). The remaining top states of residence included Texas (13.4%), Florida (9.4%), Mississippi (9.4%), and Georgia (7.4%). Table 1 shows the parish of residence for the local attendees.

Table 1. Parish of Residency for Local Residents

Response	Percentage 2015
Orleans Parish	54.8
Jefferson Parish	37.4
St. Tammany Parish	4.4
St. Charles Parish	1.1
St. John the Baptist Parish	1.1
St. Bernard Parish	0.7
Plaquemines Parish	0.5
Total	100.0
Valid Cases	436

The majority (84.6%) of out-of-town Louisiana Seafood Festival visitors stayed overnight in the New Orleans area. Visitors who stayed overnight in New Orleans spent an average of 3.5 nights in the area. Over half (57.3%) of the overnight visitors stayed in hotels, while a smaller portion stayed with friends or relatives (25.8%).

The average room rate for visitors staying in a hotel was \$149 per night. The majority (66.7%) of overnight visitors who stayed in hotels reported having two people per room. Most of the overnight visitors who stayed in a hotel reported that their party occupied only one room (83.6%).

More than half (58.8%) of the out-of-town visitors drove to New Orleans. Another 40.5% chose to fly into the city. 23.6% of the visitors who were in New Orleans to attend the Louisiana Seafood Festival while the majority came to the city for other vacation or pleasure purposes (63.5%).

Visitors spent an average of \$651 during their trip to New Orleans. The largest spending category was for meals (\$228) followed by lodging (\$129). Table 2 shows Average Individual Visitor Trip Expenditures.

Table 2. Average Individual Visitor Trip Expenditures

Response	2015
Restaurants/Meals	\$228
Bars/Nightclubs	\$95
Recreation/Entertainment	\$63
Shopping	\$72
Local Transportation	\$44
Gambling	\$21
Lodging	\$129
Total	\$651

The Louisiana Seafood Festival can be characterized as a “locals” festival as the majority of visitors lived in the New Orleans area (Orleans and Jefferson Parishes). Out of town visitors included other parts of Louisiana, Texas, Florida, Mississippi and Georgia. While 23% traveled specifically for the Louisiana Seafood Festival, the majority of visitors (63.5%) were in town for other vacation/pleasure activities.

The majority of out of town visitors stayed on average 3.5 nights in the New Orleans area. Most stayed at a hotel spending on average \$149 in room rate costs. Out of town festival attendees spent an average of \$651 in all the hospitality and tourism sectors including hotels, restaurants, bars/nightclubs, gaming, shopping, and local transportation – restaurants received the highest expenditures. If extrapolated outward, this type of spending could have a significant economic impact on the local community.

Event Characteristics

Over half (68.7%) of the respondents attended the festival for the first time during 2015. The average number of prior visits to the event was 2.5. The majority (77.3%) of the repeat visitors had attended the event between one and three times in the past. Most individuals attended the event in parties of two or three people (63.9%). The majority of festival attendees

did not bring any children with them to the event (72.5%). Of those who brought children to the event, about half (49.3%) had one child. Table 3 shows the Number of Prior Visits.

Table 3. Number of Prior Visits

Response	Percentage 2015
One time	33.0
Two times	28.1
Three times	16.2
Four times	10.8
Five times or more	11.8
Total	100
Average no. of times	2.5
Valid Cases	185

Attendees spent an average of 1.3 days at the festival. The majority (75.5%) of attendees spent one day at the Louisiana Seafood Festival. The highest proportion (60.6%) of attendees spent \$50 or less for the day at the festival. The average daily spending for all attendees was \$59. Food and drinks (73.6%) was the top-rated aspect of the Louisiana Seafood Festival followed by music (28.6%) and atmosphere (9.3%). Table 4 shows the Patrons Expenditures at the Event. Table 5 shows the Patrons Favorite Aspect of the Festival.

Table 4. Patrons Expenditures at the Event

Response	Percentage 2015
\$50 or less	60.6
\$51 - \$100	32.8
\$101 - \$200	6.1
\$201 and above	0.5
Total	100.0
Average expenditure	\$59
Valid Cases	594

Table 5. Patrons Favorite Aspect of the Festival

Response	Percent of Cases 2015
Food/Drinks	73.6
Music	28.6
Atmosphere	9.3
Free	6.6
Location	3.4
People	3.0
Family friendly	1.3
Other	7.4
Total*	133.2
N	791

Word of mouth (36.1%) was the top source of information for festival attendees followed by the website (26.6%) and TV (11.7%). The top sponsors of the Louisiana Seafood Festival recognized by attendees were Drago's (32.9%), State Farm (25.3%), and Bud Light (20.7%). Table 6 shows the Sources of Information for attendees.

Table 6. Sources of Information

Response	Percent of Cases 2015
Word of Mouth	36.1
Website	26.6
TV	11.7
Previous visits	9.8
Newspaper	9.0
Radio	6.1
Tourism publicity	5.3
Social Media	3.6
Other	14.9
Total*	123.1
N	726

*Total equals more than 100% due to multiple responses

Respondents indicated their likelihood to recommend the Louisiana Seafood Festival to other people using a ten point scale (0=Not at all likely; 10=Extremely likely). The average likelihood to recommend the event was 9.3, while the median was 10. When the results of likelihood to recommend were analyzed using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) model, a customer loyalty metric, the Louisiana Seafood Festival had a score of 72.1%. Scores of 50% and above are considered to be satisfactory. The majority of festival attendees reported they would return to the festival next year (88.4%). Table 7 shows the Likelihood to Recommend the Louisiana Seafood Festival.

Table 7. Likelihood to Recommend the Louisiana Seafood Festival

Response	Percentage 2015
Promoters (rating 9 to 10)	76.3
Passive (rating 7 to 8)	19.6
Detractors (rating 0 to 6)	4.2
Total	100.0
Net Promoter Score	72.1%
Average rate	9.3
Median rate	10.0

The visitors to the Louisiana Seafood Festival appeared to be very satisfied with the festival and its event characteristics. The Louisiana Seafood Festival received a Net Promoter Score of 72.1% which is extremely satisfactory in customer loyalty. Of the repeat visitors to the festival, the average number of prior visits to the event was 2.5. The majority (77.3%) of the repeat visitors had attended the event between one and three times in the past. The majority of all festival visitors (88.4%) would attend again next year.

The Louisiana Seafood Festival is developing a following of repeat attendees. It appears both new and repeat visitors are satisfied with the festival. Food/drinks and music were the top two rated aspects of the festival. On average, attendees spent \$59 at the festival. Louisiana seafood is the highlight of this festival, and this natural resource comes in the form of shrimp, crawfish, oyster, crab, finfish, and alligator. Attendees purchased specially crafted food items from restaurant vendors using Louisiana seafood as well as beverages and retail items such as arts and crafts. The music entertainment secured for the festival were well-known local bands. Since food/drinks and music are the mainstay for the festival, maintaining the current number of restaurant vendors or increasing the number of vendors along with increasing the number of bands or length of performance time of the bands would maintain the high level of customer loyalty to the festival.

When looking at the recognizable sponsors and the sources of information for attendees, the largest recognizable sponsor was, Drago's, a local well-known restaurant, followed by State Farm and Bud Light, both nationally recognized companies. Word of mouth was the largest source of information followed by the website. In New Orleans, there is a large food culture. Thus, there is the potential to capitalize on other well-known restaurants as sponsors as well as other large beverage brands. Advertising in restaurants who are sponsors and/or vendors would increase the word of mouth source of information.

As social media continues to become prevalent, engaging in a social media campaign may also attract attendees. Starting social media pages such as Instagram and Facebook for the festival, then advertising the event and providing exclusive discounts available through social media will increase awareness and attendance. Finally, linking the social media to the festival website will bring the grassroots advertising full circle.

Demographics

Almost a third (31.7%) of respondents had a household annual income of over \$100,000. The majority of respondents who attended the festival were white (64.9%), while a smaller proportion was black (28.7%). Over half of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 49 years old (58.8%), and more than half of the respondents who participated in the survey were female (57.5%).

A large portion of the attendees has income over \$100,000, which means the potential for large discretionary income. The attendees are split between females and males leaning more towards females and between the ages of 25 and 50. This demographic means that there is the possibility of families. Only a small percentage of attendees brought children (27.5%) to the festival, and those who brought children on average brought two children with them. There is potential to attract more families with children to the event. Increasing dedicated family-friendly activities would increase the attendance of families. Increased family attendance would result in

increased retail, food and beverage sales. This spike in income would have an impact on the financial success of the festival.

Other Festival Issues

One challenge faced by the Louisiana Seafood Festival is the fluctuation of the annual date and venue location for the event. As the festival grew, organizers had to locate a venue to accommodate the increased number of attendees as well as find an ideal date to avoid conflict with other festivals and events in the city.

Having an annual date and dedicated venue would allow advanced planning for the festival organizers and the festival visitors alike. The festival organizers will be able to secure additional sponsorship, vendors, and advertising because the date and venue are set versus fluctuating. The festival attendee will be able to plan by adding a trip to the festival onto an established vacation, or other pleasure trips into the city of New Orleans.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, the 2015 Louisiana Seafood Festival attracted nearly 56,000 attendees and made a valuable contribution to the New Orleans metro area economy. The study provided noteworthy implications for both industry festival event organizers and academics alike.

The practical implications for festival organizers are timely. Advertising and partnerships are crucial for festival attendance. Understanding the attendee make up will allow for new programming which is vital to the success of the event. From the academic standpoint, adding new research on event characteristics and attendee travel characteristics for the festival is beneficial to the great discussion of impacts of festivals on a community.

Based on the results and discussion of the study, the following are recommendations for the LSF event organizers:

- 1) Develop a two-pronged approach to advertising the festival which encompasses local and out of town advertising. Develop partnerships with entities such as marketing boards and CVBs to advertise the festival.
- 2) Select a dedicated date and venue for the festival. A dedicated date and venue will provide continuity and allow the organizers and attendees to plan for the festival.
- 3) Increase number of restaurant sponsorships and vendors. Advertise within these establishments to increase word of mouth about the festival.
- 4) Start Instagram and Facebook pages for the festival, providing exclusive festival discounts available through social media. Link the social media to the festival website to capitalize on the website usage.
- 5) Increase the dedicated family and children friendly activities to increase the attendance of families.

The aforementioned recommendations provide tangible practical implications for the festival organizers. These recommendations, if instituted, may have a positive impact on the overall success of the event. The visitor profile from the 2015 Louisiana Seafood Festival provided the event organizers with valuable information on visitor characteristics, event characteristics, and visitor spending. The event organizers can use the visitor profile for target

marketing and advertising efforts to attract more patrons to the festival. The festival management academic community will also benefit from this study. Focusing on the visitor profile of a festival provides a new dimension in the festival research literature.

The results of this study are limited to the 2015 Louisiana Seafood Festival. However, such research provides the opportunity for future investigation. Future research may include examining the economic impact of the festival on the local community. Studying the festival longitudinally to examine trends in visitor profile, economic impact, and changes in festival organization and delivery of the festival are also opportunities for future research. The current study along with future research opportunities will provide valuable information for the festival management research body of literature.

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