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# Festival Admission and Visitors' Behavioral Intentions: Do Previous Visit and Age Matter?

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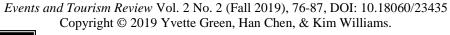
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## **Abstract**

Food festivals provide unique opportunities for leisure, social and cultural experiences, help generate business and income for the host community and promote a positive image of the local community. This study examines the behavioral intentions of the first time and repeat visitors to revisit and recommend a festival when admission fee is charged vs no admission. The study also investigates the impact of admission fees on the intention to revisit and recommend the festival for different age groups. Two-way ANOVA and independent t-tests were used. Results found that admission fees impacted the intentions to revisit and recommend the festival.

Keywords: Festival, Behavioral Intentions, Revisit, Recommendations, Admission Fee, Age

## Introduction

Festivals, in particular, food festivals, provide unique opportunities for leisure, social and cultural experiences, help generate business and income for the host community and promote a positive image of the local community. Understanding that the economic impact of festivals is heavily determined by attendees' direct and indirect expenditures, festival organizers strive to maximize visitor satisfaction and increase revisit (Chen, Lee & Lin, 2012; Lee et. al, 2008).

There are numerous satisfaction studies on nonfood festivals (Anwar & Sohail, 2004; Crompton & Love, 1995; Lee et al., 2008) and wine and food festivals (Axelsen and Swan, 2010; Yuan and Jang, 2008). Festival researchers have focused on reporting the profiles and characteristics of visitors (Nicolson & Pearce, 2000; Yuan et al., 2005), motivations for attending food festivals (Cela et al., 2008; Crompton & Mckay, 1997; Nicholson & Pearce, 2000), festival experiences (Axelsen & Swan, 2010) and ways to organize a successful food/wine festival (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009). Although there is growth in research on festivals, limited studies have examined the factors and attributes that affect the levels of satisfaction and loyalty towards food festivals, consumers' satisfaction and revisit intentions (Özdemir & Culha, 2009; Yuan & Jang, 2008), as well as the impact of admission fees on the intention to revisit or recommend a festival or event (Hubbard, et. al, 2012; Wan & Chen, 2013).

The above-mentioned gaps in revisit and recommendation intentions and admission fee impacts make it critical to understand the factors or attributes that affect satisfaction and loyalty towards attending food festivals. The study aims to 1) examine the impact of admission fees on the intention to revisit and recommend a festival for first-time visitors vs. repeat visitors and to 2) examine the impact of admission fees on the intention to revisit and recommend for older vs. younger visitors.

## **Literature Review**

## Intention to Revisit and Recommend

In a study conducted by Hall et al. (2016), findings revealed that visitor perception of festival attributes determined perceived quality; while entertainment quality, informational services, food and beverage provision, and comfort facilities had a strong influence on the evaluation of the festival. Hall et al. (2016) also concluded that overall perceived quality had more influence over recommendations than revisit intentions, and festival visitor satisfaction predicted revisit intentions more than recommendation intentions. The Hall et al. (2016) study supported existing literature (Cronin et al, 2000; Lee et al, 2007; Papadimitriou, 2013; Petrick, 2004) that the perceived quality of a festival exerts direct and significant influence on visitors' behavioral intentions. Other studies have found a positive and significant relationship between satisfaction and revisit intentions on one hand and satisfaction and recommendation on the other hand (Thrane, 2002; Yoon et al., 2009).

Previous studies have proven that festival attendees' satisfaction levels have a direct association with their loyalty towards a particular festival (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Özdemir & Culha, 2009; Thrane, 2002; Yuan & Jang, 2008). Tourists' loyalty in these studies refers to their intention to return to the food festival or recommend it to other people. The food, environment, entertainment and service quality of festivals leave a positive image with most tourists. These positive attributes increase satisfaction towards the food festival and consequently increased visitors' intentions to revisit the festival and recommend it to family, friends, and others (Wan & Chan, 2013). These findings reiterate the connection between tourist satisfaction and their behavioral intentions and support earlier research that the three concepts, namely, image, satisfaction and behavioral intention (Thrane, 2002; Yuan & Jang, 2008), are linked.

# Behavioral Intentions of First time vs. Repeat Visitors

Behavioral intentions are what a visitor intends to do after experiencing an opportunity (Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010). Behavioral intentions can involve individuals making the decision to revisit an organization, the decision to make a repeat purchase with an organization, and delivering word-of-mouth publicity about an organization to family and friends (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Shanka and Taylor (2004) reported two festival attributes and four visitor characteristics of festivals that impacted first time and repeat visitors. The two festival attributes with discriminating abilities between the first-time visitors and repeat visitors were parking and services, while the four visitor characteristics that showed discriminating effects were age, place of residence, group composition, and information sources utilized (Shanka & Taylor, 2004).

Lee and Beeler (2007) highlighted differences between first-time and repeat visitors in terms of the strength of the relationship among service quality, satisfaction, and future intention. First-time visitors were more likely than repeat visitors to count on the quality of the festival to be satisfied. On the other hand, repeat visitors were satisfied with factors other than service quality (Lee & Beeler, 2007).

# Behavioral Intention, Admission and Age

Limited research is available on behavioral intentions and the impact of admission and visitor age on a festival (Hubbard et al, 2016) or mega event (Lee et al, 2013). Hubbard et al. (2016) reported that the respondents were very positive about their intentions to attend the festival again with admission fees and a large proportion of attendees were very likely to recommend this festival to a friend or relative. The respondents rated the festival as a high performer in terms of satisfaction, quality, and experience. A large proportion of respondents planned on attending the festival again and the admission price was not seen as affecting attendance (Hall et al., 2016; Hubbard et al, 2016). Research also indicated that age could impact behavioral intentions (Hall, et al., 2016). Reynisdottir, Song, and Agrusa (2008) suggested that willingness to pay admission fee was negatively related to age as younger people are more used to the idea of having to pay entrance fees to tourist attractions. In addition, researchers indicated that older visitors were less willing to pay more for park admission fees than younger visitors (Uyarra, Gill, & Côté, 2010). Uyarra et al. (2010) found the willingness to pay more increased with repeat visits. Based on the literature, two hypotheses were developed for the study:

H1: Admission fee has a more negative impact on attendees' (a) intention to revisit and (b) intention to recommend to new visitors compared to repeat visitors.

H2: Admission fee has a more negative impact on attendees' (a) intention to revisit and (b) intention to recommend for older visitors compared to younger ones.

# Methodology

# 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 includes crab, shrimp, oyster, alligator, crawfish and all finfish. The festival was founded in 2007. 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 was free since its inception, however, patrons purchase food and beverage items as well as arts and crafts. In 2016, the festival organizers began charging admission into the festival.

# 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 and 2016 LSF festival. The questionnaire was adapted from a visitor profile survey developed and used by the HRC in prior studies (Chacko & Marcell, 2007; Jainchill, 2013; Roussel, 2009). 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

Data was collected over a span of two years. A team of surveyors trained in data collection administered the surveys during the festival weekends in 2015 and 2016 via on-site intercept. A total of 600 completed surveys were obtained in 2015 and 649 completed surveys in 2016. 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 (Mcdowall et al., 2014; Shani et al., 2009). The hypotheses testing was done using two-way ANOVA and independent T-tests.

#### **Results and Discussion**

## **Demographics**

Out of the 1249 responses collected over a period of two years, a total of 1229 were usable. Detailed demographic information were indicated by Table 1.

# Hypothesis Testing

To examine if admission fee influence visitors' intention to revisit differently for new visitors compared to repeat visitors, a two-way ANOVA (repeat visitor, new visitor; admission fee, free admission) was carried out. Results indicated a significant interaction between previous festival visitation and admission fee, F(1,1225) = 10.16, p < .01 (Table 2).

An Independent t-test was conducted with new visitors and repeat visitors separately to better understand the simple main effects (Table 3). Results showed that new visitors had a significantly lower intention to revisit when the admission fee is charged ( $.68 \pm .47$ ) than free admission ( $.84 \pm .37$ ), t (.863) = .5.68, p< .01. However, admission fee did not have a significant

influence on repeat visitors' intention to revisit, t (362) = .71, p = .48. Hence, hypothesis 1a was supported.

Table 1. Demographics

	No Admiss	ion Fee (N=590)	Admission	Fee (N=639)
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Male	251	42.5	287	44.9
Female	339	57.5	352	55.1
Ethnicity				
White	381	64.6	431	67.4
Black	170	28.8	138	21.6
Asian	13	2.2	14	2.2
Hispanic	16	2.7	27	4.2
Other	10	1.7	29	4.5
Generation				
18-24	46	7.8	68	10.6
25-34	202	34.2	216	33.8
35-49	146	24.7	188	29.4
50-64	145	24.6	133	20.8
65 and above	51	8.6	34	5.3
Previous Visitation				
Yes	191	32.4	173	27.1
No	399	67.6	466	72.9
Household Income				
Less than \$25,000	5	7.6	44	6.9
\$25,000 to \$49,999	25	13.6	84	13.1
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21	19.0	99	15.5
\$75,000 to \$99,999	33	15.1	104	16.3
\$100,000 to \$149,999	22	17.3	109	17.1
\$150,000 to \$199,999	20	8.5	106	16.6
\$200,000 and more	10	5.9	42	6.6
Prefer not to answer	77	13.1	51	5.0

Table 1 Continuation

Similarly, a two-way ANOVA (repeat visitor, new visitor; admission fee, free admission) was carried out to examine if admission fee influences visitors' intention to recommend differently for new visitors compared to repeat visitors (Table 4). Results indicated no significant interaction between admission fee and previous visitation, F (1,1225) = .01, p=.91. Admission fee

had a significant main effect on intention to recommend, F (1,1225) =20.12, p< .01. Visitors had a higher intention to recommend the festival when there was no admission fee  $(9.32, \pm .06)$  than admission was charged  $(8.92 \pm .06)$ . In addition, the previous visitation had a significant main effect on the intention to recommend, F (1,1225) =16.74, p< .01. New visitors have significantly lower intention to recommend the festival  $(8.94, \pm .05)$  than repeat visitors  $(9.30, \pm .07)$ . Therefore, hypothesis 1b is not supported.

Table 2. Summary of ANOVA, intention to revisit as dependent variable

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Corrected Model	16.29	3	5.43	39.11**
Intercept	751.56	1	751.56	5414.21**
Admission Fee	2.05	1	2.05	14.79**
Visitation	9.76	1	9.76	70.33**
Admission Fee ×	1.41	1	1.41	10.16**
Visitation				
Error	170.05	1225	.14	
Total	1000.00	1229		
Corrected Total	186.33	1228		

<sup>\*</sup>p< .05; \*\* p< .01

Table 3. Independent t Test

		Free	Admission Fee		95% CI for Mean	4			
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	Difference	τ	df
New Visitor	.84	.37	399	.68	.47	466	.11, .22	5.68	863
Repeat Visitor	.96	.19	191	.95	.22	173	03, .06	.71	362

Table 4. Summary of ANOVA, intention to recommend as dependent variable

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Corrected Model	84.38	3	28.13	14.27**
Intercept	84948.40	1	84948.40	43095.79**
Admission Fee	39.66	1	39.66	20.12**
Visitation	33.01	1	33.01	16.74**
Admission Fee ×	.03	1	.03	.01
Visitation				
Error	2414.66	1225	.14	
Total	102932.00	1229		
Corrected Total	2499.05	1228		
	14			

<sup>\*</sup>p< .05; \*\* p< .01

In order to investigate if admission fee influence visitors' intention to revisit differently for older visitors compared to younger ones, a two-way ANOVA was carried out (Table 5). Results did not show significant interaction between admission fee and age, F (4,1219) =1.43, p=.22. Admission fee had a significant main effect on intention to revisit, F (1,1219) =33.88, p<.01. Visitors had a higher intention to revisit the festival when there was no admission fee (.90,  $\pm$  .02) than admission was charged (.75  $\pm$ .02). In addition, age had a significant main effect on intention to revisit, F (4,1219) =2.64, p< .05. Visitors aged 18 to 24 (.92  $\pm$  .04) had a significantly higher intention to revisit than visitors in the age group of 35 to 49 (.80  $\pm$  .02). Hypothesis 2a is not supported.

<b>Table 5.</b> Summary of ANOVA,	intention to revisit as de	ependent variable
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Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Corrected Model	7.60	9	.85	5.76**
Intercept	557.29	1	557.29	3800.95**
Admission Fee	4.97	1	4.97	33.88**
Age	1.55	4	.39	2.64*
Admission Fee ×	.84	4	.21	1.43
Age				
Error	178.73	1219	.14	
Total	1000.00	1229		
Corrected Total	186.33	1228		

<sup>\*</sup>p<.05; \*\* p<.01

A two-way ANOVA was carried out to examine if admission fee influence visitors' intention to recommend differently for older visitors compared to younger visitors (Table 6). Results indicated significant interaction between admission fee and visitors' age, F (4,1219) =5.45, p< .01. Independent t test was conducted with different age groups separately to better understand the simple main effects (Table 7). Results showed that visitors who were 50 to 64 years old had significantly lower intention to recommend the festival when admission fee was charged (8.58  $\pm$  2.11) than free admission (9.43  $\pm$  1.01), t (276) =4.33, p< .01. Moreover, visitors who were 65 years old and above had lower intention to recommend the festival when admission fee was charged (8.12  $\pm$  1.84) than when it was free (9.45  $\pm$  1.03), t (83) =4.28, p< .01. Admission fee did not have a significant influence on visitors' intention to recommend for all other younger age groups (see Table 6), supporting hypothesis 2b.

#### Discussion

Admission fee tends to negatively influence new visitors' intention to visit than repeat visitors. In addition, admission fee was negatively associated with visitors' intention to recommend. The results do not support the previous research that admission price would not impact the intent to revisit or recommend (Hall et al., 2016; Hubbard et al, 2016). Repeat visitors have higher level intention to recommend than new visitors in general, which echoes with Uyarra et al.'s (2010) finding that the willingness to pay more increased with repeat visits.

Visitors' intention to recommend was significantly lower among visitors whose age were 50 and above when admission fee was charged. In general, visitors showed a higher intention to revisit when there was no admission fee. Also, visitors aged 18 to 24 had a significantly higher intention to revisit than visitors in the age group of 35 to 49. The results are consistent with previous research findings that willingness to pay admission fee was negatively related to age as younger people are more used to the idea of having to pay entrance fees to tourist attractions (Reynisdottir, Song, & Agrusa, 2008; Uyarra, Gill, & Côté, 2010).

**Table 6.** Summary of ANOVA, intention to recommend as dependent variable

Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F
Corrected Model	98.21	9	10.91	5.54**
Intercept	66564.49	1	66564.49	33797.47**
Admission Fee	61.00	1	61.00	30.97**
Age	6.66	4	1.66	.85
Admission Fee ×	42.95	4	10.74	5.45**
Age				
Error	2400.83	1219	.14	
Total	102932.00	1229		
Corrected Total	2499.05	1228		

<sup>\*</sup>p< .05; \*\* p< .01

**Table 7**. Independent t Test

		Free	Admission Fee			Fee	95% CI for Mean	4	df
Age Group	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	Difference	ι	uı
18-24	9.13	1.13	46	9.01	1.31	68	35, .58	.49	112
25-34	9.14	1.26	202	9.03	1.20	216	12, .35	.96	416
35-49	9.20	1.36	146	8.89	1.52	188	01, .63	1.94	332
50-64	9.43	1.01	145	8.58	2.11	133	.46, 1.23	4.33 **	276
65 and above	9.45	1.03	51	8.12	1.84	34	.71, 1.95	4.28 **	83

# **Conclusion and Implications**

In conclusion, the current study provided implications for both practitioners and academics. Practitioners can use the results to assist with the planning and logistics, revenue and economic impact of the festival. The research also contributes to the body of knowledge for festival behavior intention research.

The results of this study are limited to the 2015 and 2016 Louisiana Seafood Festival. However, such research provides the opportunity for future investigation. Future research may examine how visitors' travel distance to the festival venue influence their revisit intention. In addition, the economic impact of the festival on the local community can also be investigated. Continuing to

study 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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