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FACTORS OF LEISURE EXPERIENCE: A STUDY OF TURKISH FESTIVAL PARTICIPANTS

Key words: leisure, leisure experience, festival.

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses results of a study examining experiences of participants in leisure and pleasure behaviors and provides some interesting recommendations for leisure professionals. Facilitating leisure experience is the most important goal in providing and delivering leisure services; however, studies on leisure marketing give very little guidance on how recreation providers could increase their customers' satisfaction with an experiential product such as a live music or an open air concert. The Turkish Rock'n Coke Festival was chosen as a research subject. Questionnaire items concerning leisure experiences during the Festival were adapted from Schmitt (1999); Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007); Tsaur, Chiu and Wang (2006); Borrie (1995); Chao (2003); Cotte (1998); Manfredi and Driver (1996); and Kao, Huang and Wu (2008) with some modifications and revisions to fit our empirical case. A total of 234 questionnaires were collected. The obtained results showed that leisure experience could be conceptualized as a four-dimensional construct comprising social relations, lifestyle, expression of emotions and sensual perception. All these dimensions were found to affect leisure behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

The paper discusses results of a study examining experiences of participants in leisure and pleasure behaviors and provides some interesting recommendations for leisure professionals. Facilitating leisure experience is the most important goal in providing and delivering leisure services. Hull et al. (1996) emphasized the significant role of leisure experience in recreation marketing: "Experience is an important part of what recreationists say they want... and what recreation resource managers try to provide" [11]. This experiential approach in leisure has moved the emphasis of leisure services from focusing on functional features and benefits of recreation activities to delivering leisure

experience. It proposes that recreation should not be viewed merely as an activity such as hiking, fishing, camping, etc. Instead, recreation should be conceptualized as a psycho-physiological experience that is self-rewarding and enjoyable [14]. Gaining an enjoyable experience during leisure is often the ultimate goal of leisure participants. What they want is leisure activities and services that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts and stimulate their minds, in other words, leisure products and services to deliver an experience [17].

The question what constitutes leisure experience has been of great interest to various leisure researchers, as reflected in a special issue of the *Journal of Leisure Research* (Vol. 30, No: 4), where leisure experience was conceptualized as

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focus of attention, perceptions of risk and competence, meanings associated with challenges of leisure environments, satisfaction and absorption in the moment [13]. According to this view, leisure experience is an emerging state of mind resulting from interactions with others in the environment. This implies that leisure outcomes may not be the same across participants and leisure settings, as the nature of interactions is believed to vary [12].

The purpose of this study was to examine leisure experiences of participants of the Turkish Rock'n Coke Festival. The event was chosen as a novel case study, since the existing literature on leisure marketing gives very little guidance on how recreation providers could increase their customers' satisfaction with an experiential product such as a live music or an open air concert. Rock'n Coke is Turkey's largest open-air music festival that has been organized annually by Coca-Cola since 2003. For seven years, regardless of weather conditions, the festival featuring rock stars from all over the world has become a part of Istanbul cultural life and a recognized brand in the field of music [5].

The two-day festival is traditionally held at the end of the summer at the Hezarfen Airfield in Istanbul, Turkey. Rock'n Coke is a member of the European Festival Association supported by the Coca-Cola Company. The festival is organized by the Turkish concert organizer Pozitif. The festival grounds are large enough to support two stages, a mini-amusement park, two large food areas, a shopping area, several sponsor attractions, outhouses and a large camp site for people with two-day tickets [6]. Although mainly rock-oriented, Rock'n Coke also hosts other music genres. While the main stage is generally reserved for rock and its subgenres, the other stage – DJ Arena – is reserved for different music styles such as house music.

In 2009 the festival gathered many famous bands and their 40,000 fans. Some 22 local and 13 foreign artists and bands performed at the event. 4,327 tents were set out in the area, which has the capacity to host 15,000 people. A health center, food court, market, drink stand and an Internet zone were set up on the festival grounds [7].

METHODS

Research and questionnaire design

The study used a questionnaire dispatched to a sample of festival participants, regarding their

leisure experiences gathered during the festival. The questionnaire items were adapted from Schmitt (1999); Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007); Tsaor, Chiu and Wang (2006); Borrie (1995); Chao (2003); Cotte (1998); Manfredo and Driver (1996); Kao, Huang and Wu (2008) with some modifications and revisions to fit our empirical case. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of 59 festival participants who were judged to be representative of the target population. After an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, a scale of 19 items was proposed. Dependent variables included two single-item measures relating to pleasure and intention. Each item was measured on a 5-point Likert scale: from 5 = "strongly agree" to 1 = "strongly disagree". The respondents were also asked to indicate their sex, age, education level, occupation, income status and marital status.

Sample

The sample consisted of audience members of the 2009 Rock'n Coke Festival. The questionnaires were distributed and completed on-line. As the best way to reach the greatest number of participants of the Rock' Coke Festival turned out to be Facebook fan pages, rock groups and forums, the questionnaires were distributed and completed on-line, using a specially linked website <http://www.rockncoketr.com>. In total, 234 questionnaires were answered on-line between August 2 and October 30, 2009.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the sample

53.4% of the respondents were women, over 63.7% were aged 19-25 years, 67.9% were students, and 43.6% had no income. As far as the respondents' education level was concerned, 72.2% of them held a bachelor's degree, 16.2% a master's degree, 9.8% were secondary school graduates and 1.7% completed only primary school.

Dimensions of leisure experience

There was a total of 19 scale items that could influence or determine dimensions of leisure experience. A principal component factor analysis was used to sort out and classify these variables as well as to convert them into main factors. To apply

factor analysis to questionnaire items concerning the participants' leisure experiences, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy [16, 19] was used. For the experience variables the KMO amounted to 0.923, which indicated that the sample was adequate for factor analysis [8, 16]. The Bartlett Test for Sphericity (BTS) was 2617.890 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the hypothesis variance and covariance matrix of variables as an identity matrix was rejected; therefore, the factor analysis was appropriate. The principal axis analysis revealed that four factors had an eigenvalue close to or higher than 1.0, which explained a total of 67.055 percent of the variance. These four factors were termed *social relations*, *lifestyle*, *expression of emotions* and *sensual perception*. In the factor analysis, the percentage of variance explained by each factor indicates the relative significance of the factors. Accordingly, the first factor, labeled *social relations*, explained a large part (45.485%) of total variance, having a greater significance than the other three factors. The *lifestyle* factor explained 11.003% of variance. The *expression of emotions* factor explained 5.826% of variance. The last factor, i.e. *sensual perception*, explained 4.742% of variance. All the four constructs met the criterion that a factor loading should be equal to or greater than 0.45, and the total of scale reliability amounted to 0.85. Factors *social relations* (0.89), *lifestyle* (0.88), *expression of emotions* (0.79) and *sensual perception* (0.75) had higher scores than the recommended level of 0.70 [10, 15, 16] (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Factors of leisure experience

Factors	Eigenvalues	% of variance	α
1. Social relations	8.642	45.485	0.896
2. Lifestyle	2.090	11.003	0.881
3. Expression of emotions	1.107	5.826	0.797
4. Sensual perception	0.901	4.742	0.759
Total variance (%)		67.055	

Determinants of pleasure behavior and intention to recommend

To identify the relationship between the four leisure experience factors, pleasure behavior and intention to recommend, a multiple regression analysis was utilized. The enter-variable selection method involving all dimensions of leisure experience was conducted.

The regression results from Table 2 show that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 95.343$; $p < 0.01$), and 61 percent of the overall pleasure behavior was explained by the four factors of leisure experience. The regression coefficients indicated that the dimensions of social relations ($\beta = 0.498$; $p < 0.01$) and expression of emotions ($\beta = 0.435$; $p < 0.01$) exerted the strongest influence on the overall pleasure behavior, followed by lifestyle and sensual perception. In Table 2, the dimensions of social relations, expression of emotions, sensual perception and lifestyle indicated a statistically significant relationship with pleasure behavior, respectively. The second regression model was found to be statistically significant ($F = 84.876$; $p < 0.01$) and 59 percent of the overall intention was explained by the four factors of leisure experience. The regression coefficients indicated that the factors of social relations ($\beta = 0.514$; $p < 0.01$), sensual perception ($\beta = 0.407$; $p < 0.01$), expression of emotions ($\beta = 0.372$; $p < 0.01$) and lifestyle ($\beta = 0.169$; $p < 0.01$) featured statistically significant correlations with the overall intention to recommend the festival.

Table 2. Regression results related to pleasure behavior and intention to recommend

	Dependent variables			
	Pleasure behavior		Intention to recommend	
	Std. β	t	Std. β	t
Social relations	0.498	12.303*	0.514*	12.261*
Lifestyle	0.183	4.521*	0.169*	4.034*
Expression of emotions	0.435	10.743*	0.372*	8.862*
Sensual perception	0.393	9.703*	0.407*	9.714*
* $p < 0.01$	$R^2 = 0.62$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.61$ $F = 95.343^*$		$R^2 = 0.59$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.59$ $F = 84.876^*$	

DISCUSSION

The study used a 19-item questionnaire survey to assess factors related to leisure experience. The results showed that leisure experience could be conceptualized and measured as a four-dimensional construct comprising social relations, lifestyle, expression of emotions and sensual perception. These aspects demonstrate that leisure experience is absorption in the moment but also has many experiential dimensions. The scale used in the research exhibited an ideal internal consistency and met rigorous conceptual and empirical criteria for validity. The obtained results revealed that the factor of social relations is the most important dimension of leisure experience, followed by expression of emotions, sensual perception and lifestyle.

The results can help enhance the understanding of experiential dimensions in a leisure activity in several ways. They show that there are many dimensions of leisure experience and these dimensions have an effect on pleasure behaviors and intention to recommend. The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the factor of social relations seemed to exert the strongest influence on overall pleasure behavior in comparison with other aspects. The factor of expression of emotions, which refers to individuals' emotional states, was identified as the second most influential dimension of pleasure behavior. The results also revealed that social relations and expression of emotions exerted the strongest influence on the intention to recommend the festival to someone.

The results of the present study can be of interest to marketers and recreation practitioners. In general, the obtained data, although still preliminary, can be considered a first attempt at conscious evaluation of leisure experience during an open-air festival in Turkey. The study also provides some useful insights for managerial applications. First, marketers can apply their marketing-mix decisions according to these findings. Second, recreation resource managers can use experiential qualities to create holistic experiences for leisure participants.

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