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Mediating the relationship between emotional solidarity and intentions to revisit a UNESCO World Heritage Site: The effects of perceived safety at the Osun Osogbo Cultural Festival in Osogbo, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION and LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on festivals and events has blossomed over the past 20 years as communities have increasingly begun to recognize the value of these events for locals and as well as a potential source of tourism (Chang, Gibson, and Sisson, 2014). Festivals are occasions used to celebrate community values, ideologies, identity and community (Getz, Andersson, & Carlsen, 2010). Communities around the world have stepped up efforts in promoting and sustaining their cultural identities through the creation of cultural festivals and revitalizing existing ones with the growing national and international tourist markets as motivation. Lee (2014) asserted that attracting and maintaining the flow of visitors to cultural festivals with the expected economic, social, and cultural benefits associated with it is very important for both the festival organizers and the destination marketing organizations. In essence, efforts are not only directed toward attracting the visitors but also ways in which festival visitors' experiences are enhanced for a repeat attendance and positive word of mouth to others. Tourists' safety constitute a major goal for organizers because it could jeopardize the success of the event and the attractiveness of the destination.

Personal safety in tourist destinations especially at community festivals where many congregate at the same time plays a prominent role in the continued success of such events. Tourists' risk perceptions about their personal safety have a major impact on patterns of tourism demand (Seabra, Dolnicar, Abrantes, and Kastenholz, 2013). As such, it is quite difficult for destinations that are perceived to be unsafe to attract tourists (George, 2003). Perception of crime and risks varies from one person to the next and no individual or destination is totally immune. Studies in tourism are in agreement that tourists' perception of risk and safety can significantly influence decisions to travel to both national and international destinations (Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Resinger and Movondo, 2005). Destinations that are known to have a safe reputation provide the visitor with a greater feeling of being welcomed and facilitate easy interaction with residents.

Festivals that have low risks or safety concerns provides a platform for harmonious residents and tourist relationship that is inevitable in most destinations. A positive feeling toward each other is crucial in forming an emotional bond. The framework of emotional solidarity conceived by Durkheim (1995[1915]) has been used to explain the relationship between residents and tourists. Woosnam (2011) asserted that as residents and tourists interact with each other, engage in similar behavior and shared similar beliefs, some degree of emotional solidarity will emerge, forming a bond between them. Emotional solidarity that tourists experience with residents can explain the degree of safety the former might feel in a destination (Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, and Timothy, 2015).

Few studies concerning cultural festivals have investigated the impact of visitors' perceived safety on the relationship they have with residents (Woosnam et.al. 2015). Also revisit

intensions or loyalty to a cultural festival have mostly been examined on the basis of festival quality (e.g., information services, programs, souvenirs, food, and facilities), perceived value (worthiness of money, time and effort), and behavioral intentions (Yoon, Lee, and Lee, 2010; Yuan and Jang, 2008) not on the residents and tourists interaction or emotional bond. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to determine tourists' level of emotional solidarity (i.e. *feeling welcomed, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding*) they share with the residents of Osogbo – the host community of the annual Osun Osogbo festival can significantly predict their perceived safety and 2) to examine whether the perceived safety of the visitors predict their likelihood of returning to the festival.

Research method

Study Site

Osun Osogbo is an annual religious cultural festival held at the ancient Osun grove located on the periphery of Osogbo, the state capital of Osun State in honor of Osun, one of Yoruba deities (orisa). The festival is the largest event in Nigeria dedicated to a traditional deity and has become an international tourist attraction drawing thousands to witness the grandeur of the festival and give praise to the Osun goddess (Osun festival brochure, 2014; Murphy & Sanford, 2001). The festival is a 12-day event in the month of August and is comprised of prayers, rituals, dancing and a grand possession on the last day to the Osun grove for divination and sacrifice (Jones, 1997). The dense forest of the Osun scared grove is one of the remaining remnants of primary high forest in southern Nigeria, regarded as the abode of the goddess of fertility Osun, one of the pantheon of Yoruba gods (UNESCO, 2005). In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) named the Osun grove a World Heritage Site (WHS), thereby joining the elite list of special cultural or physical significant sites in the world.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the tourists during the annual Osun Osogbo festival in August, 2013. A systematic sampling method was employed for this study to ensure a representative sample of the tourists. Using an on-site, self-administered survey instrument, tourists were intercepted at six different major locations in and around the town, mainly in areas patronized by the visitors. Researchers stationed at these places intercepted visitors as they walked past and asked if they were visitors to the festival. Starting with a randomly selected individual, every fifth person was approached and asked if they would be willing to complete the instrument. Data were collected between 10am and 6pm during the festival. In total, of the 486 visitors approached, 75 declined to participate, indicating 411 accepted (84.6% acceptance rate). From those 411, 408 completed the instrument (99.3% completion rate), yielding an overall response rate of 84.0%.

Measurement and Survey Instrument

The survey instrument included the 10-item *Emotional Solidarity Scale* (ESS) developed by Woosnam & Norman, 2010 and the 6-item perceived safety scale adapted from George (2000), with both on a Likert scale of 1-7, where 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The

ESS has been shown to be multidimensional in nature (Woosnam, 2011a) (i.e., with factors: *feeling welcomed, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding*), while the perceived safety scale was found to be unidimensional (George, 2010). Tourists were also asked about their travel behavior, travel history and other numerous socio-demographic questions such as age, gender, education, marital status, race and ethnicity.

Data Analysis/ Interpretation

For analysis purposes, three composite means were calculated, one for each of the ESS factors: *emotional closeness, sympathetic understanding, and feeling welcomed* and the perceived safety scale. To address the purposes of the study, a multiple regression analysis were conducted examining the degree to which the three factors of emotional solidarity predicted the perceived safety factor. Also a linear regression was performed to indicate if perceived safety has a resultant effect on the likelihood to return for the festival.

Results

The sample was comprised of slightly more males ($n = 408$; 52.9%) that were fairly young ($M_{age} = 34.9$ years) and a large majority ($n = 408$; 95.1%) were black. More than half ($n = 408$; 61%) of the respondents have 4-year college degrees, with a preponderance ($n = 409$; 92.4%) of the visitors originating within the country. Additionally, nearly three-quarters ($n = 408$; 72.5%) of the visitors are repeat attendees to the annual event. Prior to assessing relationships between measures, reliabilities for each factor were requested and found to be strong (i.e., in excess of 0.80) as indicated by the Cronbach's alphas below (Table 1).

Table 1. Factor reliabilities

Factor	Cronbach alpha
<i>Perceived safety</i>	
	0.95
<i>Emotional solidarity</i>	
Welcoming nature	0.85
Emotional closeness	0.86
Sympathetic understanding	0.87

In addressing the first purpose of this paper, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted on emotional solidarity factors (i.e., *feeling welcomed, emotional closeness, and sympathetic understanding*) to predict the perceived safety of the visitors. The result was highly significant indicating that the visitors' level of emotional solidarity predicted their perceived

safety at the OOCF ($F = 17.77, p < 0.00; R^2 = 0.12$). For the second purpose of the paper, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine if the perceived safety of the visitors could predict their likelihood of returning to the festival. The result indicated that perceived safety significantly predicted the likelihood to return ($F = 13.23, p < 0.00; R^2 = 0.03$).

Conclusion and implications

The results of the study indicate that a significant relationship exists between emotional solidarity and perceived safety, which ultimately affects visitors' likelihood of returning to the festival. In essence visitors to the Osun Osogbo cultural festival through their relationship and interactions with the residents felt safe and welcomed and are most likely to revisit in future. Tourist safety and security is a very important factor for the success of any festival events and studies have indicated that perceived safety is the most paramount motivating reason drawing a visitor to a festival celebration (George, 2010). Lee, Kyle, & Scott (2012) asserted that visitors who experiences meaningful social interaction within a particular place are highly likely to revisit that destination, more inclined to spread positive word-of-mouth to others, and display a strong preference over alternative destinations. These findings give credence to Woosnam et.al. (2015) that the extent of emotional solidarity that tourists experience with residents can explain the degree of safety the former might feel in a destination. In addition, the current findings build off Woosnam et al.'s work indicating that implications for safety (i.e., bearing on intentions to revisit). George (2003) asserted that destinations perceived to be unsafe will have difficulty in attracting tourists.

Further studies need to be done to establish if socio-cultural variables such as age, gender, economic status, and cultural similarities have an impact on perceived risk level of visitor to the festival as a predictor of emotional solidarity with the residents. The results of this study have implications for festival planners and managers. DMO should promote cultural festival emphasizing the hospitable attitude of the local residents and the low risk or safety level at the destination. Safety issues can be the deciding factor of the success of festivals so adequate security must be put in place to address any unforeseen circumstances that can compromise visitors' safety. Lastly, the DMO should make sure that the local people, tourism operators, volunteers, and local business personnel are well orientated in making visitors comfortable and welcomed in the community.

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