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A Special Event Loyalty Model: Comparing First Time and Repeat Attendees

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ABSTRACT

This study developed a conceptual model to examine attendee loyalty to special events. The model anticipated that attendees' loyalty can be influenced by their motivation, involvement, satisfaction, and perceived value of the special event by surveying visitors to Airshow China. The study also compared the loyalty of first time and repeat attendees. CFA and SEM were used for data analysis. Findings indicated that attendee involvement, satisfaction, and perceived value are important antecedents their loyalty. In addition, while first time visitors put more weight on perceived value of the show when developing their loyal behavior, repeat visitors emphasized more on their level of satisfaction. Conclusions were drawn and implications provided based on the findings.

***Keywords:** motivation, involvement, satisfaction, perceived value, loyalty, first time and repeat visitors, special event*

INTRODUCTION

Event tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal 2004, Getz 2008). The growing interest in festivals and special events may provide both tangible and intangible "profitable activities" in the community (Getz 1991, 1997). As a unique form of tourism attraction, events are an important motivator of tourism, as most of them are not dependent upon physical environment (Gursoy, Kim, and Uysal 2004). They are of increasing importance for destination competitiveness (Getz 2008) and have become an increasingly significant component of destination marketing (Lee and Beeler 2009). Although special events share commonality in that an event is always themed (Getz 1989), the themes

would vary. One of the special events that have grown in popularity is air show (Bojanic and Warnick 2012). Air shows are considered more special than other types of events because the shows feature the display of real-size aviation/aerospace products, and stunning flying performances (Bojanic and Warnick 2012). Despite its growing popularity in attracting visitors, with numerous festivals and special events staged every year, it is still not an easy task for event organizers to fight for a share of attendees. Hence, it is vital for the event organizers to understand factors that not only help attract first-time visitors, but retain previous attendees as well. Little research has been found to examine attendees' loyalty behavior in this type of special event setting (Bojanic and Warnick 2012). Thus, this study aims to develop an integrated model to understand attendee loyalty and empirically examine the structural relationships between attendee motivation, involvement, satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty (Figure 1).

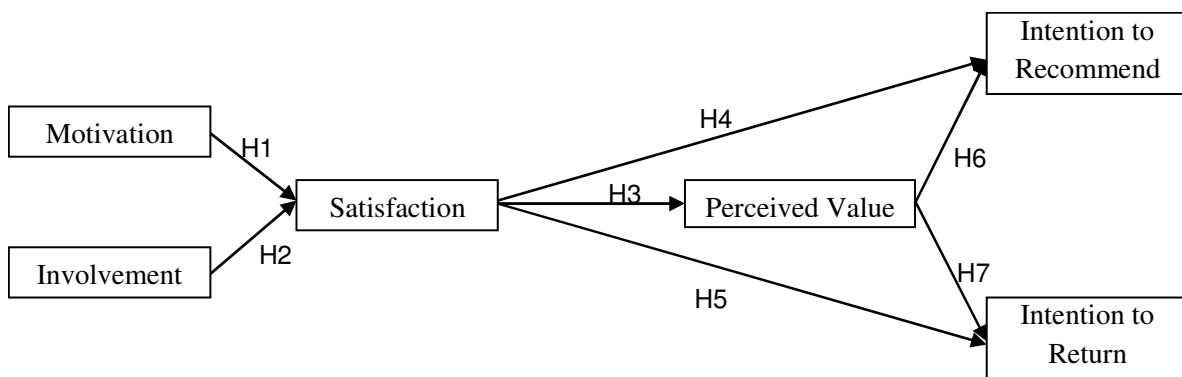


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is the starting point when a decision process is initiated. Fodness (1994) defined motivation as “the driving force behind all behavior.” Therefore, understanding what motivates

people to travel allows researchers to better define the value of tourism behavior, and ultimately predict or influence future travel patterns (Uysal and Hagan 1993). This has also been empirically confirmed that festival attendee motivation is an immediate antecedent of their satisfaction (Savinovic, Kim, and Long 2012, Lee and Beeler 2009). The second concept is involvement, which has been extensively studied by consumer behavior scholars, and is thought to exert a considerable influence over consumers' decision process (Laurent and Kapferer 1985). Tourism and event studies have evidenced that involvement can influence satisfaction positively as well (Bojanic and Warnick 2012, Prayag and Ryan 2012).

The importance of satisfaction in predicting tourist's future behavior is needless to say. Gnoth (1997) argued that the degree of satisfaction would influence perceived trip value, which was supported empirically by Nicolau (2011) and Yuksel (2007). Both studies showed that more satisfied tourists perceive their travel value higher than their less satisfied counterparts. Satisfactions' link to loyalty has also been well-established. Recent empirical studies confirmed that satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit the destination and/or recommend the destination to others (Huang and Hsu 2009, Pandža Bajcs 2015). This is also the case in the setting of festivals and special events (Savinovic, Kim, and Long 2012, Yoon, Lee, and Lee 2010). Based on prior discussion, an integrated loyalty model is created (Figure 1), and seven hypotheses are proposed.

H1: Motivation has a positive influence on satisfaction.

H2: Involvement has a positive influence on satisfaction.

H3: Satisfaction has a positive influence on perceived value.

H4: Satisfaction has a positive influence on intention to recommend.

H5: Satisfaction has a positive influence on intention to return.

H6: Perceived value has a positive influence on intention to recommend.

H7: Perceived value has a positive influence on intention to return.

In addition, the loyalty model is compared between first-time and repeat visitors, as it is generally accepted that past experience can influence visitor motivation, perceptions, post-trip evaluation and decision-making process (Vogt and Andereck 2003, Hong et al. 2009, Kozak 2001). The eight hypothesis was thus proposed.

H8: The relationships among motivation, involvement, satisfaction, perceived value, intention to recommend and intention to return (H1 to H7) are moderated by past experience (first time and repeat attendees).

METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire was first designed in English, and then translated into standardized Chinese (Simplified Chinese) by two bi-lingual researchers. The Chinese version was back-translated into English by two other Chinese. Modifications were then made to the Chinese version. Only the Chinese version was distributed to the respondents. The instrument consisted of sections of motivation (18 items) (Nicholson and Pearce 2001, Lee, Lee, and Wicks 2004), involvement (15 items) (Gursoy and Gavcar 2003, Laurent and Kapferer 1985), satisfaction (25 items) (Jin, Weber, and Bauer 2012, Baker and Crompton 2000), perceived value (3 items) (Zeithaml 1988, Oh 1999, Chen and Chen 2010), and loyalty (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996) (intention to recommend (three items), and intention to return (one item)). All the items were modified and adapted to be suitable for the event and targeted respondents. All the indicators were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale (1=strongly disagree). Demographic information was also gathered.

The study population consisted of the 2012 Airshow China attendees. The Airshow China is held every two years since 1996. It is the only international aerospace trade show approved by the State Council, with Zhuhai appointed as the permanent host city. It is also open to the public visitors for three days. Convenience sampling method was employed and face-to-face survey interviews with event attendees were conducted. A total of 503 complete responses were collected and analyzed. A series of exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were first conducted to determine the underlying dimensions of all the constructs involved. Then a two-stage procedure proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) (1988) was employed to examine the overall measurement model first with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine all the hypothesized paths (H1-H7), and multiple-group comparison was performed to test H8 using AMOS20.

FINDINGS

Of the 503 respondents interviewed, there were a slightly more males (58.1%). More than half of them were rather young and below 34 years old (35.2% of 18-24 age group and 30.4% of 25-34 age group). In terms of their education level, 47.9% of the respondents held a university degree, followed by diploma holders (24.7%). As for their income level, 47.7% of them earned less than RMB5,000 monthly, followed by monthly salary between RMB5,000-9,999 (30.6%). Single (51.1%) and married (48.9) respondents were almost equally distributed. Over 65% of them were first-time attendees, and the rest 35% repeat visitors.

EFA of motivation, involvement, satisfaction, perceived value, and intention to recommend were conducted (Table 1). Five dimensions were derived for motivation, three for involvement, and five for satisfaction. Perceived value and intention to recommend produced one dimension

structure. For multiple-dimensional constructs, mean composite scores for each of the dimensions were calculated by averaging the items loaded within each dimension. Consequently, motivation was measured with five indicators, involvement with three indicators, and satisfaction with five indicators. Thus, the measurement model consisted of intention to revisit (one item), intention to recommend (three items), satisfaction (five items), perceived value (three items), involvement (three items), and motivation (five items).

First round of CFA suggested that family-togetherness be removed from the construct of motivation, and facilities from satisfaction. Hence, the second round of CFA was performed and yielded satisfactory results (Table 2). Multiple fit indices indicated that the overall measurement model was acceptable (GFI=.919, NFI=.929, CFI=.950, SRMR=.039, RMSEA=.067). In addition, all the factor loadings were significant at 0.001 level. Composite reliability coefficients and extract variance estimates for all the constructs were all above the cutoff values of .70 and .50 respectively except extract variance estimate of satisfaction (.468) which is slightly below .50 threshold. Therefore, the overall measurement model was acceptable, and SEM was performed to test the seven hypotheses (H1-H7). All the paths were significant (Table 3) except the relationship between motivation and satisfaction. Thus, six out of the seven hypotheses were supported. Therefore, involvement can exert a significant and positive influence on satisfaction, and satisfaction on perceived value, intention to recommend, and intention to revisit. Perceived value also was found to have a positive effect on both intention to recommend and intention to revisit. Multiple regression analyses, as post hoc tests, were conducted to identify the relative importance of satisfaction dimensions on attendee loyalty, namely, intention to recommend and intention to revisit. Satisfaction with air show and satisfaction with staff were found to be more important contributors to both intentions to recommend and to revisit.

Multiple group analysis was conducted to examine the differences between first time and repeat attendees regarding their loyalty process (Table 4). Results exhibited some significant differences between these two groups. Specifically, while first time visitors put more weight on perceived value of the show when developing their loyal behavior, repeat visitors emphasized more on their level of satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Previous research has acknowledged the significance of motivation, involvement in shaping visitor satisfaction, and the importance of satisfaction in influencing visitors' perceived value and loyalty behavior (Pandža Bajs 2015, Prebensen et al. 2013, Prayag and Ryan 2012). This study extended the literature by integrating all the important factors into one conceptual frame in the setting of special event. This model facilitates better understanding of loyalty process of event attendees. Analysis of data showed that involvement has a direct and positive effect on satisfaction, and satisfaction a direct and positive effect on perceived value, intention to recommend and to revisit. However, the influence of motivation on satisfaction is not significant. Among all the determinants, perceived value is the most important in predicting attendee loyalty. In addition, as air show is a very unique special event, its unique features prove to be more important in determining attendee loyalty process as exemplified that satisfaction with the air show is the more significant attribute influencing attendee loyalty than other three satisfaction dimensions. Another contribution is that this study demonstrated the different dynamics of first time and repeat attendees in developing their loyalty scheme.

This study also provided several implications for event planners and marketers to increase attendee loyalty. It is evident that value perception should become the center of event organizers'

strategic management and marketing. Event planners should provide high value experience to attendees. The perceived value of Airshow China is strongly influenced by their satisfaction with the event, including satisfaction with the air show, the staff, the venue and accessibility to the show. In addition, satisfied air show experience translates to positive WOM and likelihood to revisit the next air show. Therefore, it boils down to air show marketers to stage high quality event by exhibiting more new model aircrafts, inviting more high level flying performance teams. Staff training is also a must for the success of the air show. The differences between first time and repeat attendees advice the organizers to devise different marketing programs to effectively target both first time and repeat visitors by highlighting value of the event for first time visitors and underlining unique features of the air show to repeat attendees.

Table 1 EFA Results

Factors & Indicators	Factor Loadings	Eigen-value	Variance Explained	Reliability Coefficient
Motivation (KMO=0.896)				
Airshow Attractions		6.697	39.395	0.841
Because I like the variety of things to see and do	0.830			
Because I enjoy special events such as the Airshow	0.822			
Because the Airshow is unique	0.735			
Because I enjoy the event crowds	0.591			
Because the show is stimulating and exciting	0.551			
Escape		1.683	9.903	0.854
To have a change from my daily routine	0.842			
For a change of pace from my everyday life	0.805			
To get away from the demands of life	0.775			
Family-Togetherness		1.404	8.261	0.727
Because I thought the entire family would enjoy it	0.854			
So the family could do something together	0.762			
Because I enjoy the event crowds	0.644			
Novelty		1.066	5.979	0.753
To experience new and different things	0.741			
Because I am curious	0.736			
Because this is the only chance that I can see the real aviation and aerospace	0.620			
Socialization		1.017	5.725	0.765
So I could be with my friends	0.848			
To be with people who enjoy the same things I do	0.727			
To be with people of similar interest/hobby	0.535			
Total Variance Explained			69.264	
Involvement (KMO=.892)				
Interest/Pleasure		6.056	43.256	0.906
I can say that this Airshow interests me a lot	0.869			
I give myself pleasure by attending this Airshow	0.856			
I attach great importance to this Airshow	0.815			
When I attend this Airshow, it is a bit like giving a gift to myself	0.760			
For me, attending this Airshow is somewhat a pleasure	0.745			
Sign		1.964	14.026	0.817
What type of event you attend tells something about you	0.794			
What event I attend gives a glimpse of the type of person I am	0.760			
You can tell about a person by what type of event he/she attends	0.758			
Risk Probability		1.092	6.494	0.761
Whenever one attends an event, one never really knows whether it is a right choice	0.854			
When faced with choosing among events, I always feel a bit at a loss to make the right choice	0.817			
It is rather complicated to choose an event	0.719			
Total Variance Explained			63.776	

Satisfaction (KMO=.913)				
Staff		8.582	39.009	0.940
The staff are available whenever I need them	0.870			
The staff provide useful information	0.858			
The staff are polite and friendly	0.850			
The staff possess good language ability	0.845			
The staff are willing to help	0.790			
Venue		2.628	11.944	0.887
The layout of Airshow is well planned and organized	0.767			
The signage is clear.	0.765			
The signage is sufficient	0.761			
The venue is clean	0.734			
The admission process is well managed	0.691			
The flow of visitors is in good order	0.647			
Accessibility		1.540	6.998	0.832
The venue can be accessed by public transportation	0.846			
The location of the Airshow is convenient	0.826			
The shuttle bus service offered by the organizer is convenient	0.782			
Facilities		1.182	5.375	0.744
Sufficient rest facilities (such as chairs, benches) are provided	0.783			
The food and beverage service is good	0.741			
The restrooms are clean	0.594			
Airshow		1.022	4.647	0.785
The flying display is wonderful	0.767			
The exhibits are attractive	0.741			
The flying performance is exciting	0.642			
Total Variance Explained			67.973	
<hr/>				
Perceived Value (KMO=.739)		2.458	81.947	0.890
Value1: The Airshow offered value for the money	0.921			
Value2: The Airshow was worthy for my time and effort	0.908			
Value3: Attending this show provided much more benefits than costs	0.885			
Total Variance Explained			81.947	
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Intention to Recommend (KMO=.756)		2.541	84.696	0.909
Recommend1: I will recommend this show to other people	0.927			
Recommend2: I will encourage friends and relatives to attend this show	0.920			
Recommend3: I will say positive things about this show to other people	0.913			
Total Variance Explained			84.696	
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Table 2 CFA Results

Factor and	Standardized	Composite	Error	Extract Variance
Motivation		0.801		0.536
Airshow Attractions	0.873		0.238	
Novelty	0.695		0.517	
Escape	0.603		0.636	
Socialization	0.645		0.584	
Involvement		0.750		0.511
Interest	0.862		0.257	
Risk Probability	0.515		0.735	
Sign	0.724		0.476	
Satisfaction		0.801		0.468
Staff	0.761		0.421	
Venue	0.671		0.550	
Accessibility	0.612		0.625	
Airshow	0.781		0.390	
Perceived Value		0.891		0.731
Value1	0.868		0.247	
Value3	0.816		0.334	
Value2	0.880		0.226	
Intention to Recommend		0.910		0.771
Recommend3	0.853		0.272	
Recommend1	0.900		0.190	
Recommend2	0.880		0.226	

All the factor loadings are significant at .001 level.

Table 3 SEM Results

Hypothesized Paths	b coefficient	β coefficient
H1: Motivation --> Satisfaction	0.114 ^{n.s.}	0.147
H2: Involvement --> Satisfaction	0.351***	0.496
H3: Satisfaction --> Perceived Value	1.106***	0.703
H4: Satisfaction --> Intention to Recommend	0.328***	0.218
H5: Satisfaction --> Intention to Revisit	0.308**	0.145
H6: Perceived Value --> Intention to Recommend	0.725***	0.757
H7: Perceived Value --> Intention to Revisit	0.867***	0.642
	R Square	
Satisfaction	0.396	
Perceived Value	0.494	
Intention to Recommend	0.853	
Intention to Revisit	0.564	

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, n.s.:not significant

Table 4 Comparison between First Time and Repeat Attendees (H8)

Hypothesized Paths	First time Attendees			Repeat Attendees			z-score
	b	β	P	b	β	P	
	coefficient	coefficient		coefficient	coefficient		
H1: Motivation --> Satisfaction	-0.139	-0.179	0.559	0.235	0.355	0.015	1.456
H2: Involvement --> Satisfaction	0.579	0.782	0.014	0.198	0.372	0.014	-1.534
H3: Satisfaction --> Perceived Value	1.160	0.754	0.000	1.087	0.56	0.000	-0.318
H4: Satisfaction --> Intention to Recommend	0.216	0.142	0.017	0.566	0.325	0.000	2.03**
H5: Satisfaction --> Intention to Revisit	-0.040	-0.019	0.809	0.801	0.331	0.000	3.111***
H6: Perceived Value --> Intention to Recommend	0.831	0.841	0.000	0.555	0.618	0.000	-2.771***
H7: Perceived Value --> Intention to Revisit	1.073	0.781	0.000	0.577	0.463	0.000	-3.366***

Notes: *** p-value < 0.01; ** p-value < 0.05

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