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Balandran, Jose S. and Roehl, Wesley S., "Festival Mindfulness: Assessing the Relationship between Learning and Experience Outcomes" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 19.
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Festival Mindfulness: Assessing the Relationship between Learning and Experience Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of learning motivation on attendee experience through an application of Mindfulness theory. In this context, guests at a large annual festival in the Philadelphia area were surveyed on their overall experience and learning outcomes. Despite previous research to the contrary, this particular festival context did not lead to statistically significant differences between learning motivated and non-learning motivated attendees. These results may have been due to the lack of key setting factors, such as: interactive exhibits, multisensory media, building connections to visitors and novelty. This research has implications related to festival planning, marketing and creating greater attendee experiences.

Keywords: *festival experience, Mindfulness theory, attendee motivation, attendee learning*

INTRODUCTION

Festivals can be experienced and consumed from multiple points of view (Robinson, Picard & Long, 2004). This translates to a variety of potential attendee motivations and outcomes. In a festival context, learning or education often coexists with entertainment. Pearce (2005) explores this through the concept of “edutainment”, or entertainment with educational value. Mindfulness theory is particularly useful for exploring the efficacy of learning as part the tourist experience. Mindfulness is a cognitive state where people are more attuned to their surroundings (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). This is induced by a variety of setting and personal factors which cultivate this state in visitors (Moscardo, 1996). Ultimately, this leads to greater satisfaction and heightened learning outcomes for visitors as compared to mindless visitors (Frauman & Norman, 2004).

In the tourism context, this theory is typically applied to heritage tourism (Moscardo, 1996; McIntosh, 1999; Prentice, Guerin & McGugan, 1998) and natural tourism (Frauman & Norman, 2004) settings. With respect to festivals, Van Winkle and Backman (2009) found a statistically significant relationship between learning motivators and mindfulness, as well as, between mindfulness and satisfaction. However, the variation in satisfaction accounted for by mindfulness was small. In more educationally focused settings, stronger relationships have been

observed. The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of relationships among learning motivation, mindfulness and satisfaction in festival settings.

METHODS

This study was conducted using data obtained at a large annual event in Philadelphia which focuses on celebrating diversity and fostering multicultural learning and tolerance. The event was located on the Delaware River Waterfront with ample access to public transportation. The estimated attendance for this one day event was 25,000 people and there was no entry fee.

Festival attendees were randomly selected to respond to a questionnaire focused on their motivations for attendance and various aspects of their experience with particular emphasis on learning. Attendee motivations were captured using a nominal item where attendees choice the impetus for their decision to attend the festival. Perceived learning items were assessed using 5-point likert-type scales to determine if the attendees learned about their culture or other cultures. 5-point likert-type scale items were also employed as attendee experience indicators (AEI), specifically related to: expectations, satisfaction, likelihood of future attendance and likelihood of recommendation.

In order to ascertain the strength of relationships between the presence of learning as a motivator and attendee experience, two rounds of analyses were conducted. The first focused on the nature of the sample population and their learning motivations. The second battery of tests were run to investigate relationships among learning motivation, perceived learning items and AEI items.

RESULTS

Questionnaires were distributed throughout the event leading to a sample population of 224 festival attendees. A preliminary investigation of the event focused on creating a profile of the festival attendees. The demographic breakdown the population was predominantly female (56%). The age of respondents varied with the majority of respondents aged below 45 years of age (70%) Overall the participants were fairly well educated with 70% having had at least some college education. The ethnic breakdown of the sample population revealed the most highly represented groups to be African-American (47%) and White (31%).

Participants who indicated they were attending the festival in order to learn more about their culture or other cultures were considered to be learning motivated. 23% of respondents reported learning as a motivator. Learning motivation was examined across the various demographic and behavioral items to determine if a specific profile could be created for educationally focused visitors. Chi-Square tests were conducted for the following characteristics: Gender, Age, Education Level, Ethnicity and Previous Festival Attendance. The only relationship discernible at the .05 significance level was gender ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 6.44$, $p = 0.011$). In this case, females were more likely to be motivated by learning than their male counter parts.

Finally, learning and non-learning motivated groups were compared with respect to learning outcomes and AEI items. For the learning outcome items, learning about my culture received an average score of 2.8 with a standard deviation of 1.2. Learning about other cultures received a slightly higher mean score of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 1.1. AEI outcomes were

generally higher with the exception of the expectation item (with a mean of 3.4 and a standard deviation of 0.9). The satisfaction item had an overall mean of 4.0 with a standard deviation of 0.8. The likelihood to attend and recommend the event had mean scores of 4.0 (standard deviation 1.0) and 4.1 (standard deviation of 0.9) respectively. Based on the previous studies it was expected that a statistically significant difference would be found between these groups' learning and satisfaction outcomes. ANOVA results between groups on perceived learning items were not found to be statistically significant. Similar results were found when comparing these groups across AEI results. Despite previous findings to the contrary, learning motivation did not lead to increased learning or satisfaction in visitors.

Table 1

ANOVA Results Between Learning Motivated and Non-Learning Motivated Festival Attendees

	df1	df2	F	p
Learning about My Culture	1	222	1.946	0.164
Learning about Other Cultures	1	218	0.453	0.502
Expectations	1	222	0.135	0.713
Satisfaction	1	222	0.006	0.940
Likelihood of Future Attendance	1	221	0.030	0.864
Likelihood of Future Recommendation	1	221	0.701	0.403

CONCLUSION

Previous studies have shown that mindful states, which are tied to learning motivation, should increase learning and satisfaction outcomes. As stated previously, mindfulness theory postulates that environmental and personal factors contribute to mindfulness (Moscardo, 1996). Setting and design factors play an important role by creating an atmosphere conducive to learning and essentially fostering a more exciting experience. These design factors include: variety/change, use of multisensory media, novelty/conflict/surprise, use of questions, visitor control/interactive exhibits, connections to visitors and good physical orientation. The presence of these qualities should create a more mindfulness-inducing environment.

In this particular case, the festival's goal was to promote learning, which is dependent upon creating the proper learning atmosphere. An examination of the respondents' suggestions and criticisms gives further insight into the effectiveness of the festival organizers in creating this ideal educational setting. Several respondents commented on a desire for greater interactivity at the event. This is not surprising given the event centers around musical entertainment and a variety of vendors. There was a single area devoted to children's crafts, which did provide some interactivity for children. There was very little interactivity that appealed to adults. Another interesting common suggestion involved the incorporation of greater diversity at the event, both in the musical offerings and in the site itself. This festival is multicultural in nature and yet many

attendees felt that there was a lack of diversity and perhaps that their particular group was not included in the multicultural offerings at the event. At least this shows a lack of connection with the attendees. Also, if more diversity was requested it suggests a lack of novelty.

Ultimately, the dual educational and entertainment atmosphere provided by festivals provides an interesting challenge to the role of mindfulness in tourist experiences. In order to capitalize on gains in learning and satisfaction by attendees, event stakeholders should incorporate mindfulness-inducing setting factors in their festival planning. This can be enhanced by the development of festival site evaluations focusing on these factors to be used in conjunction with consumer mindfulness measures to ensure that these goals were met. The development and effects of these mindfulness-based planning procedures and evaluations was beyond the scope of this study, but represents an interesting future direction for festival-related mindfulness research.

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