

Analysis of repeat visitation to a university festival

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Abstract

Recently, local events and festivals are being increasingly used as destination marketing tools to enhance tourism. One such local event, the gakuensai (university festival) attracts visitors from both the university and its environs and as such visitors to the gakuensai should be considered as event tourists. There is however a lack of research into the gakuensai as part of the event tourism genre. Using an empirical questionnaire survey administered at a university in Chiba, this paper therefore attempts to fill this paucity in knowledge by measuring how gakuensai visitors evaluate the festival as an event, and in doing so examine any possible factors that encourage repeat visitation. Results show that attending gakuensai is a satisfying experience and moreover show that repeat visitation is related in part to festival food. The relevance of the study to other local area festivals is discussed.

Keywords

festival, event, repeat visitation, university festival, questionnaire survey

1. Introduction

The current enthusiasm for the Olympics in Japan shows it is mega events that stir the public imagination and take center stage in government tourism policy. Recently however smaller scale, local events and festivals are also being used as a mechanism to enhance local area tourism.

Events and festivals play a significant role in the development and attractiveness of towns and regions [Raj et al., 2017]. As Getz and Page [2016] point out, “events attract tourists, events contribute to place marketing, events animate attractions and places, events can act as catalysts for other forms of development or improved capacity to attract tourists through infrastructure gains and more effective marketing”.

We can thus suggest that any town with suitable facilities or touristic value can become an event tourism destination. As well as contributing to development events can help nurture relations between the host and the guest [Getz, 2008] and positively reinforce the way people view and reflect on regions. In the case of one's own region this can have a positive effect on local culture and customs, and build civic pride [Ashkenazi, 1990].

In order to be successful events need to provide a level of benefit, or satisfaction. In turn this satisfaction will determine the level of success and any repeat visitation [Byrd et al., 2014].

Despite numerous studies on the phenomenon of event tourism there is little research that focuses on the university festival (*gakuensai*) as a tourist event. By investigating one such festival in a decentralized location in Japan the current study thus offers a new perspective.

Using empirical questionnaire survey data administered to festival participants at Awa Campus, Josai International University, Chiba this paper considers how event participants evaluate the *gakuensai* and highlights the key factors that can promote repeat visitation.

The results presented help us not only to understand aspects

of festival participants' satisfaction but also to understand the activities and operations of the event itself. In turn the motivation to undertake repeat visits and the scale of any such visits can be better recognized as can any additional implied benefits for the area which accrue from event tourism.

2. Previous research

Events can bring significant economic benefits to a place and consequently can make a powerful contribution to tourism and other businesses in destinations.

Getz [2008] highlights how events can stimulate the local economy at all levels by being a fillip for infrastructure building, and in addition act as a forum for introducing local traditions and culture to visitors who can make a more authentic experience. This can encourage spending and create an economic positive feedback effect. On the other hand, Lee, Arcodia, and Lee [2012] indicate that festivals can make a significant social contribution by developing local community networks.

Research related to event tourism published in Japan has tended to take a theoretical approach [Morishita, 2014; Akiyoshi, 2013] although Minamizono, Kaneko, Minamizono, and Motohashi [2013] did explore the effects of the festival on participants themselves. Opening the way for the current research Iwamoto, Williams, and Uchiyama made their first exploratory investigation into the *gakuensai* as event tourism in 2015. This study found that visitor satisfaction at the *gakuensai* was positive for 5 factors with those relating to the ‘program’ itself and ‘food’ most highly correlated.

In their later study, Williams, Iwamoto and Uchiyama [2016] examined visitor satisfaction and found participants' characteristics or ‘antecedents’, including age, experience, and culture, to be important. The statistically most significant differences were found between groups of the same culture rather than for groups from dissimilar cultures. Blešić, Pivac, Stamenković, and Besermenji [2013] add to this finding by pointing to gender as an important factor in understanding event tourism.

Regarding satisfaction at festivals emphasis has been placed largely on “quality”. Baker and Crompton [2000] for example have shown the value of stressing quality when festival partici-

pants evaluate features such as festival food, performances and activities – all features offered by the *gakuensai*. At the same time Yoon et al. [2010] highlight the relationship between quality and value, satisfaction, or loyalty. Such loyalty, as expressed in repeat visits, can influence both the length of stay at the festival and the economic benefits it brings [Byrd et al., 2014].

Based on the findings of these previous studies, the current research intends to introduce factors that may indicate potential repeat visitation.

3. Method

3.1 Overview

The questionnaire survey for the current research was conducted in October 2016 on the campus of Josai International University's Faculty of Tourism during its annual festival, known as *Koryu Day*. The tourism studies dedicated campus is located in Kamogawa – a small year-round Pacific coast short-stay tourist destination located in the southern part of Chiba prefecture.

Koryu Day is an event that welcomes a relatively large number of overseas students, and aims to emphasize tourism, research and internationality. The festival's main performances are held on an open-air stage surrounded by various student-run stalls selling food and snacks, while exhibitions, academic presentations and other displays are held inside the main campus building.

3.2 Data collection

The survey instrument was divided into two parts. The first part elicited demographic background information on respondents and the second consisted of 15 questions across 5 different domains designed to uncover how respondents evaluated the *gakuensai*.

Based on Yoon et al. [2010] study of event tourism repeat visits, the current research extracted 5 key domains (“information service”, “program”, “food”, “festival value”, and “loyalty”) and presented respondents with three 5-point Likert style question items for each domain.

During the *gakuensai* questionnaires were administered to festival participants on a voluntary basis with researchers on hand to receive completed surveys. A total of 179 questionnaires were collected of which 134 were deemed suitable for analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

Analysis of the data was conducted in three steps. First, descriptive statistics from part one of the survey (demographic factors) were compiled. Secondly, descriptive statistics concerning participants' satisfaction with the *gakuensai* were produced. Finally, a stepwise regression analysis using all 15 items was conducted to reveal any factors that might affect repeat visits where the question, ‘I would like to attend this festival again next year’ was the independent variable, and all other factors were treated as dependent variables.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic profiles of the respondents ($N = 134$) are

Table 1: Respondents' demographic profiles

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	61	46
Male	73	54
Age		
10-19	30	22
20-29	64	48
30-39	9	7
40-49	9	7
50-59	7	5
60 and above	14	10
Nationality		
Japan	74	55
China	21	16
Vietnam	12	9
Hungary	8	6
Taiwan	4	3
Other nationality	15	11
Occupation		
University student	84	63
Full-time employee	27	20
High school student	8	6
Housewife/Househusband	6	4
Retired	3	2
Other occupation	6	4
Transportation		
Car	54	40
Bicycle	21	16
On foot	21	16
Hired bus	19	14
Local bus	12	9
Train	7	5
Number of visits		
First visit	78	58
One previous visit	17	13
Two previous visits	17	13
Three previous visits	7	5
Four or more previous visits	15	11

shown in Table 1.

The gender (male: female) ratio of respondents was 54:46 and comprised mostly those who were less than 30 years of age (20-29 age group = 48 %; 10-19 age group = 22 %).

Regarding respondents' nationality a total of ten different countries were represented at the *gakuensai* of which 55 % were Japanese. The other major nationalities were China (16 %), Vietnam (9 %), Hungary (6 %), and Taiwan (3 %). A further five nations made up the remaining 11 % of participants.

As we might expect for university festival the majority of respondents (63 %) identified their occupation as ‘university student’. A further 27 % identified as ‘full-time employees’ (including self-employed) while ‘high school students’ (6 %) and ‘housewives’ (4 %) comprised the majority of other respondents.

Concerning mode of transport to the festival, the most common was ‘car’ (40 %). Other means of transport included ‘on foot’ (21 %), bicycle (16 %), hired bus (14 %), and local bus (9 %).

Finally, regarding the number of visits made to Koryu Day,

most respondents (58 %) indicated it was their ‘first time’. At the same time 29 % were visiting for at least a third time implying the relatively high proportion of multiple repeat visitors.

Dissemination of information about an event is vital to encourage first, or repeat, visitation. As Table 2 indicates in the current research the two most common ways for visitors to learn about the event were ‘university webpage’ and ‘poster/leaflet’ which together accounted for 40 % of participants. The large relatively proportion of ‘other’ (28 %) comprised mostly word-of-mouth communication. This observation shows how informal networks can be crucial to event visitation.

Table 2: Means of gathering festival information

	Frequency	(%)
University webpage	29	22
University Facebook	17	12
Faculty webpage	16	12
Poster/leaflet	24	18
Seminar or event	11	8
Other	37	28
Total	134	100

4.2 Measurement of visitors’ satisfaction with the university festival

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis of the 15 questionnaire items in the five domains.

Firstly, in the “information service” domain, the highest mean score (M) was attributed to ‘student staff were good guides’ ($M = 4.31$) with ‘Pamphlets were well prepared’ (3.99) and ‘I had good knowledge about this festival before today’ (3.78), the lattermost being the lowest mean score of any of the 15 items.

For the “program” domain, ‘the festival was enjoyable’, ‘there was a good range of activities’, and ‘the festival was well organized’ received mean scores (M) of 4.35, 4.28, and 4.21 respectively.

In the third domain, “food”, the highest mean score was attributed to ‘the festival stalls were good’ ($M = 4.34$) with ‘the festival stalls were unique’ evaluated with a mean score of 4.20. ‘Stall food was reasonably priced’ ($M = 3.97$) gained the highest standard deviation value ($SD = 0.917$) of the 15 items and hints at the individual subjectivity in evaluating price.

Overall, the highest evaluated domain was “festival value” with all three items receiving mean scores $M \geq 4.32$. As reported by Williams, Iwamoto and Uchiyama [2016] this was true across all visitors irrespective of age, gender or culture.

Responses relating to the “loyalty” domain were also highly evaluated and mirrored those of “festival value”. In particular the intention to make a repeat visit, ‘I would like to attend this festival again next year’ ($M = 4.40$), stands out to show the importance of instilling a sense of allegiance to an event to ensure visitors return year after year.

4.3 Multivariate regression

A stepwise regression was carried out to elicit any items in

Table 3: Measurement of visitors’ satisfaction

Questionnaire item	Mean	SD
Information service		
I had good knowledge about this festival before today	3.78	0.887
Pamphlets were well prepared	3.99	0.836
Student staff were good guides	4.31	0.770
Program		
The festival was enjoyable	4.35	0.718
There was a good range of activities	4.21	0.795
The festival was well organized	4.28	0.791
Food		
Stall food was reasonably priced	3.97	0.917
The festival stalls were good	4.34	0.747
The festival stalls were unique	4.20	0.802
Festival value		
The festival was a positive experience	4.32	0.742
I believe I did the right thing coming to the festival	4.46	0.679
On the whole, I am happy with the festival	4.46	0.679
Loyalty		
I will spread positive word-of-mouth about the festival	4.36	0.750
I will recommend this festival to my friends, family, and neighbours	4.29	0.784
I would like to attend this festival again next year	4.40	0.815

Table 4: Stepwise regression results

	Repeat visits (β)
The festival stalls were unique	.416*
There was a good range of activities	.296*
R^2	0.365

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

the 15-item questionnaire that might explain repeat visitation. As shown in Table 4 at the 95 % confidence level ($p < 0.05$) two items (‘the festival stalls were unique’ and ‘there was a good range of activities’) correlated significantly with the independent variable, repeat visitation.

The results of the regression with 2 df (2, 131) produced an F value of 37.61 which is significant at $p < 0.001$. The resultant multiple correlation coefficient of 0.60 indicates that approximately 36.5 % of the variance of repeat visitation can be accounted for by the items ‘the festival stalls were unique’ and ‘there was a good range of activities’.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As an investigation into *gakuensai* surveyed on a university campus it is not surprising that most respondents in the current research were university students. What made *Koryu Day* unique however was the relatively high proportion of non-Japanese par-

ticipants at an event in non-metropolitan area of Japan. The results presented here can thus be instructive to planners of events in Japan who aim to target foreign visitors to regional events and, in doing so, answer the call of Japan's contemporary tourism policy of enticing tourists to lesser-visited regions of the country.

One surprising result was the large number of visitors (42 %) to *Koryu Day* making at least a second visit. Repeat visits come from loyalty and from this figure it appears there may be an unrecognized tendency in the visitor profile to local area events like the *gakuensai*. Many of these repeat visitors were students of the university but when set against the number of visits made by persons from outside the university (47 %) it is likely there is great scope for increasing this repeat visit ratio even further.

In order to make this a reality, there needs to be timely, accurate and reliable information about the event in a format that is suitable for the target audience. Within a university setting word-of-mouth may be an effective way to do so but to reach the wider community requires a strategic approach that can attract all sections of society. In rural areas of Japan where populations are older this may mean established media such as advertisements in newspapers are suitable. This can be complemented by electronic and/or social media platforms to widen any such audience. The low mean values attached to the "information services" domain of the current research suggest that a fully co-ordinated strategy was not implemented at *Koryu Day*.

Despite this apparent deficiency, overall satisfaction with *Koryu Day* was high. This is evidenced by the high mean values for the items in the "festival value" domain such as, 'I believe I did the right thing in coming to the festival' and 'on the whole, I am happy with the festival'. This in turn appears to be encouraging visitors to consider future visits to the festival. From the regression analysis presented here the driver behind this appears to be related to the food available at the festival. This result is supported by Nield et al. [2000] who found that food is central to visitor satisfaction particularly for events that are multicultural.

From our analysis more than one third (36.5 %) of the variance in repeat visitation correlated with food related questionnaire items. It is thus our belief that to be successful, local area festivals such as *gakuensai* while paying attention to information dissemination need to focus on one festival attribute, food. This can attract repeat visitation and, as shown here, is a suitable strategy to encourage visits to Japan's regions by both domestic and international visitors.

To overcome the limitations of the current research it is recommended that future research employ stratified sampling techniques to ensure a balanced generational spread of respondents.

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