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The Effect of Festival Atmospheric on Visitors' Emotions and Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how festival atmospheric influence visitors' emotions and satisfaction within the Mehrabian-Russell (M-R) framework. Data were collected from festival goers using an onsite and post-visit survey in Spring/Summer 2008 at three Texas community festivals. Our results provided empirical evidence in support of the M-R model within the festival contexts. Specifically, the study results demonstrated that festival atmospheric had a positive indirect effect on overall satisfaction with festival experiences via positive emotions. Based on the findings, practical and theoretical insights are provided.

Keywords: *festival atmospheric, consumption emotions, satisfaction, agricultural festivals*

INTRODUCTION

Environmental psychologists and marketing researchers have investigated the role of emotions that are elicited by different environmental stimuli in affecting human behaviors in various settings. Mehrabian and Russell (1974), in particular, demonstrated how environmental perceptions elicit different sets of emotions, and these emotions, in turn, influence people's reaction to the environment either positively or negatively. The Mehrabian-Russell (M-R) model is based on a stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) paradigm of human information processing in learning theory and behavioral psychology (White, 1993). In a nutshell, the model posits that an individual's perception and interpretation of the physical and social environment influence how s/he feels in that environment. It further assumes that such feelings as pleasure, arousal, and dominance affect the behaviors that govern whether people either approach or avoid an environment.

The M-R model has been adapted in services marketing to suggest how the physical environments in service organizations (e.g., retail stores) can be used to influence customers' behaviors (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Correspondingly, tourism researchers have focused on the role of emotion elicited from physical and social stimuli within a destination in predicting repeat patronage intention and creating positive word of mouth recommendations (e.g., Boom & Bitner, 1982; Castro et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2008). For example, Lee et al. (2008) have recently investigated how festivalscapes affect visitors' emotional experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty to the particular festival. In their study, emotional states were aggregated into specific emotion types with a similar valence (i.e., positive and negative emotions). Yet, the summed, unidimensional emotion measures tend to entail some limitations, including the incapability of fully capturing the nuance, diversity, and pattern of emotional responses to different contexts (Holbrook & Westwood 1989; Richins, 1997). Given that several discrete emotion types existent at a lower level of aggregation have different antecedents and consequences (Söderlund & Rosengren, 2004), it is necessary to reassess how different types of emotions elicited from various environmental stimuli affect visitors' post-visit evaluation with their festival experiences.

Building on the Lee et al.'s (2008) work, this study aimed at understanding the effect of visitors' different sets of emotions engendered specifically during festival experiences on their overall satisfaction. Unlike the previous work that has no theoretical basis, this study adapted the M-R model in order to better explain how visitors react to the festival physical and social environment.

METHODS

Data collection procedures

Data were collected at the three community-based festivals (i.e., two strawberry festivals and one wine festival) in Texas in April through November 2008. An onsite survey first was

administered by interviewers who distributed self-administered questionnaires to randomly selected visitors at various venues at approximately 15-minute intervals. Altogether, 743 individuals at the three festivals completed the survey questionnaire. In a follow-up survey procedure, individuals who provided valid contact information ($N = 579$) received a self-administered survey questionnaire via postal mail and/or e-mail/Internet over a six-week period. A total of 228 questionnaires were returned in six weeks (37.3% of response rate).

Measurement instruments

Measures for festival atmospherics and overall satisfaction consisted for multiple items on the basis of previous literature and were modified to fit to the context of this study. All measures have been empirically tested and found to be valid in various contexts. Specifically, festival atmospherics were measured using the Bitner's (1992) intended service environment. A total of 23 items were assessed the three dimensions of festival atmospherics (i.e., ambience, layout/design, and service encounter) using a 7-point bipolar scale (1 = very poor to 7 = very good). Overall satisfaction with the festivals was measured using 11 items suggested by Oliver's (1997) evaluative set of cumulative satisfaction measures. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on all items using a 7-point Likert scale.

In order to identify the measures that best reflected festival visitors' emotional experience, I conducted a four-stage of exploratory study: (1) compiling the full range of emotions; (2) eliminating irrelevant, unfamiliar, and rarely used descriptors using frequency analysis (Ortony et al., 1988); (3) categorizing the remaining items under the six basic emotions (i.e., love, joy, anger, sadness, fear, and surprise); and (4) removing the subcategorical descriptors with a substantially lower likelihood of usage rating within a basic category (Shaver et al., 1987). As a result, 24 festival-specific emotion descriptors were obtained and measured in a 5-point scale with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "extremely much."

RESULTS

Demographic profiles of respondents

Overall, the respondents at the three festivals were predominantly white and female with an average age of 41. A majority of all respondents in each of the surveys indicated that they had graduated from college and/or earned an advanced degree (82%). The proportion of non-local, repeat visitors was significantly higher at the two strawberry festivals than at the steak and wine festival.

Testing for a measurement model

After performing data preparation and screening, latent constructs were tested for the validity of the multidimensional factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in LISREL 8.8 (Byrne, 1998). After deleting the cross-loaded items and combining the items of three emotional factors with a substantial correlation ($r > 0.90$), I obtained 16 items of three-dimensional festival atmospherics, 17 items of four-dimensional emotions, and 4 items of unidimensional festival satisfaction [$\chi^2_{(600)} = 1015.31$, RMSEA = 0.05, NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98] (see Table 1). Parameter estimates of each item had correct signs and sizes and appropriate standard errors, which indicated their statistical significance (Byrne, 1998). Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability further indicated good internal consistency of the items of all constructs respectively.

Testing for a structural model

The next step involved testing the causal relationship of the hypothesized model (see Figure 1). The goodness-of-fit indices for the model suggested a reasonable fit to the sample data [$\chi^2_{(617)} = 1641.21$, RMSEA = 0.08, NNFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.96]. *Love* and *joy* were positively predicted by both *ambience* ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 6.48$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.81$, $t = 8.99$, $p < 0.001$) and *service encounter* ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 6.85$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.18$, $t = 3.69$, $p < 0.001$), whereas *negative emotions* were negatively influenced by both predictors ($\beta = -0.21$, $t = -2.94$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = -0.27$, $t = -3.86$, $p < 0.001$). *Surprise* was also strongly predicted by *ambience* ($\beta = 0.69$, $t = 8.71$, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, *layout/design*

was found to be a negative predictor of all positive emotions (*love*, $\beta = -0.33$, $t = -5.18$, $p < 0.001$; *joy*, $\beta = -0.22$, $t = -4.32$, $p < 0.001$; *surprise*, $\beta = -0.14$, $t = -2.48$, $p < 0.05$), but had no effect on *negative emotions*. Of those four salient emotions, only *joy*, in turn, was a strong predictor had a positive effect on *overall satisfaction* ($\beta = 0.90$, $t = 7.94$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1
Confirmatory factor analysis and item descriptive festival atmospherics, emotions, and overall satisfaction^a

Items	α (ρ)	λ	t -value	R^2	M	SD
Festival atmospherics^b						
FA1 <i>Ambience</i>	0.88 (0.88)					
Availability of activities/programs for all ages		0.76	13.23	0.58	5.14	1.45
Quality of entertainment		0.80	14.27	0.64	5.41	1.30
Uniqueness of themed activities/programs		0.76	13.28	0.58	5.06	1.35
Availability of types of food/refreshments		0.78	13.65	0.60	5.54	1.29
Availability of various souvenirs/products		0.75	12.97	0.56	5.20	1.44
FA2 <i>Layout/design</i>	0.86 (0.87)					
Easy access to parking lots		0.71	11.99	0.51	5.38	1.84
Availability of restrooms		0.76	13.19	0.58	5.02	1.49
Enough picnic tables and rest areas		0.62	9.93	0.38	4.22	1.73
Availability of proper signs for site directions		0.73	12.45	0.54	4.83	1.48
Cleanliness of the festival site		0.76	13.12	0.58	5.30	1.31
Safe and well-maintained equipment and facilities		0.78	13.60	0.61	5.43	1.18
FA3 <i>Service encounter/social interaction</i>	0.95 (0.94)					
Attentive staff who willingly respond to my requests		0.84	15.54	0.71	4.97	1.49
Friendly and courteous staff		0.90	17.29	0.81	5.43	1.30
Staff's willingness to help me and other visitors		0.89	17.01	0.79	5.21	1.37
Knowledgeable staff in response to my requests		0.89	17.11	0.80	5.14	1.35
Availability of prompt services		0.84	15.37	0.70	5.20	1.36
Emotions^c						
A1 <i>Love</i>	0.88 (0.88)					
Caring		0.88	16.18	0.77	2.89	1.17
Loving		0.83	14.94	0.69	3.04	1.26
Compassionate		0.82	14.50	0.67	2.60	1.13
A2 <i>Joy</i>	0.90 (0.90)					
Happy		0.87	16.11	0.75	4.09	0.83
Pleased		0.84	15.22	0.70	3.96	0.84
Glad		0.84	15.26	0.70	3.82	0.85
Cheerful		0.79	13.99	0.62	3.87	0.90
A3 <i>Surprise</i>	0.89 (0.89)					
Amazed		0.91	17.27	0.83	2.72	1.16
Surprised		0.88	16.30	0.77	2.78	1.11
Astonished		0.76	13.05	0.57	2.43	1.11
A4 <i>Negative</i>	0.92 (0.93)					
Annoyed		0.84	15.26	0.70	1.77	0.91
Frustrated		0.75	12.92	0.56	1.96	0.97
Irritated		0.82	14.67	0.67	1.67	0.87
Aggravated		0.87	16.11	0.75	1.56	0.86
Unhappy		0.81	14.39	0.65	1.42	0.81
Tense		0.76	13.28	0.58	1.59	0.83
Uneasy		0.80	14.14	0.63	1.45	0.72
Overall satisfaction^d						
My choice to visit this festival was a wise one	0.92 (0.92)	0.82	14.95	0.68	5.55	1.52
I am satisfied with my decision to visit this festival		0.84	15.36	0.70	5.91	1.36
This festival made me feel happy		0.89	16.90	0.79	5.60	1.44
I really enjoyed myself at this festival		0.90	17.13	0.80	5.85	1.32

a. Fit indices: $\chi^2_{(600)} = 1015.31$, RMSEA = 0.05, NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98

b. Items measured along a 7-point scale where 1 = very poor and 7 = very good

c. Items measured along a 5-point scale where 1 = not at all and 5 = extremely much

d. Items measured along a 7-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree

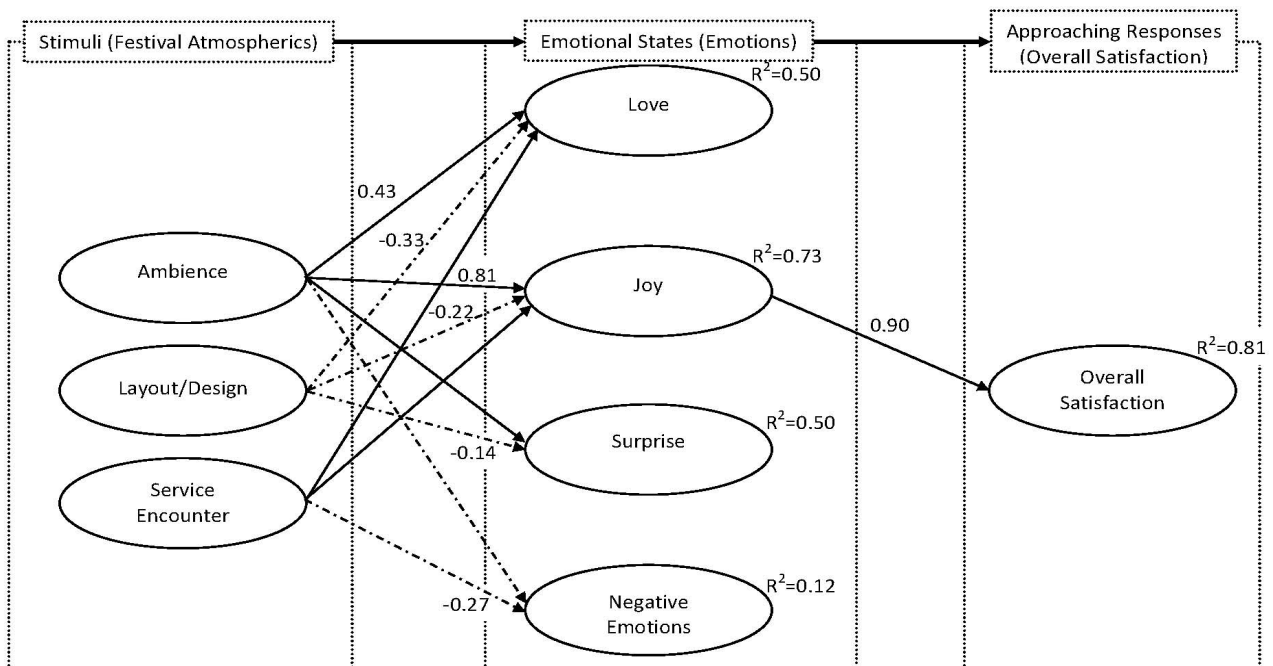
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study results demonstrate that certain aspects of festival atmospherics played an essential role in engendering moderate to strong positive emotions and indirectly affecting overall satisfaction. Well-managed festival ambience and satisfactory service encounter significantly contributed to bringing about positive emotions, which, in turn, strongly influenced visitors' overall satisfaction with festivals. That is, happy, pleased, and cheerful feelings elicited through uniquely themed and diverse activities and entertainment along with quality service delivery is associated with generating visitors' satisfying experiences at festivals.

Considering the previous observation that satisfied consumers influence destination/setting preferences, consumption of products and services, and decisions to return (Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Bigné et al., 2005; Kozak & Rimmington, 2003), these findings offer some insight for practitioners. Festival organizers should exert themselves to create positive emotion-inducing atmospherics by effectively designing and managing programs and providing various food and products for all ages in order to exceed visitors' overall satisfaction and to further attain their loyalty to festivals. The theoretical insight presented in this study revolves around the application of the M-R model that focuses on visitors' emotional response to festival atmospherics. Compared the past work that lacks a theoretical basis (e.g., Lee et al., 2008), this investigation contributes to furthering our understanding of festival visitors' post-visit behaviors within the M-R framework.

This study has some limitations that warrant further examination in future studies. The follow-up survey measuring the emotions in this study was conducted four to six months after the onsite inquiry, which might reveal the difference in the types and patterns. Therefore, it is necessary to measure the frequency of visitors' emotional experiences in a consistent time frame across study sites in order to improve the validity of the findings in future research. It is also needed to examine what contributed to the negative effect of layout/design on positive emotions.

Figure 1 Path diagram of the final model with standardized solutions



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