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Suzana Marković, Ph.D., Full Professor

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management Opatija
Department of Quantitative Economics
Primorska 42, p.p. 97, 51410 Opatija, Croatia
Phone: +385 99 245 5901
E-mail address: suzanam@fthm.hr

Jasna Horvat, PhD, Full professor

University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek, Faculty of Economics
Department of Quantitative Economics
Trg Ljudevita Gaja 7, 31000 Osijek
+395912244025
E-mail address: jasna@efos.hr

Srdan Mitrović, doctoral student

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management Opatija
Primorska 42, p.p. 97, 51410 Opatija, Croatia
Phone: +385 91 3322 101
E-mail address: mitrovic.srdan@gmail.com

**MEASURING WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL
VISITOR'S PERSONALITY TRAITS AND EXPERIENCES**

**ISTRAŽIVANJE OSOBINA I ISKUSTVA POSJETITELJA
FESTIVALA HRANE I PIĆA**

ABSTRACT

Wine festivals have become vital parts of the wine tourism experience and are slowly morphing into lifestyle experience events that bring exposure to wineries and wine destinations. The purpose of the research was to measure visitors wine and food involvement and neophobia, and to compare these traits with regard to visitor demographics. Additionally, research explored the relationship of food related personality traits, experience quality dimension and outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty. Data was collected using an on-site questionnaire that measured selected constructs during the VinoCOM festival on 24th and 25th November 2017. Descriptive and bivariate statistics were used to analyze collected data. The research findings revealed that visitors have high levels of involvement and low levels of neophobia with significant differences found among return visitors, first-time visitors and visitors with high and low-income level.

Key words: wine tourism, wine festival, festival experience quality, visitor personality traits, quantitative analysis.

SAŽETAK

Vinski festivali postali su ključan doživljaj u kontekstu vinskog turizma te predstavljaju izvrsnu priliku za promociju pojedinih vinarija i čitavih vinskih regija. Svrha ovoga istraživanja je izmjeriti razinu uključenosti i neofobije posjetitelja, vezane uz vino i hranu te ih usporediti s njihovim demografskim karakteristikama. Osim toga, cilj ovog istraživanja je utvrditi moguću povezanost osobina ličnosti posjetitelja s konceptima kvalitete doživljaja festivala, zadovoljstva i vjernosti

festivalu. Podaci su prikupljeni pomoću upitnika na festivalu vina i hrane VinoCOM koji se održao u Zagrebu 24.-25. studenog 2017. Metodama deskriptivne i bivarijatne statističke analize analizirani su prikupljeni podaci. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na visok stupanj uključenosti i nizak stupanj neofobije od strane posjetitelja festivala te na značajne razlike u navedenim osobinama s obzirom na to jesu li posjetitelji prvi put na festivalu ili su ponovljeni posjetitelji te pripadaju li posjetitelji višem ili nižem prihodovnom rangu.

Ključne riječi: *vinski turizam, festival vina, kvalitete doživljaja festivala, osobine ličnosti posjetitelja, kvantitativna analiza.*

1. Introduction

Since the mid-1990s wine tourism has become an important form of tourism with an evident growth in tourists interested in wine (Getz and Brown, 2006). While there are many definitions of wine tourism, the one proposed by Geißler (2007), “Wine tourism embraces and includes a wide range of experiences built around tourist visitation to wineries, wine regions or wine-related events and shows - including wine tasting, wine and food, the enjoyment of the regional environs, day trips or longer-term recreation, and the experience of a range of cultural and lifestyle activities”, could be viewed as a constitutive definition. Just as any other consumers in today’s fast-growing world of the experience economy, wine consumers are in search of products and services that have both utilitarian and hedonic components (Sandstorm et al., 2009). Berry et al. (2002) have argued that businesses should strive to provide meaningful experience to their customers to add value to their core product or service. According to (Charters and Ali-Knight 2002; Galloway et al., 2008), the best way to provide wine tourism experiences is through hosting festivals and events. Wine festivals have been defined as special occasions that “visitors actively engage in for the satisfaction of their interest in wine and/or for the entertainment made available by other leisure activities” (Yuan et al., 2005). Furthermore, festivals provide opportunities to raise awareness of both wineries and destinations (Taylor and Shanka, 2007) as well as to increase revenue flows with direct sales at the festival and create relationships with consumers that can lead to long-term sales and generate brand loyalty (Treloar and Hall, 2008).

Cohen and Avieli (2004) have suggested that neophilic tendencies and high food-involvement are displayed by tourists who take gastronomic tours and who tend to be more inclined towards new food experiences due to their wine- and food-related personality traits. Events and festivals, based around wine and food as a form of wine or food tourism, usually play an important role in introducing a tourist to new flavors and different traditions during their visit to a destination (Getz, 2000; Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Yuan et al., 2005). Food and wine festivals also present visitors with an authentic lifestyle experience in a pleasant environment (Getz, 2000).

Kim et al. (2010) claim that research from the perspective of food-related personality traits is still relatively young, and that the integration of the two bodies of hospitality and tourism events and food choice research is almost never seen. Therefore, this research aims to measure the food-related personality traits of visitors, namely wine and food involvement and neophobia, and compare them with regard to visitor demographic characteristics as well as explore the relationship between food-related personality traits and perceptions of experience quality and experience outcomes of the festival. This paper should give us better insight into the specific food-related personality traits of wine and food festival visitors and clarify to what extent, if any, they influence visitors’ perceptions of experience quality and their satisfaction and loyalty as experience outcomes.

The paper is organized as follows. First, a literature review is provided regarding the main research constructs. Next, research methodology is explained and, lastly, research results and conclusions are presented.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Consumer experience

Recently “customer experience” has become a key concept in service research and management in fields such as services marketing, innovation and retailing (Jakkola et al., 2015). The “experience economy” concept suggests that experience can be seen as a form of economic offering creating a competitive advantage that is hard to imitate or replace. Researchers have recently found that consumer experience has to be viewed as a multidimensional evaluation in which multiple factors contribute to form a holistic view (e.g. Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011), but dimensions of the consumer experience concept can be hard to separate, challenging to orchestrate and beyond the control of the provider of goods or services. Consequently, it has been underlined by many researchers that the creation of “extraordinary” customer experiences is necessary as a part of the strategy to bring value to the consumer and foster satisfaction, loyalty and positive word of mouth. (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Berry et al., 2002; Shaw and Ivens, 2005; Backstrom and Johansson, 2006; Naylor et al., 2008; Bolton et al., 2014). Satisfaction is considered a judgment from the consumer whether the selected alternative has met or exceeded expectations (Oliver, 1997), while loyalty is defined as repeat purchasing behavior and can manifest in repurchase intentions, spreading positive word of mouth or recommendations (Lee et al., 2006). Research has shown that to create loyalty it is necessary to achieve consumer satisfaction as there is a positive correlation between consumers’ satisfaction and future intentions (Oliver and Burke, 1999).

2.2. Wine tourism experience

Wine tourism experiences can be offered in many ways such as visiting vineyards, wineries and wine festivals (Bruwer 2003), which can, according to Axelsen and Swan (2010), provide a wide range of experiences that differ from day to day living and could be viewed as a possible lifestyle tourism experience (Gross and Brown, 2006). According to Axelsen and Swan (2010) and Taylor and Shanka (2007), wine festivals are diverse in their offering of “extraordinary” experiences as they offer interactivity, leisure, social and cultural experiences; however, the personality traits of visitors have to be taken into account as multiple researchers have found that certain personality traits such as food neophobia and wine involvement can influence consumer behavior and attitude (Bell and Marshall, 2003; Sparks, 2007) and so, by extension, could also affect the consumer experience and related outcomes.

2.3. Wine and food related personality traits

Food neophobia has been defined as the extent to which consumers are reluctant to try novel foods, recipes or cuisines (Pliner and Hobden, 1992). Various studies have concluded that an inclination towards new food experiences stems from low levels of food neophobia as those types of customers, more often than not, have a significantly different taste physiology and are able to experience the new tastes with more enjoyment. Closely connected to food neophobia is food involvement, defined as the level of importance of food in a person’s life, measuring how much certain people enjoy talking about food, thinking about food or partaking in food-related activities (Bell and Marshall, 2003).

Food-related personality traits research in the context of wine and food festivals is at a relative early stage of integration (Kim et al., 2010) as only a few studies have so far combined the concepts of food and wine-related personality traits and experiences, experience outcomes, behaviors and attitudes towards the festival. Cohen and Avieli (2004) researched the attraction of food and beverages in tourism and consider food neophobic tendencies as an outstanding element because eating involves actual bodily involvement. Getz and Brown (2006) concluded that consumers’ involvement with wine is likely to be a determinant of wine-related travel. Gross and

Brown (2006) found that a dimension of food and wine involvement was an indicator of lifestyle tourism experiences. Sparks (2007) found that directly and indirectly food and wine involvement has an effect on intentions to participate in a wine-based holiday. Kim et al. (2009) identified three important elements influencing the consumption of local food in a destination: physiological factors (food neophilia, neophobia), motivational factors (exciting experience, escape from routine) and demographic factors. They suggested that engagement with local food or wine in the destination may be driven by food-related personality traits such as food neophilia or neophobia. Kim et al. (2010) found that food neophobia and food involvement can be added as one of the considerable factors influencing satisfaction and loyalty in hospitality and tourism research.

3. Methodology

The aim of the research was to measure the wine and food personality traits of festival visitors, specifically involvement and neophobia, and explore their relationship with the experience quality dimensions of the festival (environment, education, service providers, functional benefits, entertainment) and experience outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty). Additionally, the research aimed to compare wine and food involvement and neophobia with regard to specific demographic characteristics of the visitors (gender, income level, visitor status, employment, residency).

The research instrument was divided into five parts, with four parts focusing on the main research constructs of wine and food involvement, wine and food neophobia, experience quality, experience outcomes and the fifth part referring to the demographic characteristics of the visitors. For measuring each construct, with the exception of entertainment experience, multi-item scales were adapted, which were drawn from previous literature and adapted to the wine and food festival context of the research.

An adapted Food Neophobia Scale (Pilner and Hobden, 1992; Ritchey et al., 2003) was used to measure wine and food neophobia, while wine and food involvement was measured with an adapted Food Involvement Scale (Bell and Marshall, 2003). Experience outcomes (satisfaction, loyalty) were measured with items adapted from Kim et al. (2010). Items measuring environment experience were adapted from the work of Chung and Horng (2010) and the Consumer Experience Index model (Kim et al. 2011), which was also used for items in the functional benefits experience construct. Service providers' experience items were drawn from the work of Chung and Horng (2010) and the Experience Quality scale (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). Entertainment and education experience items were adapted from Chung and Horng (2010).

All items regarding wine and food involvement and neophobia, experience quality and experience outcomes were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". It is important to note that the food neophobia construct was reverse scored, so high scores point to a low level of wine and food neophobia.

The last part of the research instrument was designed to collect demographic characteristics of the festival visitors which included: gender, age, client status, income, education, residency, marital status, employment and accommodation.

Collection of data on wine and food festival visitors was done using an on-site survey during VinoCOM, an international wine and food festival, that was held at the Esplanade hotel in Zagreb on the 24th and 25th of November 2017. The questionnaires were randomly distributed to visitors in different halls of the festival, with each potential respondent being asked whether they wanted to participate in the survey. The questionnaires were inspected for missing data on site and collected after completion.

Data were analyzed using the SPSS 23 statistical program on Windows 10. Descriptive and bivariate statistical analyses were used to examine and describe the data. Specifically, independent sample t-tests were used to determine the significance of difference in mean scores of each construct regarding the selected demographic characteristics of the festival visitors, while Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between wine and food neophobia, involvement, experience quality constructs and outcomes.

4. Results

The sample consisted of 304 respondents, fairly evenly divided between residents of the area (46.7%) and non-residents (53.3%) and between female (54.8%) and male (45.2%) visitors. Most of the respondents were domestic (84.2%). About half of the visitors (56.9%) were single, while most visitors were currently employed (77.7%), belonged to the average or higher income bracket (84.8%), and their education level was mostly at the college level or above (66.5%). There were more return visitors (64.8%) than first-time visitors (36.2%). The approximate average age of the visitors was 33.

Visitors of the wine and food festival have a relatively high level of involvement with overall mean score 5.37 and low level of neophobia where overall mean score was 5.97 (items for the neophobia were reverse coded). Among the neophobia construct items, the highest average score was given to the item "At food and wine festivals I'll try new foods and wines" (6.51) while the lowest mean score was given to "I seek out unconventional wines" (4.74). In the wine and food involvement construct, the highest mean score was given to the item "When I travel, one of the things I anticipate most is eating the food there" (6.48) while the item "Compared with other daily decisions my food choices are not very important" (4.64) was given the lowest mean score. Regarding the income levels of the visitors, significant differences were found in mean scores for the involvement construct as visitors with higher than average income level had a significantly higher mean score ($t=2.919$, $df=302$, $p<0.05$). The neophobia construct did not have a significantly higher mean score as only one item showed a significant difference ("If I don't know what the food is, I won't eat it") regarding visitor's income level. Additionally, both constructs showed significant differences in mean scores regarding previous visits to the festival with repeat visitors having significantly higher involvement ($t=-2.671$, $df=302$, $p<0.05$) and neophobia ($t=-2.640$, $df=302$, $p<0.05$) scores. Two items for each construct showed significant differences. For the neophobia construct they were "I seek out unconventional wines" and "If I don't know what the food is I won't try it", while for the involvement construct they were "When I travel I try to visit as many wineries as possible" and "I don't think a lot about the wine I'm going to pair with food".

Even though certain items within the constructs did show significantly different mean scores, no significant differences were found in the mean scores of wine and food involvement and neophobia constructs of male and female, domestic and international, as well as employed and unemployed visitors of the festival. Items that showed significantly different mean scores for male and female visitors were "When I travel I try to visit as many wineries as possible" ($t=3.428$, $df=301$, $p<0.05$), with male visitors having the higher mean score, and "When I eat at the festival I don't think about how the food tastes" ($t=-2.021$, $df=273.032$, $p<0.05$), with female visitors having the higher mean score. Both items were from the wine and food involvement construct. International visitors had a significantly higher mean score for the items "If I don't know what the food is, I won't try it" ($t=-2.631$, $df=107.166$, $p<0.05$) and "I seek out unconventional wines" ($t=-2.586$, $df=77.591$, $p<0.05$) from the neophobia construct, and higher mean scores in the items "When I travel I try to visit as many wineries as possible" ($t=-4.371$, $df=88.089$, $p<0.05$) and "I don't think a lot about the wine I am going to pair with food" ($t=-2.066$, $df=302$, $p<0.05$) from the neophobia construct. Unemployed festival visitors had only one significantly higher score in an item from the involvement construct "At food and wine festivals I will try new foods and wines" ($t=-2.402$, $df=293.352$, $p<0.05$).

Significant correlations were found between wine and food involvement and neophobia constructs and experience quality constructs and experience outcomes. The neophobia construct displays a stronger relationship and significant correlations with all observed experience quality dimensions, while the involvement construct seems not to be correlated with environment and education constructs. Additionally, wine and food neophobia and involvement are correlated to the observed experience quality constructs and outcomes in opposite directions, as involvement is positively correlated and neophobia negatively correlated to the experience constructs due to reversed scoring

of the construct items. Hence, a higher degree of wine and food involvement leads to higher perception of experience quality with regard to service providers ($r=0.197, n=304, p<0.01$), entertainment ($r=0.254, n=304, p<0.01$), and functional benefits ($r=0.195, n=304, p<0.01$), as well as satisfaction ($r=0.232, n=304, p<0.01$), and loyalty ($r=0.263, n=304, p<0.01$) to the festival, while a lower degree of wine and food neophobia leads to higher perceptions of experience quality with regard to environment, ($r=0.309, n=304, p<0.01$), service providers ($r=0.339, n=304, p<0.01$), education ($r=0.236, n=304, p<0.01$), entertainment ($r=0.357, n=304, p<0.01$), functional benefits ($r=0.367, n=304, p<0.01$), as well as loyalty ($r=0.4, n=304, p<0.01$), and satisfaction ($r=0.413, n=304, p<0.01$) with the festival.

5. Conclusion

The present research aimed to measure visitors' food-related personality traits, namely involvement and neophobia, compare them with regard to the specific demographic characteristics of the visitors, and determine possible relationships between the observed personality traits, perceived experience quality and experience outcomes.

Certain demographics such as gender, residency or employment did not show to have a significant effect on levels of food and wine involvement and neophobia. Significant differences, however, were found for the involvement construct with regard to visitors with higher income, leading to the conclusion that income level will determine a person's involvement in all things wine and food but not their inclination towards new food experiences as no difference was found for the neophobia construct. Additionally, significant differences were found for both construct levels with regard to return visitors compared to first-time visitors, which points to a connection between food-related personality traits and loyalty that needs to be explored further.

The results indicate that experiences and outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty of visitors attending food-related festivals are correlated with their food-related personality traits of food neophobia and food involvement which stands in contrast with findings of Kim et al. (2010), who found no relationship between visitor involvement and satisfaction. The findings of other relationships are consistent with previous studies (Bell and Marshall, 2003; Brown et al., 2006; Cohen and Avieli, 2004), which have shown that personality traits relate to food choice and predict the likelihood of future behavior.

Marketers should take wine- and food-related personality traits into consideration when organizing wine and food events because visitors with low neophilic tendencies and high involvement represent loyal customers who will generate more revenue and contribute to reducing marketing costs. Also, an interesting application stems from the fact that visitors with lower income do not shy away from new food experiences but, rather, are not that involved for mostly financial reasons. Accordingly, certain marketing strategies and products could be developed to convert the market of lower income visitors, as not all wine and food currently on the market is in the premium category. This study has several limitations. It examines only a single event using a sample of mostly domestic visitors and, hence, has limited ability to generalize the results. Future research could look at the longitudinal data from the festival or compare results across countries to account for possible cultural differences. In addition, the present research takes into account only correlations between the constructs which are relatively small, so it would be necessary to test the relationship in a higher-order theoretical model to define paths of influence among the constructs and also explore experience constructs as mediating factors between food-related personality traits and experience outcomes. Additional motivations and personality traits could be explored as possible factors that influence experience quality and experience outcomes.

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