



MEDIATING ROLE OF EVENT EXPERIENCE ON EVENT DESIGN AND ATTENDEES' SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine event design and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State, assessing the mediating role of event experience. The specific objectives were to examine the relationship between event transportation and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State, and to determine the relationship between event communication and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State. The research design for this study utilized a survey and descriptive approach. The results of the data analysis were derived using a structural equation model. Based on the analysis of the results, it was revealed that event transportation and event communication significantly influence attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State. The study recommended that event managers devise effective strategies to promote adequate transportation facilities for tourists. Effective communication is an essential tool in designing any event; therefore, event organizers should provide a detailed timeline of the event's activities and presentations so that attendees can plan accordingly.

Keywords: event experience, event design, transportation, communication, attendees' satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, numerous events take place every year, bringing attendees from far and near to participate. These events can take the form of conferences, festivals, sporting events, or cultural and heritage activities. Anenechukwu (2019) opines that the hosting of these events requires adequate logistical involvement in the areas of event security, transportation, and communication. Event design is the creation, conceptual development, and staging of an event using principles and techniques to capture and engage the audience with a positive and meaningful experience (Tsai-Fa, 2020). The event design experience capitalizes on the efficiency of interaction with visitors, thereby enlarging the possibility of the event achieving its aims and objectives. Besides, event design articulates artistic interpretations and expressions of the aims and objectives of the overall

event (Brown & Hutton, 2013). The design must play an imperative role in stimulating visitors' sensory experience to enhance their attraction and satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2014).

Attendees' satisfaction is determined by the overall feelings or attitudes a person has about a product or service after it has been purchased or used. Satisfaction is a response to an evaluation process evaluating the value derived from experiences with various service providers (Prebensen & Rosengren, 2016). A study by Suzana (2019) found that satisfaction is subjective to the socio-psychological state of attendees' outcomes, such as mood, disposition, needs, unrelated occurrences, as well as climate and group interactions that are beyond the organizers' control. Thus, they concluded that performance quality is assessed from the provider's or organizer's output, while satisfaction is determined by attendees' outcomes. The importance of event design has been emphasized by experts in the field of events. Suzana (2019) suggested that a higher level of attendees' satisfaction is likely influenced by a higher quality design in facility provision, programming, and services.

The factors that provide satisfaction and meet the needs of event attendees must be considered by event organizers for an event to be successful (Prebensen & Rosengren, 2016). When the event offers attendees' satisfaction, it creates joy and motivation for them to return for future events. Event organizers need to understand the implications and importance of quality according to the type of event and its goals. Improving service quality has been recognized as the primary approach to enhance levels of customer satisfaction. Increased customer satisfaction offers many advantages, as satisfied customers are less price sensitive, more willing to make additional purchases, and likely to sustain customer loyalty (Kubra & Kerem, 2020).

One important aspect of event performance is hedonic dimensions (Chen & Chen, 2014). Hedonic dimensions measure the positive feelings, fun and pleasant experiences, joy, excitement, and interest of attendees (Geldenhuys, & Welthagen, 2015). Hedonic values are non-instrumental, experiential, and sentimental, relating more to intangible service features. These values can be stimulated by specific behaviours such as play, leisure activities, sports, aesthetic appreciation, games, creativity, and hobbies (Tsai-Fa, 2020). Another essential basis of event performance includes maintenance factors such as infrastructure, parking, and information services (Laura, et al, 2017). However, it requires more than these factors to create attendee satisfaction. Instead, visitors seek socio-psychological benefits like entertainment, activities, and shows to capture their interest and enhance satisfaction (Laura, et al, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

System theory

System theory was proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1928. The system theory is an interdisciplinary framework that explores the principles and concepts governing complex systems. It provides a holistic approach to understanding the behaviour and interactions of these systems. The main assumption of systems theory is that a complex system consists of multiple smaller systems, and it is the interactions between these smaller systems that create a complex system. The theory encourages a holistic view of the entire event by considering all aspects and components. Event design involves examining the entire event as a system rather than focusing on individual

elements. It is a combination of all the supporting activities that brings success to the event. Applying system theory helps event planners analyze these elements and optimize their interdependence for a seamless and successful event

Conceptual review

Event concept

Events are diverse in nature, and their formations are not linked to the same time period (Meghan, 2015). Both exhibitions and trade events were held in ancient times. Ancient historians noted sporting events as significant and prestigious forms of social activity, which reached their peak with the organization of the ancient Olympic Games (Wynn-Moylan, 2017). Festival-type events are known to have existed since the Middle Ages when they were financed by the church, although some similar events date back to Roman times. While conference events may seem like a product of modern life, their origins can be traced to the 18th century (Barrera-Fernández, Hernández-Escampa and Arista Castillo, 2016; Barrera-Fernández and Hernández-Escampa, 2017).

Event transportation

Since the 1970s, when tourism became increasingly affordable, the number of international tourists has more than doubled. The expansion of international tourism significantly impacts the field of transport geography, as it connects traffic generation, interactions at various scales (from local to global), and the related transportation modes and terminals (Graham & Dobruszkes, 2019). As of 2016, international tourist receipts reached 1.2 billion, representing over 10% of the global population (World Economic Forum, 2017; Politis, Giovanis, & Binioris, 2014).

The risks and exoticism associated with travel also attracted the elite who could afford the substantial expenses and time required to visit remote destinations (Graham & Dobruszkes, 2019). Many wrote both realistic and imaginative travel accounts. As time progressed and transportation became more reliable, travel emerged as a more commonplace activity in an organized environment: tourism. In the modern world, travel is largely focused on annual holidays and can be relatively well forecasted. As an economic activity, tourism exhibits a high level of demand elasticity. Since transport costs are significant for international travel, fluctuations in costs greatly influence demand. Consequently, transport is a vital component of the tourism industry (Graham & Dobruszkes, 2019; Wynn-Moylan, 2017; Meghan, 2015; Bladen & Kennell, 2012; Goldblatt, 2005; Getz, 2008).

Event communication

An event communication plan is like a roadmap for getting the word out about an event. It's no longer enough to simply sell tickets and wait for guests to arrive. In today's competitive and technological landscape, it is crucial to employ various methods to communicate with people and attendees. Therefore, it is essential to leverage available technology to engage and connect with attendees before, during, and after the event (Kharouf et al 2020).

Event experience

This is how attendees perceive and engage with the event. Gertz and Page (2016) state that the essence of a planned event is that of an experience that has been designed. Experience is an intrinsic process within the person who receives the experience. Studies have been carried out on the experience at the core of events. Experience is seen as the major output of events, but the

growing number of events is also taken as one sign of the rise of the experience economy. However, determining the experience of events or how different participants experience events is more complex. Experience itself is multifaceted; that is, individuals experience things differently. Previous studies of event experience have tended to treat experience itself as a black box, concentrating on experience outcomes, such as satisfaction and intention to return (Richards, 2019; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Choi & Chu, 2001; Hu *et al.*, 2009).

Experience is at the core of special events, as the experience of being there essentially drives attendance (Getz, 2008). However, as de Geus *et al.* (2016) and Richards (2019) suggest, the actual experience that visitors have during an event is rarely examined in detail. Typically, the experience itself is treated as a 'black box', with research focusing on the antecedents of the experience (who attends and why) or the outcomes (satisfaction, intention to return, etc.). To better understand the experiences visitors have during events, it is important to study the essence of the event experience itself. This poses a significant challenge due to the complexity of event experiences and the difficulty in collecting data from event visitors during the core experience (Mitas & Bastiaansen, 2018; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016; Geurtsen, 2014)

Attendees' satisfaction

Attendees' satisfaction is one of the most important marketing priorities for businesses (Ryu, Han, 2010). Many factors affect attendees' satisfaction at an event, such as location and accessibility, food and beverage quality, personnel performance, service quality, and perceived value (Hu *et al.*, 2009). Attendees' satisfaction has become a prominent research topic since it is crucial for establishing long-term relationships with individuals (Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Different authors offer various definitions of attendees' satisfaction in the literature. According to Del Bosque *et al.* (2006), attendee satisfaction refers to the cognitive and emotional evaluations of consumers after the use or consumption of a product. Attendee satisfaction is an evaluation based on a comparison between attendees' experiences and their expectations (Xu, Li, 2016). Dominici and Guzzo (2010) suggested that attendee satisfaction is a "business philosophy which tends to the creation of value for attendees", anticipating and managing their expectations, and demonstrating ability and responsibility to satisfy their needs (Gonzalez-Mansilla *et al.*, 2019; Radojevic *et al.*, 2015; Qu *et al.* 2000).

Empirical review

Wei *et al.* (2017) studied event experiences through the lens of attendees. This study adopts a holistic approach to examining customer experience at a food and wine event. Drawing on an ecosystem concept from service design and the concept of co-creation of value, the authors develop a conceptual framework to capture the complexity of customer experience. Using photo elicitation methodology to combine customers' in-situ experiences as reflected in photos, narratives, and attribute ratings, the authors identify five main themes, with sensory experience, discovery, and entertainment/fun demonstrating a high level of impact on customer experience. The study's findings illustrate that when designing event programs, event management should recognize the importance of balance within the ecosystem.

Claudio, Timothy and Phillip (2017) conducted a study on 'Determining Visitor Engagement through Augmented Reality at Science Festivals: An Experience Economy Perspective.' The aim of this study is to examine how the educational, aesthetic, escapist, and entertainment experiences

using AR affects visitor satisfaction and creates a memorable experience, ultimately leading to visitor engagement with science activities in the context of science festivals. A total of 220 data inputs were collected as part of the European City of Science festivities and the Manchester Science Festival 2016 and analyzed using structural equation modelling. Findings show that the four realms of the experience economy influence satisfaction and memory and, ultimately, the intention for visitor engagement with science research at science festivals.

Laura et al. (2017) conducted research on 'Event venue satisfaction and its impact on sponsorship outcomes. The objective of the study was to analyze the effect of event venue satisfaction on sponsor image, particularly to verify whether attendee satisfaction with the venue positively affects sponsor recall, attitude, and purchase intention. The study presented the results of a survey conducted during the International Rome Film Festival, which takes place annually at the Rome Auditorium. Results suggest that attendee satisfaction with venues affects attitudes toward sponsors and sponsor-related purchase intention, while sponsor awareness is unaffected.

Oznur (2017) conducted a study on 'Cruise Tourists' Experiences, Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions: A Case Study in Istanbul. The purpose of this study is to determine cruise tourists' perceptions of their experiences with cruise tourism and to reveal the influence of these experiences on overall satisfaction and behavioural intention. A total of 322 English-language surveys were collected, but only 307 valid surveys remained after the erroneous ones were eliminated. The result (0.907) was found to be sufficient. In the questionnaire, 16 statements were subjected to factor analysis to assess participants' experiences. As a result of this factor analysis, four dimensions emerged, with an eigenvalue of 1, explaining 86.4% of the total variance. The first dimension, "Education", accounts for 26.7%; the second dimension, "Entertainment", accounts for 25.4%; the third dimension, "Esthetics", accounts for 20.6%; and the last dimension, "Escapism", accounts for 13.6%. A correlation analysis was conducted to reveal the relationships between experience dimensions and overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions. It was found that, except for escapism and satisfaction, there was a significant relationship between all other variables.

Smaranda (2016) conducted research on 'Some Considerations Regarding Motivations and Overall Perceptions on Film Festivals.' The main purpose of the research is to study participants' motivations for attending a film festival, their perceptions, and overall impressions from different segments' points of view. An exploratory and descriptive research study was carried out. Data were collected from attendees of the Transilvania International Film Festival, which occurs regularly in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, using face-to-face interviews based on a short questionnaire. The results obtained reveal significant variations in motivations and overall impressions across the main demographic features of the participants.

Jen-Son, et al. (2016) conducted a study on 'Festival revisiting intention and quality: The case of Taiwan's Lantern Festival.' The aim of this research was to examine a comprehensive model of festival revisiting intentions. More specifically, the study tested a model linking festival authenticity to festival quality and satisfaction regarding a specific festival. Using a convenience sampling method, empirical data were collected at Taiwan's Lantern Festival in Taoyuan. A sample of 301 domestic tourists who attended the festival was surveyed. Applying structural equation modelling, the findings showed that perceived quality was found to have a direct effect on

perceived satisfaction. Satisfaction had a direct effect on revisiting Intention.

Armam (2016) conducted a study on 'Tourist loyalty to a local cultural event: The case of Turkmen handicrafts festival. The purpose of this research was to examine a comprehensive model of attendee loyalty at a local festival. More specifically, the research tested a model linking festival authenticity to festival quality, value, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty to a given festival. Using a convenience sampling method, empirical data were collected at the Turkmen handicraft's festival in Gonbad-e-Kavoos, the most significant city in the Turkmen Sahra region, Iran. A sample of 301 domestic tourists who attended the festival was surveyed. By applying structural equation modelling, the findings showed that perceived authenticity influenced perceived quality, value, and satisfaction. Perceived quality was found to have a direct effect on perceived value, satisfaction, and trust. Perceived value affected satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Satisfaction had a direct effect on loyalty, as did trust.

Mehmet et al. (2016) conducted a study on 'The relationship of atmosphere, satisfaction, and loyalty: Sample of a fitness center.' The aim of the study was to measure the relationship among the atmosphere, satisfaction, and loyalty of customers who are members of a private fitness center as perceived by this center. The study group consisted of 503 participants (n_{male} = 465; n_{female} = 38), all of whom had been members of a private fitness center for at least six months, selected through a convenience sampling method. In this study, the "Personal Information Form," "Perceived Leisure Time Loyalty and Leisure Time Satisfaction Scale," and "Fitness Center Atmosphere Scale" were utilized. For data analysis, correlation and regression analyses were employed to examine the relationships between the variables, alongside explanatory factor analysis for the fitness center scale. As a result of the analyses, it was identified that the fitness center atmosphere influenced customer satisfaction, which in turn affected customer loyalty.

Esu (2014) conducted a study analyzing event quality, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of attendees at the Calabar Festival in Nigeria. The study examines the underlying structure of perceived event quality and the relationships between satisfaction and behavioural intentions of festival attendees. Secondly, it addresses whether the study's results from Nigeria corroborate existing knowledge in the field of festival quality conducted in various destinations cited in the study. The Calabar Festival 2012 was the focus of this research. Data was collected from a sample of 470 attendees drawn from twenty festival events/activities using a modified FESTPERF instrument consisting of twenty-nine items. Results indicate that significant relationships exist between perceived event quality and satisfaction, and between satisfaction and behavioural intentions. However, no significant relationship was found between perceived event quality and behavioural intentions. The study also recommends that improvements to the event environment and staff are necessary to enhance satisfaction levels and, subsequently, elicit the desired positive behaviour from current and prospective attendees of the Calabar Festival.

Miranda and Michello (2014) conducted a study on 'Festival motivation and loyalty factors.' The purpose of this study is twofold: First, it investigates whether festivalscape factors impact attendees' motivation and loyalty behaviour. Additionally, it examines whether festivalscape factors are influenced by different types of attendees. Practical implications for festival organizers and marketers highlight the importance of customizing operational and marketing strategies based on their target market (local versus non-local). The academic contributions of this study relate to the theoretical foundations by validating the impact of festivalscape factors in tourism marketing.

METHODOLOGY

The design for this study was a survey and descriptive design. The population of this study comprised attendees of the selected events in Cross River State from June to September 2023, across the three Senatorial Districts of Cross River State. The sample size for the attendees was determined using the Topman formula. Primary data were gathered for the study through a questionnaire. The structural path analysis model was executed to determine the explanatory power of the statistical model.

Model specification

The working model for this study is stated thus;

$$y = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 + bm + e$$

Where:

y= Dependent variable (attendees' satisfaction)

a= Intercept

b= The coefficient of the independent variable

x = Independent variables (event design = event communication, event transportation

m = mediating variable (event experience)

e = Error term

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Hypotheses testing

1. H_0 : Event transportation does not significantly influence attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State
2. H_0 : Event communication does not significantly influence attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State
3. H_0 : Event experience does not mediate event design and attendees' satisfaction

Structural model evaluation

Based on the confirmation of the model's fitness, the structural path analysis model was executed in order to determine the explanatory power of the statistical model and also the significance of the path coefficient based on the coefficient of determination R^2 (i.e., square of multiple correlation of the endogenous construct as shown below;

For the standardized regression weight, the results indicate that transportation $\beta = .904$, $p < .000$, communication $\beta = .820$, $p < .000$, and event experience $\beta = .719$, $p < .000$, significantly predict attendees' satisfaction. The hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling reveals that all hypotheses were significant. However, when the mediating variable experience was introduced, two variables—event ambience and event hospitality—were not significant. Hypothesis one showed that event transportation significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State by up to 90% ($R^2 .904$, F-crit of 3.898, $p < .000$). Hypothesis two demonstrated that event communication significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State by up to 82% ($R^2 .820$, F-crit of 2.175, $p < .003$). The relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable were all significant, whereas when the mediating variable (Experience) was introduced.

Table 1: Model hypotheses summary

Hypothesis	Unstandardised regression weight	CR-value	p-value	Remark
H ₀₁ : Event transportation attendees' satisfaction	.904	3.898	.000	significant
H ₀₂ : Event communication attendees' satisfaction	.820	2.175	.003	Significant
H ₀₃ : Event experience and attendees' satisfaction	.636	5.470	.000	Significant

Source: Field study, 2024

Discussions

The findings indicated that event transportation significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State. Transportation serves as the bridge connecting attendees to the event's core. A carefully planned transportation strategy enhances the attendees' experience by offering convenience and comfort. Smooth events with satisfied attendees promote future participation and bolster an event organiser's reputation. Organizing transportation logistics for large events can be daunting. The success of any event depends on attendee satisfaction. An efficient transportation system plays a crucial role in enhancing that experience.

The findings agree with the works of Graham and Dobruszkes (2019), who posited that tourism, as an economic activity, relies on transportation to bring tourists to destinations, and transportation can be part of the touristic experience. The results revealed that event communication significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State. This may be based on the fact that the success of an event is judged by many factors, but one stands out more than any other: attendee satisfaction. The finding may be due to clear communication throughout the build-up to the event, including during the promotion, registration, and invitation process. Providing your customers with a complete heads-up on what to expect and ensuring a frictionless booking process makes everyone happy. After all, perception is reality, so prepare guests for what to expect accurately and honestly. An organization that encourages interactive communication stands to foster unity and togetherness, which can enhance the image of the organization.

The findings agree with the works of Cvent (2023), who posited that effective communication is the name of the game. The results showed that event experience had both a direct and indirect effect on event design and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State. There are partial and full mediating roles of experience in the relationship between certain event design dimensions and attendees' satisfaction; however, the results indicate that event ambience and event hospitality did not significantly affect attendees' satisfaction after introducing the mediating variable (experience). The event attendees primarily focused on event safety, event transportation, and event communication through passive participation.

Based on the results, the following findings were made:

1. Event transportation significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State.
2. Event communication significantly influences attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State.

3. Event experience mediates the relationship between event design and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined event design and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State, focusing on the mediating role of experience. Event design is regarded as one of the key elements of event success. The event design experience enhances the efficiency of interaction with visitors, thereby increasing the likelihood of the event achieving its aims and objectives.

Recommendations

1. Event managers should devise effective strategies for promoting adequate transportation facilities for tourists, specifically by arranging to pick up attendees from the airport as soon as they arrive. Additionally, they should provide transportation facilities to take attendees to attractions to ensure a memorable experience.
2. Effective communication is essential in designing any event; therefore, event organizers should organize a timeline of the event's activities.
3. Event managers should design valuable activities such as dance, drama, and gift presentations that will satisfy the needs of attendees while they experience the various selected events at a destination.

Practical implications of findings

It would be beneficial to conduct comparative studies with other regions or countries to identify any region-specific factors that might affect attendees' satisfaction differently.

Contribution to knowledge

This study examined event design and attendees' satisfaction in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing on the mediating role of experience. It has contributed to knowledge by collaborating with other scholars in researching event design and attendees' satisfaction, specifically regarding the mediating role of experience. Additionally, this study has enriched knowledge by presenting a model on event design and attendees' satisfaction and the mediating role of experience.

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