A study of Night-Festival Experience Based on Visitor Awareness

--Focused on China Zigong Lantern Festival

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Festivals and special events were recognized as an effective strategy for host destinations to gain tremendous benefits(Getz, 1993; Jeong, Jafari & Gartner, 1990; Jeong & Faulkner, 1996; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Grappi & Montanari, 2011). Night festival widely accepted by many countries as a series of night festivals spring up at the end of 20th Century in Europe major capitals or big cities like ‘Light Art Festival’, ‘Night of the Museum’, ‘cultural night’ and ‘Nuit Blanche’. Night festival/event also were figured out perceived benefits as improvement in vitality of the area and reduced crime/fear of crime; attraction/expansion of leisure venues; new residents moving into the area; increased number of jobs; greater number of tourists; and inward investment in other businesses (Evans, 2011). Although the night festival is popular in the current tourism industry, there is a lack of systematic academic research regarding the subject, as well as a lack of awareness by the public.
A systematic review of relevant literature to the night festival specifically revealed classic documentation statements which are presented in this study. Research on visitor awareness of night festival (features), experience, association, value and loyalty and related studies in social sciences were also reviewed as part of this study in order to construct the conceptual model for the current research, and six hypotheses were developed. This study purposed on research the effects of night-festival experience on the association, value and loyalty based on visitor awareness for developing a night festival research model. The practical purpose of this research is to provide suggestions and recommendations for those involved in developing, planning, promoting, and managing such night festivals (Zigong Lantern Festival), in order to support city brands and promote those cities as tourism destinations through hosting night festivals.

Firstly, this study was conducted in four stages (in-depth interviews, a panel of experts, pilot test, on-site survey) to develop the variables related to awareness of the night festival (features). Secondly, basing on the visitors awareness of night festival (features), a utilization of the experience economy theory enhanced the understanding of intricate mechanisms that form the loyalty with night festivals through mediating variables of association and value. Thirdly, the survey chose China Zigong Lantern Festival which was the biggest lantern festival as research subjective. Totally, 466 effective questionnaires were finally employed in SPSS and Mplus to examine the hypothetical structural model.

The results showed that the prominent features of the night festival were ‘need overnight’, ‘high spending’, ‘flexible use of sound and photoelectric technology (lantern/light)’, ‘visual feast’ and ‘security issues’. The constructs of the night festival experience were 4Es ‘Education’, ‘Escapism’, ‘Entertainment’ and ‘Esthetics’ experience. The original measurement model and structural model were found to fit the data well. Visitor awareness of the night festival (features) was significantly influenced by the 4E experiences, the Esthetics Experience has the most prominent influence both on association and value, and a significant influence on loyalty.