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VISITORS' SATISFACTION, PERCEIVED QUALITY, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: THE CASE STUDY OF EXIT FESTIVAL

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Abstract: Events organized to promote the cultural values of destinations increase tourism diversity and activities. Over 2000 different events are organized annually in Serbia, and music festivals are the most visited. One of them is EXIT festival. The EXIT festival is one of the biggest cultural and social projects running in Serbia based on the concept of modern European festivals. For the past eighteen years, Novi Sad has been hosting one of the largest, or even the largest international event in Serbia, which has attracted over 200,000 visitors, half of whom are foreign visitors. This study explored the relationships between the perceived quality of festival performance and experience factors (traffic and information, hygiene and safety, culture and art, socialization, infrastructure and products and services), behavioral intention and the overall visitor's satisfaction intending to test a mediating role of the overall visitor's satisfaction. For this purpose, data were collected from a sample of 557 EXIT festival visitors in Novi Sad in July 2016.

Keywords: cultural event; music festival; tourist satisfaction; EXIT; Serbia

Introduction

Events are indispensable tourism incentives and affect different forms of tourism and marketing strategy of different destinations. The role and impact of event planning in tourism is well recorded and has an increasing influence on the competitiveness of a destination. It has been only several decades since the term *event tourism* became integrated in tourism and science (Getz, 2008). Events are not only one of the most important parts of tourism, but also an inseparable part of human society. They are global phenomenon which is gaining greater and greater importance through the event industry (Oklobdžija, 2015).

Community festivals and festive events have grown rapidly in number throughout the world during the past two decades. Local festivals are increasingly being used as instruments for promoting tourism and boosting the local economy (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007; R. Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2015; Chang, 2006; Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; Lee & Hsu, 2011; Maneenet & Ha Tran, 2014). Also, festivals are travel attractions with unique features (Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004). In the current economic climate, festivals play a vital role for towns, cities and entire regions. Festivals have

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a significant impact on the development of cultural tourism of the host communities (Raj & Vignali, 2010). Festival organizers use cultural and historical themes to develop annual events to attract visitors. Such festivals provide opportunities for the local community to share their culture and community development with visitors. Furthermore, they support the local community to develop its own identity (Blešić, Pivac, Djordjević, Stamenković, & Janičević, 2014; Liang, Illum, & Cole, 2008). Based on the research carried out at the music festivals EXIT and SZIGET (Hungary), Pavluković, Armenski, & Alcántara-Pilar (2017) revealed that national culture significantly influences local perception of festival impacts on communities. Some authors consider that social inclusion might be a potential outcome of a festival, providing opportunities for social advantage, identity and improved self-esteem (Laing & Mair, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2012). The festivals not only attract visitors to the venue but can also contribute to the creation of a positive image of a destination, enhance the visitors' experience and contribute to the duration of their stay (Baum & Hagen, 1999). Lately, there has been an increase in the number of festivals in small and medium-sized cities (Hadžić, Nedeljković Knežević, & Pivac, 2018). A particularly elegant example of this is the city of Novi Sad, which has become a prime tourism destination because of EXIT festival.

The most famous festival in Serbia is EXIT festival, held in Novi Sad. The festival is a lively music event with performers from Serbia, the region and the world. The number of visitors increases every year, as well as their length of stay (extending to a whole month) before and after the festival. The festival attracts the young from Serbia, from former Yugoslav Republics (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia), Europe and the world. EXIT festival is the largest music festival in south-eastern Europe. It was established at the end of the twentieth century and operates as a consortium of nongovernmental organizations and industrial companies. EXIT festival emerged within the students' movement that fought for democratic changes in Serbia at the end of the 20th century. It promotes peace, democracy, multiculturalism and human rights. This is a key element in the identity of the festival as a commercial brand and as an expression of contemporary Serbian culture and identity. The majority of attendees come from neighboring former Yugoslavian states, and recent research has shown that most of them believe that EXIT has made a significant contribution to improving Serbia's image in the rest of the world (Bladen, Kennell, Abson, & Wilde, 2018).

The festival was organized for the first time in 2000 at the local level, but in 2001, it grew into one of the largest music and cultural festivals in south-eastern Europe (Besermenji, Pivac, & Wallrabenstein, 2009; Blešić, Pivac, Stamenković, Besermenji, & Marković, 2014; Pivac, Kovačević, & Garača, 2007). EXIT festival, like other music festivals, has become a more commonplace part of life for many young people (Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Morey, Griffin, & Riley, 2017). Apart from exceptional music programs, EXIT festival is visited for its high-quality entertainment, excellent atmosphere at the fortress and positive energy of the town. EXIT festival in 2016 was held at Petrovaradin Fortress near Novi Sad from July 7th to 10th. About 30,000 foreign tourists visited the festival, and most of them arrived from Great Britain, Greece, Turkey, Poland, France, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, the USA, Canada, Brazil, Australia and Russia.

According to the data of "Tim" Agency, the overall increase in the number of foreign tourists on EXIT festival was by 30% compared to the previous year (2015), and the average spending per guest was 468 euros ("Kovačević: Exit privredi", 2016). During all the years of EXIT festival, it has been visited by over 3 million people of 65 nationalities.

EXIT festival has hosted some of the most popular musicians of the present time, more than 4,000 music performers since the year 2000. In 2016, some of the participants were David Guetta,

Ellie Goulding, The Prodigy, Bastille, etc. A lot of people have become fans of EXIT festival, and at the moment about 100,311 people follow the festival web site and Facebook news on a daily basis, whereas 1,985 bands have their profiles on www.EXITmusic.tv. According to many visitors, a special attraction of EXIT festival is the magic Petrovaradin Fortress. EXIT music festival takes place at Petrovaradin Fortress, a spatial and cultural entity, which is also among cultural assets of the highest importance. During the festival, Petrovaradin Fortress becomes the center of youth, culture and art. Each year, at the time of EXIT festival the Fortress is transformed into the gathering point of cultural tourism in Serbia (Besermenji et al., 2009).

The purpose of this article is to develop a conceptual framework to determine the factors influencing visitors' satisfaction and behavioral intention. The theoretical framework focuses on the perceived quality which is connect with EXIT festival performance and experience.

Literature review

Since the early 90s, a sizeable industry has been created around the events and festivals. This growth leads to the entire tourism sector to develop this industry in a way that it fits the consumer expectations today and ensure a positive and planned development in the future. According to Yeoman, Robertson, Ali-Knight, Drummond, and McMahon-Beattie (2004), festivals are the way to celebrate the heritage of a certain village, town or region, and they are considered as a new form of tourism that helps the promotion of the particular destination at the same time. Therefore, they are a valuable source of revenues for the area, and it is, in some sense, the way that governments choose to place the area on the *tourism map*. Events have the power to help promote a destination and to attract tourists (Robinson, Picard, & Long, 2004).

Satisfaction surveys are one of the most essential tools that are used in gathering information about tourist opinions of a destination and help to evaluate the performance of a festival (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Kim, 2015). Satisfaction helps to increase customers' loyalty and retention. This enhances the number of tourists and helps the destination revenues in achieving economic goals (Wu, Wong, & Cheng, 2014). Simon, Parker, & Stockport (2018) suggest that managers of events organizations should direct careful attention to planning, customer satisfaction, and innovation in order to ensure a successful outcome. Satisfied visitors at a festival also develop an emotional attachment to the festival host destination and, ultimately, become loyal to that destination (Christou, Sharpley, & Farmaki, 2018).

Tourism satisfaction has been researched from a cross-cultural perspective because different cultural values may influence tourists of different cultural background to perceive service delivery and service quality differently (Bowen & Clarke, 2002; Crofts & Erdmann, 2000; Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Mongkonvanit, 2002). Tourists from different countries are thought to place different levels of emphasis on different aspects of service, such as safety and security, hygiene, entertainment and even employees' appearance.

In the tourism industry, there are empirical evidences that tourists' satisfaction is a strong indicator of their intentions to revisit the destination and recommend it to other people (Kozak, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Satisfied tourists are more likely to return to the same destination and are more willing to share their positive travelling experience with their friends and relatives (Chi & Qu, 2008). The primary purpose of measuring customer satisfaction is to provide information; the information relates to how well a destination is currently meeting its tourists' needs. With this information, marketers can focus their efforts on improving the quality of products or services, thereby enhancing the overall competitive advantages of the destination (Wong & Law, 2003)

Tourists' satisfaction has become an increasingly prominent issue for destination management organizations because it serves as a reliable measure to assess the overall performance. A good understanding of tourists' satisfaction levels, as well as the dynamic changes in these levels, benefit not only the service industries that focus on inbound tourism, but also the government regulators and private investors that have a vested interest in the development of a high-quality tourism infrastructure. Improving tourists' satisfaction levels is expected to contribute to an enhanced reputation for both service providers and the destination as a whole (Christou et al., 2018; Song, Li, van der Veen, & Chen, 2011). In the tourism sector, destination's perceived quality is concerned with the consumers' perceptions of the quality of a destination's infrastructure, hospitality service (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010), cultural heritage, festivals and events. Consequently, understanding the satisfaction of attendees at festivals can help festival organizers with festival planning and marketing.

Behavioral intentions indicate desirable behaviors that visitors expect to perform in the future. After using products or services, a customer might show favorable or unfavorable behavioral tendency towards the product or services (Saha & Nath, 2017). Several studies were conducted on the concepts of satisfaction and its relation with behavioral intention in tourism context (Ali, Yee, Imm, & Akhtar, 2018; Dolnicar, Coltman, & Sharma, 2013; Qu, 2017; Sotiriadis, 2017). Satisfaction leads to favorable behavioral intentions, such as: saying positive things about or even recommending the tourism service to other people; encouraging friends and relatives to visit the tourism destination; and coming back—even if the prices were to increase (Dolnicar et al., 2013).

Within the festival event field, several scientific papers were based on an idea of the conceptualization of the perceived service quality, satisfaction and behavioral intention. Veloso, Magueta, Fernandes, and Ribeiro (2017) found that the perceived service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction and that it directly influences behavioral intentions. Budiarta and Fachira (2017) revealed that the perceived service quality has a significant and positive influence toward customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction also turned to be a partial mediator in the relationships between the perceived service quality dimensions and customer loyalty. Based on research which was conducted on "Fair Grove Heritage Reunion" (Missouri), Cole and Illum (2006) found that the impact of service quality on behavioral intentions was fully mediated by festival visitors' satisfaction. The results of a study carried out on "The main street festival" (Texas) revealed that festival quality, festival image and affective impacts positively influence festival satisfaction (Baker & Crompton, 2000). On "Camel Wrestling Festival" in Ephesus (Turkey), Özdemir and Çulha (2009) found that the festival location dimension, which included the festival program and the quality of facilities, has a direct positive effect on visitors' satisfaction and loyalty.

Based on a review of the literature regarding the perceived quality and its influence on the overall visitors' satisfaction and behavioral intention, the four hypotheses can be drawn:

H₁: Perceived quality of festival performance and experience is positively related to the overall visitors' satisfaction.

H₂: Perceived quality of festival performance and experience is positively related to behavioral intention.

H₃: Overall satisfaction is positively related to behavioral intention.

H₄: Overall satisfaction mediates the regression between perceived quality of festival performance and experience and behavioral intention.

Methodology

Study sample

The sample included 224 (40.2%) male and 333 (59.8%) female respondents. The main age group was 21–30 and represented 55.8% of the respondents. Almost a half of the respondents completed higher education (44.5%). Regarding their occupation, the majority of the respondents were students (49.6%) or employed (39.7%). The main group, according to the monthly income, was with no income (30.9%), the next group earned between 301 and 500€ (17.4%), and the third group earned less than 300€ (17.1%). Observed by the country of origin, the largest number of respondents arrived from Serbia (36.1%), and then followed the visitors from former Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) with the share of 29.5%, and the visitors from England made up 9%.

Table 1
 Demographic information of visitors ($n = 557$)

Demographics	<i>f</i>	%	Demographics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender			Serbia	201	36.1
Male	224	40.2	France	4	0.7
Female	333	59.8	Bosnia and Herzegovina	26	4.7
Age			Croatia	65	11.7
≤ 20	84	15.1	Slovenia	40	7.2
21–30	311	55.8	Germany	6	1.1
31–40	112	20.1	Hungary	5	0.9
41–50	31	5.6	Montenegro	23	4.1
≥ 51	19	3.4	Spain	5	0.9
Education			Bulgaria	4	0.7
Secondary education	137	24.6	Belgium	3	0.5
College	106	19.0	Macedonia	10	1.8
Higher education	248	44.5	England	50	9
Master's degree	58	10.4	Albania	2	0.4
Doctor's degree	8	1.4	Romania	2	0.4
Average income			Switzerland	7	1.3
≤ 300 €	95	17.1	Russia	3	0.5
30–500 €	97	17.4	Poland	6	1.1
501–700 €	45	8.1	Austria	2	0.4
701–1000 €	42	7.5	Greece	18	3.2
1001–2000 €	52	9.3	Netherlands	6	1.1
≥ 2001 €	54	9.7	Scotland	29	5.2
No income	172	30.9	Ireland	2	0.4
Occupation			Residence (non-European)		
Pupil	27	4.8	USA	5	0.9
Student	276	49.6	Chile	2	0.4
Employed	221	39.7	Brazil	1	0.2
Retired	6	1.1	New Zealand	11	2
Unemployed	27	4.8	Australia	16	2.9
Residence (European)			Pakistan	3	0.5

Note. *f* = frequency.

Research instrument

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three parts. The first part of the questionnaire included respondents' demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, average income, place of residence).

The second part of the questionnaire measured the perceived quality of festival performance and experience using the 23-item scale developed by Pivac, Blešić, Stamenković, & Besermenji, (2011). These 23 attributes were identified based on a review of relevant literature and researches on tourist satisfaction by music festivals conducted by the authors in 2010 at Dragačevo Brass Bands Festival in Guča (Serbia). The scale consists of six factors: *Traffic and information*, *Hygiene and safety*, *Culture and art*, *Socialization*, *Infrastructure*, and *Products and services* (Pivac et al., 2011).

The third part of the questionnaire measured the overall satisfaction (three-item scale by Yuksel, A., Yuksel, & Bilim, 2000) and behavioral intention (three-item scale by Tian-Cole, Crompton, & Wilson, 2002). All the statements were assessed on 5-point Likert scale (1 = *I totally disagree*, 5 = *I totally agree*). The obtained data were processed by *Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 20*.

Survey

The research was conducted in Novi Sad, more precisely at Petrovaradin Fortress, the venue of EXIT festival and the EXIT campsite or village. The survey was conducted from 7–10th July 2016. Ten senior students and four authors of the paper carried out the research. The research was conducted at Petrovaradin Fortress during the festival program in the evening and at camping sites from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, during the pause in music programs. In total, 1,200 questionnaires were distributed, from which 812 (67.6%) were returned and 557 (46.4%) were totally filled in.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The principal aim of the paper was to explore the relationship between the overall satisfaction, perceived quality of festival performance and experience (traffic and information, hygiene and safety, culture and art, socialization, infrastructure, products and services) and behavioral intention. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha coefficient for all the analyzed constructs are presented in Table 2. The reliability analysis confirmed that all the measures used in the study are reliable, as Cronbach alpha (α) for each construct is greater than .7 (Nunnally, 1978) (ranging from .829 to .899).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and reliability of the instruments

Constructs	M	SD	α
Perceived quality			
Traffic and information	3.947	1.052	.89
Hygiene and safety	3.721	1.081	.90
Culture and Art	4.025	1.133	.89
Socialization	3.841	.918	.85
Infrastructure	4.040	1.066	.83
Products and services	3.661	1.075	.87
Overall satisfaction	3.901	1.258	.87
Behavioral Intention	3.768	1.087	.88

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation;
 α = Cronbach alpha.

The results of the regression analysis

Standard linear regression analysis was conducted in order to analyze the influence of the perceived quality of festival performance and experience on the overall satisfaction and behavioral intention. Furthermore, in the second part of the study, the additional analyses were conducted in order to analyze the possible mediating effect of the overall satisfaction between the perceived quality of festival performance and experience and behavioral intention. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3.

The results show that all the factors of the perceived quality have a significant positive influence on the overall satisfaction and behavioral intention. The highest influence is in the case of *culture and art* and *products and services* (influence on the overall satisfaction) and *hygiene and safety*, and *products and services* (influence on behavioral intention).

Table 3
Regression between the perceived quality of festival performance and experience, overall satisfaction and behavioral intention

Independent variable	R^2	F	p	β
Overall satisfaction				
Traffic and information	.415	393.689	.000	.644**
Hygiene and safety	.450	453.398	.000	.671**
Culture and Art	.531	627.488	.000	.728**
Socialization	.448	450.192	.000	.669**
Infrastructure	.456	464.461	.000	.675**
Products and services	.500	554.315	.000	.707**
Behavioral intention				
Traffic and information	.303	240.816	.000	.550**
Hygiene and safety	.547	671.025	.000	.740**
Culture and Art	.408	382.516	.000	.639**
Socialization	.462	477.495	.000	.680**
Infrastructure	.382	342.435	.000	.618**
Products and services	.512	581.652	.000	.715**

Note. R^2 = coefficient of determination; F = F-test of equality of variances; p = statistical significance; β = standardized beta coefficient; ** β is significant at the level of 0.01.

In order to test the mediating effects of the overall satisfaction in regression between the perceived quality and behavioral intention, we have taken the approach proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) that suggests regressing the (1) mediators on the independent variables, (2) dependent variables on the independent variables, and (3) dependent variables on both the independent variables and mediators.

In case of the regression between the perceived quality and behavioral intention, the results presented in Table 4 show the partial mediation of the overall satisfaction (after introducing the overall satisfaction into the model, β is reduced but it does not turn into insignificant). In order to determine whether the indirect effect of a mediator is statistically significant, the Sobel test has been preformed (the results are presented in Table 5).

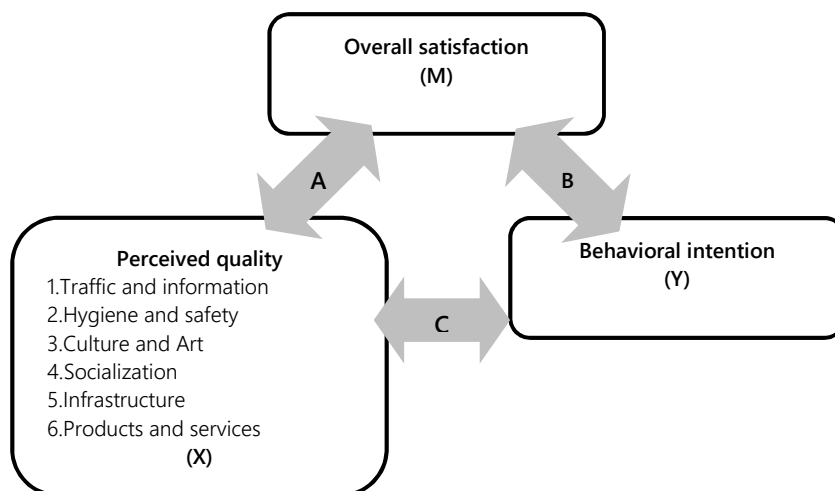


Figure 1. Mediating effect of the overall satisfaction in regression between perceived quality and behavioral intention

Table 4

Mediating effect of the overall satisfaction in regression between perceived quality and behavioral intention

Independent	Dependent	Model 1				Model 2			
		R^2	F	p	β	R^2	F	p	β
Traffic and information	Behavioral intention	.303	240.816	.000	.550**	.385	173.445	.000	.308**
Hygiene and safety	Behavioral intention	.547	671.025	.000	.740**	.558	350.191	.000	.645**
Culture and Art	Behavioral intention	.408	382.516	.000	.639**	.433	211.688	.000	.470**
Socialization	Behavioral intention	.462	477.495	.000	.680**	.486	264.083	.000	.536**
Infrastructure	Behavioral intention	.382	342.435	.000	.618**	.427	206.314	.000	.423**
Products and services	Behavioral intention	.512	581.652	.000	.715**	.521	301.352	.000	.619**

Note. R^2 = coefficient of determination; F = F-test of equality of variances; p = statistical significance; β = standardized beta coefficient; ** β is significant at the level of 0.01.

The Sobel test confirmed that the partial mediating role of the overall satisfaction is statistically significant in case of regression between all the factors of the perceived quality of festival performance and experience and behavioral intention (Table 5).

Table 5

The results of the Sobel test (Behavioral intention as the dependent variable)

Y – Behavioral intention	A	B	C'	SE _A	SE _B	Sobel statistics	Two-tailed probability
X – Traffic and information	.770	.325	.319	.039	.038	7.84793918	.00000000
X – Hygiene and safety	.744	.122	.649	.029	.033	3.65917267	.00025303
X – Culture and Art	.809	.200	.451	.032	.040	4.90499089	.00000093
X – Socialization	.916	.186	.635	.043	.035	5.15625711	.00000025
X – Infrastructure	.797	.249	.432	.037	.038	6.26898963	.00000000
X – Products and services	.827	.118	.626	.035	.036	3.24668782	.00116756

Note. A = regression coefficient of the independent variable and mediator; B = regression coefficient of the mediator and dependent variable; C' = regression coefficient of the independent and dependent variable after mediator is included in regression; SE_A = standard error of A; SE_B = standard error of B.

Conclusion

The results of the study suggest that all the analyzed factors of the perceived quality have a significant positive influence on the overall EXIT festival visitors' satisfaction and behavioral intention (H1 and H2 are proved). Furthermore, *hygiene and safety* and *products and services* are proved to be the major predictors of behavioral intention. The direct positive effects of overall satisfaction on behavioral intention were confirmed in the study (H3 is proved).

The partial mediating role of the overall visitors' satisfaction was confirmed in the regression between the perceived quality and behavioral intention (H4 is partially proved). This understanding could provide guidance to the organizers to direct their management effort to improve the quality of products and services, insuring visitor's satisfaction following their needs. Understanding the relationship between the perceived quality value and satisfaction will help event organizers to develop a specific marketing strategy. For festival organizers it is relevant to understand visitors' satisfaction because it directly influences the future of a festival. A high level of the perceived service quality will produce satisfied visitors, who are more likely to spread the positive word. The findings of this study should help festival organizers to identify that both perceived quality and visitors' satisfaction affect behavioral intentions.

Festivals are not static and they evolve over time. Research similar to the present study should be conducted regularly by a festival management in order to monitor the impacts of festivals on visitors' satisfaction, perceived quality and behavioral intentions.

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