



Spiritual attitudes and visitor motivations at the Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh



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HIGHLIGHTS

- At Winter's end, BFF recreates a Celtic festival with spiritual aspects.
- Spiritual attitude and the motivations cultural adventure and escape are key factors.
- The research involved EFA and CFA to test constructs in distinct sub-samples.
- There are management implications for BFF professionalisation and growth.
- Implications extend to the host city's festival strategy and beyond.

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ABSTRACT

Outside the peak season for tourism to Edinburgh, Scotland, during the evening of April 30th, visitors attend a festival with ancient Celtic overtones. Frequently, the evening is cold and windy. Our objectives are to: identify motivations for attending the festival; trial questionnaire items on spiritual attitude; and assess whether spirituality might be relevant in assessing visitor intentions. The method of investigation involved exploration and confirmation phases to test structures in distinct subsamples. Further, a strict approach was applied to identify factors that had theoretical value. Spirituality attitude is found to be a factor, as well as the motivations of cultural adventure and escape. Given the nature of the event, the time of year and composition of the audience, encouraging repeat visitation and using this to develop and manage Edinburgh's tourism strategy has potential. Recommendations are made to management.

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1. Introduction

Commentators have suggested that festivals and events can enhance destination image, diversify the attractions base and promote and stimulate tourism development (Reid, 2006; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Richards & Wilson, 2004; Quinn, 2007, 2010). For example, Getz (2008: 403) argued that “events are an important motivator of tourism, and figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations”. This is exemplified by Edinburgh in Scotland, which stages no fewer than twelve major festivals annually (Festivals Edinburgh, 2013), as well as smaller

scale festivals such as the Beltane Fire Festival (BFF). In the context of competition for tourist visits, it is crucial that destination managers comprehend how potential visitor needs might be met, how potential visitors form decisions on destinations to visit and whether, having decided to visit, they could be satisfied to the point of making return visits. This is of central interest to managers of tourism destinations, and an understanding of this area is important in making contributions to theory.

Despite the substantive literature on visitor motivation, which is reviewed in the next section, there are challenges pertaining to the complexity and heterogeneity of tourist needs and the inter-relationship between motivation and other constructs, such as attitudes. With regard to the latter, there are calls to include visitor attitudes in studies of motivation and behaviour prediction. Gnoth (1997) suggested that attitudes are the foundation of understanding motivation and behaviour. Nonetheless, limited attention has been accorded to attitudes in many studies of tourist behaviour and

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decision making. From the perspective of tourism management, our starting point is that an examination of visitor attitudes, in tandem with motivations provides a rounded means to comprehend visitor intentions and consumption.

In the current research, visitor motivations and attitudes are investigated in the context of one Edinburgh festival, the BFF, which is held on the evening of April 30th. Frequently, this evening is cold with a chilling wind. The end of April is out of the most popular season for Scottish tourism, which spans the months July to September (*VisitScotland, n.d.*). In fact, the majority of the major Edinburgh festivals occur in August. Despite the timing of the event the BFF attracts tourists, as an earlier survey indicated that approximately a third of the audience are tourists (*Gonzalez, 2007*). BFF has spiritual roots emerging from its Celtic history and which relate to the passage of the seasons and the coming fecundity of Spring and Summer (*Frazer, 1922*). There are aspects of the BFF which relate to *Bakhtin's (1984)* conceptualisation of the carnivalesque. The current study focuses specifically on spiritual attitudes as earlier qualitative work on BFF (*Matheson & Tinsley, 2010*) indicated that spirituality could be important in consumer decision-making.

The research objectives are to: identify motivations for attending the festival; trial questionnaire items on spiritual attitude; and, assess whether spirituality might be relevant in assessing visitor intentions. To achieve these objectives, a quantitative methodology, involving principal components analysis (PCA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), is employed. As part of the method, commonly used approaches to determining the numbers of components (such as, the eigenvalue-one criterion and scree plots) are rejected, as set out in Section 3, in favour of more parsimonious approaches to deciding how many components should be included. Adopting this course means a more rigorous examination is possible of whether spirituality has a role among the BFF audience. This is documented in Section 4. In Section 5, the fulfilment of the research objectives are discussed. This is done in three ways: first, by providing an insight into tourism motivation and attitudes to spirituality within the milieu of an unorthodox event; second, by extending an understanding of motivation to incorporate the under-researched area of spiritual attitudes in the tourism management literature; and third, by informing management as they develop the city's tourism calendar.

2. Motivation, attitude and spirituality

In this section, a review is provided of the literature on festival motivation, attitudes, spirituality, tourism and events.

2.1. Festival motivation

Backman, Backman, Uysal, and Sunshine (1995: 17) suggested that "motivation refers to a state of need, a condition that serves as a driving force to display different kinds of behaviour toward certain types of activities, developing preferences, arriving at some expected satisfactory outcome". *Crompton and McKay (1997)* identified three motivational frameworks to explain tourist behaviour: push-pull factors, Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking dichotomy and Maslow's needs hierarchy. These tourism-motivation frameworks have been used in the development of motivation scales by festival and event researchers. *Uysal, Gahan, and Martin (1993)* adopted *Mannel and Iso-Ahola's (1987)* framework, which pivots on "escape" and "seeking" motivational forces. *Crompton and McKay (1997)* drew on the escape-seeking dichotomy and push-pull frameworks. In doing so, both *Uysal et al. (1993)* and *Crompton and McKay (1997)* broke new ground in motivation studies. This can be exemplified by the frequent adoption, often

with adaptations, of their respective motivational scales by subsequent researchers (*Chang, 2006; Formica & Uysal, 1996, 1998; Lee & Beeler, 2009; Yolal, Çetinel, & Uysal, 2009; Yolal, Woo, Çetinel, & Uysal, 2012*). Other researchers drew on the festivals and events literature to develop scales (*Chang & Yuan, 2011; Lee, 2000; McDowall, 2010; Schofield & Thompson, 2007; Thompson & Schofield, 2009*).

Empirical studies have pursued overlapping "themes", ranging from demographics (*Backman et al., 1995; Chang & Yuan, 2011; Mohr, Backman, Gahan, & Backman, 1993; Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008; Uysal et al., 1993; Van Zyl & Botha, 2004*), satisfaction and behavioural intention (*Lee & Beeler, 2009; Schofield & Thompson, 2007; Thompson & Schofield, 2009*), cross-cultural comparisons (*Dewar, Meyer, & Li, 2001; Schneider & Backman, 1996*) to segmentation and visitor type (*Formica & Uysal, 1996, 1998; Lee, 2000; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004*). Some of this empirical work indicates that there are common or similar motivations, for example, cultural exploration, family togetherness, socialisation, escape/equilibrium recovery, excitement and novelty (*Chang, 2006; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Formica & Uysal, 1996; Li, Huang, & Cai, 2009; Mohr et al., 1993; Scott, 1996; Thompson & Schofield, 2009; Van Zyl & Botha, 2004; Yolal et al., 2012*). Perhaps this might be expected, given the adaptation of existing scales associated with the factors listed above to a range of contexts. Such is the recurrence of certain motives that *Lee et al. (2004)* emphasised the pervasiveness of a core set of motivations, irrespective of themes or locations. In contrast, *Nicholson and Pearce (2001: 460, italics added)* concluded that "there is little evidence yet of generic event motivations". Moreover, "...the broad pattern is clearly that people go to different events for different reasons and that the majority are going to a particular event for what it offers rather than to an event in general" (*Nicholson & Pearce, 2001: p. 458*). In fact, changes in motivation according to event and visitor type are found in research involving more than one event. For example, *Scott (1996)* found that different levels of importance were attached to motivational factors at three festivals: at one, visitors rated nature appreciation as the most important motive, while those at the other two considered family togetherness to be the most significant factor. Similarly, *Nicholson and Pearce's (2001)* comparative study of four events highlighted variations in motivations, including the occurrence of event-specific factors, in addition to common factors.

Differences in motivation are also evident according to visitor type. In *Scott's (1996)* study, differences emerged between motivations of first-time and repeat visitors. Key differences have also been identified between domestic and international visitors. *Lee (2000)* identified significant differences between these visitor types to a Cultural Expo on five out of seven motivation factors. Furthermore, *Lee (2000: 174)* concluded that "for all motivation factors, the mean scores of foreign visitors were found to be consistently higher than those of domestic visitors". In *Formica and Uysal's (1996)* study on the Umbria jazz festival they classified visitors as being either out-of-the-region visitors or Umbria-region visitors. They found that Umbria-region visitors attached greater significance to socialisation, while out-of-the-region visitors placed more importance on entertainment (*Formica & Uysal, 1996*). *Faulkner, Fredline, Larson, and Tomljenovic (1999)* identified subtle differences in motivations for locals and non-locals. *Schofield and Thompson (2007)* suggested that cultural variables were more important to international visitors while sports and family aspects were more significant for domestic visitors. These comparative studies convey the heterogeneity of visitors and, taken together with variations in motivating factors by event type, provide a case for investigating what influenced attendance among the BFF's mixed audience of tourists and local visitors.

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