

## **Festival Consumers Rejection of the ‘Tourist’ Tag: Application of Self-Concept Theory**

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### **Abstract**

Self-concept is an important yet under-researched aspect of the consumer behaviour of the tourist/festival-goer. This being the case, we set out to gain a greater understanding of festival consumer self-concept in their dual role as ‘festival-goer’ and ‘tourist’. In this study, self-concept is explored via on-site focus groups involving 23 festival-goers over a four day period at the 2008/09 Woodford Folk Festival (WFF) in Queensland Australia. Findings suggest that ‘festival-goers’ actively disassociate themselves from the ‘tourist’ tag in reaction to its perception as a less authentic level of participation. This disassociation aligns with the concept of ‘public/private’ faces identified in self-concept literature. This study proposes that based on the findings further research into self-concept in a festival context is justified in terms of its potential to better focus on the provision of marketing messages that more closely align with festival-goers ideal self-image and ideal social self-image.

Keywords: festivals; self-concept; tourists; consumer behaviour

### **Introduction**

This paper focuses on gaining a greater understanding of festival consumer self-concept in their dual roles as ‘festival goer’ and ‘tourist’ (Getz, 2005). While many studies have explored festival consumer motivations (Li and Petrick, 2006), this study is novel as it is a comparative study of general travel motivation and festival motivation. People attend events in order to satisfy their desire for leisure, relaxation, socialisation and escape from their norm to a better other while seeking to affirm the nature of their self (Douglas, Douglas and Derrett, 2001). Given that individuals are motivated to better understand their ideal self-image and become more positively perceived publically by shaping their own idealised social self-image (Haggard and Williams, 1992), the authors contend that by better understanding the festival consumer’s self-concept, in relation to their dual roles, can we begin to address underlying their motivations and behaviour patterns.

Evidence empirically shows that marketing to ‘festival-goers’ as ‘tourists’ produces a largely negative reaction as they perceive themselves to be apart from this characterisation. As such, standardised tourist marketing messages, by Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO’s), are

likely to be ineffective in attracting this niche market. DMO's with a greater understanding of the self-concept of festival consumers are more likely to be able to construct an effective marketing campaign for this target market.

## **Background**

### **Festivals**

Festivals can best be defined according to Getz (2007, p.31) as 'themed, public celebrations'. Most definitions of festivals look to their relevance as a celebration of the local identity (Falassi, 1987) which often focuses on religious, historic, economic, artistic or other aspects of the local cultural identity of the place in which they are held. Festivals are frequently key means for driving economic development through tourism. Thousands of festivals are held throughout regional Australia each year contributing significantly to local economic and cultural development (Gibson & Stewart, 2009). The case study used in this article, Woodford Folk Festival in regional Queensland, while predominantly a folk music festival, encompasses a wide range of art-forms and environmentally focused activities.

### **Self-concept**

Initial ideas on self-concept can be traced back to work of psychologists and sociologists in the period from the early to mid 1900's. James (1890) wrote extensively about self in terms of spiritual-self, material-self and social-self providing a clear link to future theories relating to self-concept and consumer behaviour. Social-self researchers broadened the understanding of how people perceive of themselves in the light of their social interactions (Cooley, 1902) and built into the theory the concept of a *generalised other* that would be socially acceptable (Mead, 1934). In light of this earlier work Lecky (1945) perceived self-concept as being relatively stable in nature with incremental growth of one's personality whereas others (Rogers, 1951) saw it as a structured but much more dynamic system of perceived concepts and values.

Self-concept theory, being the *total ideal* of how one sees oneself, is now a well established theory in consumer behaviour (Maslow, 1954; Malhotra, 1988). In the consumer behaviour literature, self-concept can be perceived as a basic motivation to achieve the ideal self within private and/or social (public) contexts (Evans, 1989; Chaudhuri, 2006). Consequently there can be seen to be a relationship between who we are and what we have and do (Fromm, 1976; Belk, 1988).

Malhotra defines self-concept as 'the totality of the individuals' thoughts and feelings having reference to themselves as subjects as well as objects. Hence self-concept includes (a) the self as knower, or subject, or I, i.e., the process of active experiencing; and (b) the self as known, or object, or me, i.e., the content of experiencing. Furthermore, the ideal self (the person I would really like to be), actual self (the person I believe I actually am), and social self (the person as I believe others see me) are..important components of the multi-dimensional construct' (Malhotra, 1998, p.7).

## **Self-concept and consumer behaviour**

According to researchers such as Sirgy (1982) consumer behaviour self-concept can be categorised into four (4) basic types, being self-image (how they see themselves), ideal self-image (how they would like to see themselves), social self-image (how they feel others see them) and ideal social self-image (how they would like others to see them) (Noble and Walker, 1997; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Schiffman *et al.*, 2005). Self-image-congruity (SIG) has been studied since the 1980's (Sirgy, 1985) and has provided a solid avenue for research into consumer behaviour in terms of the perceptual alignment of person and product. The highest level of consumer need, as posited by Maslow (1954), is self-actualisation, this can be equated with the search for symbolic self-completion (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982) and their striving to undertake activities which help them to develop their personality/self (Foxall *et al.*, 1998). Consequently, it can be assumed that the greater the level of congruity between self-image and product image the greater the potential and/or realised perceived satisfaction levels and hence the greater the non-congruence the greater the potential and/or realised perceived consumption risk.

## **Self-concept research streams and tourism**

With tourism being the primary research domain of this study, it is worthwhile examining self-concept research history in this context. Three substantial research streams relating to the application of self-concept theory to the study of tourism can be seen. The earliest stream focuses on how tourists can negatively impact on the self-image of locals through the commoditization of their culture (Greenward, 1978). The second stream focuses on the interactions of locals and tourists and how this can impact on the development of new social identities and changes to self-image (Smith 1978). More recently the research focus has shifted to a stronger consumer self-concept in relation to tourism destination marketing (Sirgy, 1985; Chon, 1992; Goh and Litvin, 2000; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Beerli *et al.*, 2007).

This incremental evolution in the study of self-concept in the context of tourism currently focuses heavily on self-image-congruity and the work of researchers such as Sirgy and Su (2000). However other researchers (e.g. Todd, 2001) contend that tourism would benefit from the application of self-concept theory given that tourists may not feel comfortable in their role as a tourist (Prebensen, Larsen and Abelsen, 2003). This newest stream of research draws from established self-concept theory by addressing the importance of the individual's perception of ideal self-image and ideal social self-image in terms of their involvement in traditional tourism activities.

## **The 'tourist/anti-tourist' tag**

Many possible explanations can be incorporated within 'self-concept' theory with its myriad of undertones including 'self-actualisation', 'self-image' and 'identity crisis'. '... it can be inferred that the self-concept is a multi-dimensional, diverse, complex and dynamic structure, which is active, forceful, capable of change, and has motivational consequences' (Friese, 2000. P. 57).

Chon (1992) successfully applied Self Image Congruity model (SIG), based on self-concept theory, to tourism in terms of how consumer's specific value-laden self-concept interacts with a corresponding value-laden product-image perception value (tourism destinations). The self-

image congruity scale derived from Chon's (1992) research is however inappropriate for use in measuring the phenomenon of interest due to its inclusion of the term 'tourist' within the scale.

The feeling of being uncomfortable with being categorised may be seen as a negative emotional response to a lack of congruence between the different kinds of self-concept (Schiffman *et al.*, 2005). Knowing what *turns on* and *turns off* consumers is essential if we are to understand tourist socio-psychological motivations and their subsequent behaviour (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Fodness, 1994). Indeed, this was the intention of our study. Anti-tourist sentiment has been the subject of research speculation since the mid 1960's (Aubert, 1965). In more recent years research by Jacobsen (2000) and Prebensen, Larsen and Abelsen (2003) has linked anti-tourist sentiment to either critical appraisals of 'other tourists' behaviours or reflected a perception of shallowness of authentic experience in tourism based activities. The concept of role distancing (Manning, 1992) - where roles challenge ideal self-concept cause individuals to seek attributes that distance their being and their doing is - of particular relevance given the context of this study.

Although there is an absence of specific theory to explain why festival consumers reject the 'tourist tag' a number of potential reasons can be suggested. One perspective is that it is linked to a public and/or private signal of symbolic anti-consumption (Hogg, Banister and Stephenson, 2009) or alternatively is an expression of hedonic consumption of an exclusive service product (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Furthermore, it can be seen as being associated with a strong sense of 'communitas' or shared experience given the festival context of this study (Arnould and Price, 1993; Hannam and Halewood, 2006). The work of Klemm (2002) is particularly interesting with its findings that normal tourism marketing techniques can be perceived as being negative by certain ethnic groups. While the tag itself may not be intrinsically negative, it may be perceived as being so when it is interpreted by individual consumers as putting at risk their ideal self-image and ideal social self-image.

## **Research Focus**

While research into aligning self-concept with tourist destinations is widespread there is a paucity of research into how the ideal self-image of consumers, particularly those who are festival consumers, reacts when overtly categorized as something they perceive to be a non-ideal social self-image, a tourist. This is the research gap of interest in this study. Given the importance of festival consumer's self-concept, the research question central to our study is 'do non-resident festival consumers consider themselves as tourists and if not why?'

## **Method**

Firstly, a literature review of self-concept theory and anti-tourist sentiments was undertaken to provide theoretical underpinning to the study. Given the lack of previous research in this area, an exploratory qualitative study was deemed appropriate in order to generate preliminary insights and to clarify the phenomena (Zikmund, 2003; Jennings, 2010).

Nominal/Delphi, natural field and formal group field were inappropriate to meet the purpose of this exploratory study, thus focus groups were selected (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2003). The loosely structured, interactive, free flowing and flexible format of focus groups enables participants to discuss their beliefs, anxieties, convictions and feelings through spontaneous expression and mutual engagement (Greenbaum, 1998).

Given the focus on individual festival consumer self-concept in this study, a holistic approach to defining tourists and tourism, focused on analyzing unique aspects of tourism consumption and motivations (Theobald, 1994; Urry, 2000), has been adopted. This is in contrast to the more limiting definitions used by the World Travel and Tourism Organization (WTO) in establishing consumption estimates.

Once a suitable research method (focus groups) was identified preparation was undertaken in a structured manner (Creswell, 2003; Zikmund, 2003; Aaker *et al*, 2007). The principle researcher was chosen as Moderator. A Moderator's Guide, aligning with research questions posed, was created. Supporting materials including a Research Project Information Guide (RPIS) and Interviewee Consent form were created and ethics approval received. Permission was then sought, and granted, from Queensland Folk Federation (QFF) to undertake the research at the 2009 Woodford Folk Festival (Woodford).

### **The Festival and the Focus Groups**

The annual Woodford Folk Festival (WFF) moved to its own property near the town of Woodford in Queensland Australia, from Maleny, in 1994. It is a regional festival of music, arts and performance managed by the not-for-profit Queensland Folk Federation (QFF) and attracts approximately 130,000 attendees per year. This festival was selected for our study due to its known qualities as a tourism attraction (Allen *et al*, 2008) and importantly, it was most likely to provide both a depth and breadth of potential consumer motivations due to its widespread appeal and size (Thrane, 2002; Bowen and Daniels, 2004).

[For this study, a purposive sample of participants 18 years or older and who had attended at least one previous festival was recruited from current attendees.](#) A purposive sample was deemed appropriate as such samples tend to generate productive discussions and provide the richest data (Morgan, 1997). Four semi-structured focus groups were scheduled, one per day over a four day period, with a maximum of eight participants per focus group (La Page, 1994; Aaker *et al*, 2007). The focus groups were held under a large shady tree to create a relaxed 'festival-like' atmosphere near the middle of the festival site and timed, mid-morning, to minimise impact on interference with the enjoyment of festival programs (Creswell, 2003; Zikmund, 2003).

Invitations to participate were posted on festival noticeboards attracting a total of eight interviewees with a further 15 interviewees agreeing to participate following a direct intercept approach during the 10 minutes prior to each focus group. Total interviewed were 23 (n=23). All focus groups ran for no more than one hour.

Each interviewee was asked to respond to questions relating to their perceptions of the Festival and how they related to it, event and place, in terms of consumer behaviour and self. Questions leading to discussions included: *Do you think that tourists coming to the region for the Festival*

*have the same or different expectations as those who come for other reason? Do you consider yourself to be a tourist? and How do you think others perceive people who attend the Festival?*

All interviewees participated in an often lively discussion relating to their Festival experiences and personal perceptions.

## **The sample**

Focus Group interviewees (n = 23) were drawn from festival goers at the 2008/09 Woodford Folk Festival. All interviewees were volunteers. The age range was 18 to 65 with the majority in the 31 to 55 year age bracket. Gender distribution was relatively even (52% female and 48% male). The majority of interviewees (96%) were campers at the Festival site; this figure may indicate some form of self-selection. Most interviewees (95%) came from over one hours drive away with 32% from interstate (New South Wales and Tasmania). Most interviewees were well educated with 65% having completed a University degree (one had only completed Primary School). A strong 'intention to return' was expressed (92%).

The sample correlates well with the results of previous festival goer research (n = 2,522) by Queensland Folk Federation (QFF, 2008). The age of those interviewed was overrepresented by approximately 21% in the 46 to 65 range with a similar underrepresentation in the 18 to 30 range (the mid-morning timing of the focus groups may have impacted on this result). Gender distribution showed a similar balance with slightly more females than males. The results for accommodation type followed the general population trend of the majority of people being campers (study = 96%, QFF = 80%). In terms of attendee origin Interstate visitor component mirrored the results of the QFF survey while but produced some differences in terms of the geographic spread throughout Queensland, with most Queensland Visitors coming from outside the traditional Brisbane and South-East Queensland catchment area. Educational background aligned well with previous samples in terms of the high education levels of attendees. The intention to return results also aligned well (study = 92%, QFF = 88%). The sample was considered representative of the population of interest and therefore appropriate for data analysis.

## **Findings**

### **Seeking ideal self-image at the Festival**

The concept of escaping to a 'better place' was brought up consistently in each of the focus groups. One male interviewee (FG1) suggested *'It's like a fairyland, after the festival finishes you have to make the adjustment to go back to the outside world'* while a mother's (FG3) recollection of her children's reaction as they entered the festival site was *'Oh My God! This is another world'*. Both these reactions seem to be based on the assumption that there is something lacking in their own lives that the festival experience can provide for them. Many of the focus group members were dressed in similar clothing styles, denim jeans and 60's gear, that identified them as one with the community in which they aspired to be part of.

For some this was perceived as negative self-image where they saw themselves as caught in an everyday existence they did not like. For others the 'better place' demonstrated their own sense of specialness in participating in an adventure that was put forward in terms of how they would like others to see them (ideal social self-image).

While many interviewees recognised the festival's staged authenticity components this did not appear to de-legitimise either the event or their role in it. These festival consumers seek to escape the realities of their normal existence in a comfortable environment where through staged experiences and setting where a more authentic sense of self (ideal self-image) can be attained (Oakes, 2006).

The sense of ownership with the festival site was almost universal amongst those interviewed. That relationship to place was keenly espoused in terms on both an individual level and as part of a travelling group. (FG4) *'It is a familiar village every year and to us, because we come only once a year, at that time of year, it's like it's always been here, but its not. So it's got that magical element to it I suppose, that familiarity year after year'* and (FG2) *'It makes me happy to come back every year because I'm coming back to a place where I feel comfortable'*. (FG2) *'Everyone can find a place at the festival with which they can affiliate themselves comfortably'*. Interviewees wished to be seen as part of the place in which the festival was held and when conveying this concept they would look to each other for positive affirmation (seeking ideal social self-image).

### **Active participants of a social group**

Many interviewees saw themselves as active participants rather than passive festival consumers, (FG4) *'It makes you feel more a part of the place if you are actually participating'* and (FG3) *'for me it's about interaction with other people and watching people, seeing things and doing workshop, it's the mix'*. The majority interviewees saw themselves as both active and passive participants during the festival.

As many of the interviewees had been to the Festival over a number of years, they could be seen to be influenced by the effect of enduring involvement leading to it having a heightened relevance to the consumer corroborating the work of Sit, Johnson-Morgan and Summers (2006). The majority of interviewees had purchased their tickets before any 'headline;' acts were known. Some saw their attendance at the festival was an active response to a perceived lack in their outside life (FG2) *'You learn so much stuff. You make so many good friends. It's different than home (Ipswich) they're all just like bogans kind of sitting around watching TV'*. This individual's wish to engage with the festival is one key element in understanding how self-concept impacts upon festival consumer behaviour. They did not perceive themselves as passive consumers of experiences to be manipulated by marketers or as being one of a number of similar tourism experience consumers. By giving people at home the tag of 'bogans' they automatically place themselves in a more positive light in the eyes of others (ideal social self-image), setting themselves apart as something special through their participation.

They can be more easily deemed to be creative tourists who are engaging in a process of transformative self-development (Richards and Wilson, 2006). The appeal of the concept of creative tourism in this study is that in creative experiences 'authenticity' is not dependent on the

direct context of the experience, but on the transformational potential of the experiences themselves and the imagination and skill of the tourists (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Whether a festival is considered to be authentic or not (Reisinger and Steiner, 2005) is in the eye of the beholder and not necessarily as defined by hosts or marketers. The need to strive towards an ideal social self-image by achieving congruency is a strong festival consumer motivator.

### **Not a tourist??**

Above all else the interviewees saw themselves (ideal self-image), and wished to be perceived (ideal social self-image), as being distinct individuals who enjoyed the social, cultural and environmental aspects of going to the festival and becoming part of an excitingly diverse community who came together for a short time each year to be 'citizens of Woodford'. It was, for many, a voyage of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1952).

The term 'tourist' was strongly rejected by nearly all interviewees. Alternatives such as 'traveller' and 'visitor' seemed less offensive terms. This aligns with the findings of Wang (2000) that while the word 'travel' possesses a high culture sense the term 'tourist' suggests a more 'common and mass consumption' view of the activity and people practicing it. Comments which distanced themselves from the 'tourist tag' included (FG1) *'I wouldn't call Woodford a touristy thing, you feel comfortable here, it's not alien, you're not feeling you're somewhere else'* and (FG2) *'you can spot them (tourists) out, you can spot what they're wearing'*. An anti-consumption tone was evident with many of those interviewed with one interstate interviewee commenting, in a tone that reflected regret, at their possible classification as tourist that (FG2) *'I'd probably be called a tourist because I come for the experience - something different'*. This was the only interviewee to begrudgingly accept the tourist tag and is of particular interest given the varied backgrounds and socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees would normally be seen as a mediating factor in terms of self-image congruity (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

The strong feeling that 'theirs' was a special relationship with the festival and its site permeated much of the discussion with comments such as (FG1) *'this is another home'* and (FG4) *'I consider this like a sacred site'*. Experiences in tourism and leisure emanate from the interplay between the desire to escape routine and stressful environments and seeking recreational opportunities (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987). Their role as a festival goer was proudly conveyed as they painted a word picture of their own psychographic personality (ideal self-image and ideal social self-image) where their individuality was emphasised (Plog, 1994; Prebensen, Larsen and Abelsen, 2003). Their rejection of the tourist tag was most clearly linked to their perception of self in the following rhetorical question posed by an interviewee, (FG3) *'How can I be a tourist when I'm home?'* While all interviewees technically qualified as tourists they rejected the term as they saw it as lessening their self-concept, as demonstrated by their engagement in and with the festival.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study provides insights into the salience of self-concept theory in the context of festival consumers. Evidence was found that supported the usefulness of the Schiffman *et al* (2005) model of self-image constructs in this context. Self-concept theory can impact upon the way

marketers tailor their services and communications to best advantage (Klemm, 2002; Beerli, Meneses and Gil, 2007) by ensuring improved congruence with festival consumer self-image constructs.

Festival spaces can be perceived as being places where ‘special’ individuals can escape from the drabness of everyday life and work to a world of fantasy and dreaming (Urry, 2000; Meethan, 2006); These spaces can accommodate both locals and tourists but can require a much greater level of individualisation in the construction of complimentary marketing messages by festivals and destination marketing organisations (Reid and Arcodia, 2002; Pearce, 2005; Quinn, 2006; Andersson and Getz, 2008; Foley and McPherson, 2008). They need to take into account both the festival consumer’s ideal self-concept and ideal social self-concept.

Festivals such as the Woodford Folk Festival have a history of strong brand loyalty that has been built up through the provision of places and activities that reinforce positive self-concept. This assertion is supported by both comments from the interviewees and by the large number of people who purchase their tickets before any performing artists, headliners’ are announced.

Tourism promotions utilising undifferentiated targeting strategies clearly will not work in the context of a festival where the individuals wish to perceive themselves, and be perceived by others, as being something apart from the crowd. Festival consumers often perceive themselves to be cultural creatives who value personal authenticity (Ray and Anderson, 2000; Stebbins, 2001; Richards and Wilson, 2006) and wish to be seen as engaging in a special state of *communitas* where there is a bonding between those who share a strongly emotive experience (Arnould and Price, 1993; Noble and Walker, 1997; Getz, 2007). In this study they also wished to be seen in an anti-consumption light (Hogg, Banister and Stephenson, 2009) that supported their ideal social self-image.

From the review of the literature on self-concept and the testing of its application to festivals through qualitative research at the Woodford Folk Festival the authors have developed a greater understanding of the critical marketing importance in understanding the role of self-concept in regard to festival consumers. These new understandings of the importance that perceived and desired self-concept can have on patronage can serve as a guideline for festival market research development.

The authors believe that positive reinforcement of both ideal self-concept and ideal social self-concept can be enhanced through the usage of sympathetic terminology in marketing messages (that is, avoid using the term ‘tourist’) as well as ensuring congruence between self concept theory and the totality of the festivalscape offerings (Getz, 2007; Lee, et al, 2008).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study represents an initial exploration towards the creation of a conceptual self-concept model in the context of festivals. This study’s confinement to a single festival context may impose limitations on generalisability. Irrespective of this, the depth and scope of the sample affords a richer and insightful perspective that is of value to both academics and practitioners. A much larger sample covering a number of differing festival types such as, sporting, contemporary music and so forth would be needed to ensure that the findings are valid and

replicable. As with all focus group studies, the pressure to conform to the group was a possibility and as such it is an acknowledge limitation of this study. It should be noted however that while self-concept is inherently personal in nature the opportunity to display self-concept to others can help demonstrate that the salience of a particular self-concept can be derived from social rather than internal psychological factors (Kleine et al, 1993).

Further research could consider the employment of repertory grid analysis as a means of providing quantitative data when considering issues such as self-concept, which is primarily qualitative in nature (Ensor, Robertson and Ali-Knight, 2007). This would enable the identification of key constructs in the public and private faces of festival consumer's self-concept that would be of value in tailoring appropriate marketing messages (Coshal, 2000).

Future research that singularly explores the concept of tourist and its relationship to self-concept is encouraged. The overlaying of self-concept frameworks with Rosenbaum's (2006) Relational Third Place framework may also provide a worthwhile contribution to the further understanding of issues raised in this paper. Linkages between this study and a larger research study on emotions and place in a festival context are planned by the authors.

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