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UNDERSTANDING THE TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS OF POP CULTURE FANS

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ABSTRACT

Popular culture (pop culture) events have the potential to promote tourist destinations and to generate tourism income. Travel motivation is a critical consideration for reaping these benefits since it serves as a stepping stone for event attendance and it initiates a desire to act. The purpose of this paper therefore is to determine the travel motivations of pop culture fans. Data was gathered from 576 pop culture fans attending a pop culture event in Gauteng, South Africa, using a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using exploratory factor analysis. The findings revealed nine travel motivations which were labelled brand visibility, event participation, acquire pop culture knowledge, escapism, celebrity fandom, value for money, exclusive merchandise, social enjoyment and novelty. The paper highlights novelty as the most important travel motivation for attending the specific pop culture event and it is therefore argued that pop culture fans attend these events to experience something new and different. In line with the findings of this research, it is recommended that pop culture event marketers pay close attention to all nine identified travel motivations to retain their current fans and to remain competitive.

KEYWORDS

Pop Culture; Pop Culture Fans; Travel Motivation; Pop Culture Event; Comic Con; Exploratory Factor Analysis.

ECONLIT KEYS

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism comprises a wide variety of activities and experiences and has become an important travel motivation. Throughout the years, cultural tourism has become a critical consideration in destination development and an important component of tourism development policies (Radomskaya, 2018). Popular culture (pop culture) tourism, a form of cultural tourism, is also becoming a sought-after experience. According to Bear (2019), pop culture is one of the key reasons of tourists' intentions and choices to travel and comprises film tourism, literary tourism, music tourism, special events tourism, food tourism and arts tourism, amongst others (Radomskaya, 2018). In addition, Storey (2009) states that pop culture includes commercially created cultural products that are widely cherished by many.

Travel-related pop culture is of particular interest to those who regard themselves as fans. Travel to pop culture events provide fans with opportunities to immerse themselves into a fictional world as portrayed in books and films (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016). These events also afford fans with opportunities for face-to-face interactions with one another, shifting the fandom community from a digital context to an actual physical context (Kington, 2015). Radomskaya (2018) states that pop culture events such as film festivals, conventions (e.g., Comic Cons), competitions, exhibitions and shows add to the recreational value of a destination and provide an opportunity for economic growth in the cultural tourism sector.

During the past decades there have been a significant increase worldwide in the number of events and festivals staged (Amorim, Jiménez-Caballero & Almeida, 2019). The growth in the number of events can largely be attributed to the events' ability to promote tourism, enhance local development and improve destination image (Tonga Uriarte, Antognozzi & Catoni, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that cultural events and more specifically pop culture events are increasing as a means to increase visitor numbers and to enhance destination images (Larson, Lundberg & Lexhagen, 2013). Furthermore, the variety of cultural forms have been growing, together with an increase in the availability and diversity of multimedia products. As such, event

audiences are expanding and their wants and needs are changing. Elements of culture and fantasy are becoming more popular and events that include elements of literature, games, comics and cinema are increasing (Tonga Uriarte *et al.*, 2019). Event audiences seek increased participation in events that are related to their favourite characters, movies and television series (Dunn & Hermann, 2020).

Tourists' motivations to visit events such as a Comic Con will vary. While some tourists may attend events to escape from reality, others may attend to experience an adventure (Zhang & Walsh, 2020). Several studies (Yoo, Yoon & Park, 2018; Zhang & Walsh, 2020; Maeng, Jang & Li, 2016) have attempted to identify potential reasons why tourists visit specific destinations and events. From these studies different motivating factors for attending events have been identified, including: relaxation (Yoo *et al.* 2018); exploration (Maeng *et al.*, 2016); novelty (Yoo *et al.*, 2018); socialisation (Rexaei, Mirzaie & Abbasi, 2017); escape (Báez-Montenegro & Devasa-Fernández, 2017); excitement, fantasy (Yoo *et al.*, 2018); and shopping and learning (Maeng *et al.*, 2016).

Even though there have been many studies pertaining to tourist motivations, these might not be similar across all events and festivals. For this reason, research on event motivation has focused on a wide diversity of events, including religious festivals, wine festivals, art festivals, food festivals, and so on (Monterrubio, 2019). However, little is known about motivation for events in which fantasy, comics and films are the main attractions or themes. More specifically, visitor motivations for pop culture events have been largely overlooked by tourism and event motivation studies. It appears that existing research does not include investigations focusing on the fundamental reasons for attending pop culture events, and more specifically Comic Con.

South African studies have investigated event travel motivations in different contexts, including food festivals (Ramakumba, 2017), heritage events (Venter & Kruger, 2017), religious events (Apleni & Henema, 2020), arts festivals (Nkemngu, Sibonisiwe & Asongu, 2019), sport events (Kruger & Viljoen, 2019) and cultural events (Hermann, Tshipapala & Dlamini, 2020). Even though some of the afore-mentioned events contain elements of culture, none of them specifically promote modern popular culture conveyed through mass media which is one of the aims of a Comic Con. Comic Con Africa specifically promotes elements of pop culture such as animation, anime,

gaming, toys, manga (comics), film and series (Independent Online, 2019). Comic Con Africa was hosted for the first time in South Africa in 2018 and since this event was introduced relatively recently in South Africa, only one study (Venter & Erasmus 2021) was found with a focus on Comic Con Africa. However, this particular study (Venter & Erasmus 2021) aimed to determine the quality of life effect of Comic Con Africa on visitors. With this in mind, there is a lack of applied research with regard to the travel motivations of pop culture fans in the South African context.

Comic Cons have the potential to generate significant economic contributions for tourism destinations and local communities and to expand local tourism industries. Local businesses such as restaurants, shops and hotels can benefit greatly from Comic Con events due to the large number of visitors or fans that attend these events. Fans may stay for several days and spend money at local establishments (University of Central Florida 2021). Comic Con Africa is recognised as the largest cosplay event in South Africa and with the growth of the South African film industry Comic Con Africa is set to spark the interest of many fans (Moosa, 2018). However, to reap the economic benefits of a Comic Con it is important that its organisers gain a detailed understanding of pop culture fans' motivations for attending Comic Con.

Hosting events such as Comic Con Africa and understanding the reasons why fans attend these events are especially important in South Africa. South Africa is challenged by various socio-economic issues, some which include poverty and a high unemployment rate (34.3%) (Kumwenda-Mtambo, 2021). Comic Con Africa has the potential to stimulate job creation and economic growth. However, in order to achieve the afore-mentioned it is critical for the event organisers to have a thorough apprehension of pop culture fans' motivations for attending the event. This in turn, will lead to a sustainable and competitive event which can contribute towards the economy of the host destination and employment.

Organisers of pop culture events also need to recognise the reasons why fans decide to attend events such as Comic Con (Lee, Song, Lee & Petrick, 2018) since the trends and fashions related to pop culture are constantly changing, making it difficult to predict the future, which also complicates the task of adopting pop culture as a marketing tool (Bentley, Lipo, Herzog & Hahn, 2007). Understanding pop culture fans' motivations will assist event organisers in their efforts to arouse and sustain pop

culture fans' interest in their events and the culture that they promote. Furthermore, tourist motivation influences aspects such as place attachment, satisfaction (Prayag, Suntikul & Agyeiwaah, 2018), perceived value (Setiawan, 2018), loyalty (Prayag *et al.*, 2018) and overall experience (Agyeiwaah, Otoo, Suntikul & Huang, 2019). As pop culture fans also represent a distinct group of travellers visiting a destination, an investigation of their motivation is a key activity to enhance satisfaction, perceived value and loyalty (Lee, Bai & Busser, 2019).

The exploration of pop culture fans and their travel motivations is important. According to Reichenberger (2019), pop culture fans seek personalised and meaningful experiences. To achieve more meaningful experiences, practitioners are required to adapt pop culture events and experiences. This highlights the need for both researchers and practitioners to further their understanding of the motivations and needs of pop culture fans, more especially so in a digitalised society. Further research into pop culture tourism is also required since pop culture tourism has the potential to foster positive social changes by drawing attention to local culture and heritage and by commercialising local arts and crafts (Reichenberger, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the aim of the current study is to examine the travel motivations of pop culture fans to a selected pop culture event in South Africa. More specifically, the study seeks to empirically assess and identify the travel motivations of pop culture fans by means of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). To achieve this aim, the study is structured as follows: first, a literature review is given to serve as the conceptual framework. Second, the method of research is explained, followed by a presentation of the results. Lastly, the findings and implications of the research are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1) TRAVEL MOTIVATION

According to Meng, Tepanon and Uysal (2008), travel motivation originates from an individual's need to travel to a destination or event. Wu (2015) agrees and defines travel motivation as the desires of an individual, which impels a person to travel to a

particular destination or event in a hope that their needs will be satisfied. This definition highlights the importance of travel motivation as a factor which influences tourists travel decisions and behaviour. It is critical for event organisers to recognise attendees' travel motivations as this will assist them with effective event planning and to develop a suitable marketing strategy for creating and sustaining an interest in the event (Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014).

Various theories have been developed to explain motivation from a tourism perspective. The push-pull theory is one such theory, first introduced by Dann (1977) and later elaborated on by Crompton (1979), which is one of the most commonly applied theories in tourism research (Noela, Wien & Reisinger, 2017; Suni & Pesonen, 2019; Wong, Musa & Taha, 2017). Push motivations refer to peoples' internal needs and wants that result in travel decisions, whereas pull motivations are appealing destination or event attributes that influence travel decisions (Prebesen, Woo, Chen & Uysal, 2013). Push motivations may include relaxation, knowledge improvement, adventure and so on, while examples of pull motivations are specific facilities, friendliness of staff, available services and performances (Suni & Pesonen, 2019).

Pearce (1988), however, argues that travel motivation is rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970) and that it is not static. According to Pearce (1988), travel motivation can be classified into six categories, namely: relaxation, stimulation, relationship, self-esteem, development, and fulfilment. He refers to these as the travel career ladder (TCL) and explains that travel motivation moves up the ladder as an individual gains more travel experience. As a person gains more travel experience, he or she develops a degree of independence and a greater understanding of the world, which results in moving upwards on the TCL (Pearce, 1988). The TCL later evolved into the travel career path (TCP), which considers tourists' psychological intricacy and emphasises that motivation patterns may change, resulting in either upward or downward movements on the TCP (Pearce, 2005).

The above-mentioned theories made important contributions toward understanding travel motivations. As such, the application of both the push-pull theory (Noela *et al.*, 2017; Suni, & Pesonen, 2019; Wong *et al.*, 2017) as well as the TCP (Rahman, Zailani & Musa, 2017; Getz & Andersson, 2020) are found frequently in tourism motivational

research studies. This study therefore employed elements of both theories in an attempt to obtain an understanding of the travel motivations of pop culture fans. Some of the push and pull motivations included in this study are: novelty; escape; adventure; time with family and status (push motivations); event facilities; affordability; and service quality (pull motivations). The push motivations used in this study are also related to the stages in the travel career path, for example: escape (relaxation/bodily needs, first stage); time with family (relationships, third stage); and status (self-esteem and development, fourth stage).

2.2) POP CULTURE, POP CULTURE EVENTS AND POP CULTURE FANS

Pop culture consists of the cultural elements that prevail in any given society and mainly comprises the more popular media, music, television, cinema, books, games (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021), literature, drama and celebrities (Busby & Klug, 2001; Lee, Song & Lee, 2017). Radomskaya (2018) refers to pop culture as an umbrella term, consisting of various fields such as film tourism, arts tourism, special events tourism and literary tourism. From a commercial perspective, Lee and Bai (2016) state that pop culture is mainly profit-driven and for mass consumption.

From a tourism perspective, pop culture is considered to be an effective mechanism to attract tourists to a destination, resulting in an improved destination image (Lee & Bai, 2016) and an economic injection (Conell, 2005). Radomskaya (2018) also adds that pop culture induced events are used to propel educational, political, recreational and cultural agendas. Pop culture tourism is a concept associated with tourists visiting a destination or event, which attaches them to their favourite television show, film, book, game or celebrity (Iwashita, 2008). According to Lee *et al.* (2019), tourists are attracted to destinations and events, which include elements related to their favourite movies or literature.

Popular culture tourism has gained momentum over the past few years (Lee & Bai, 2016). The economic and recreational benefits associated with pop culture have also been realised by the event industry and have resulted in the hosting of events such as film festivals, Comic Cons, gaming conventions, technological exhibitions, fashion shows and eSport competitions (Radomskaya, 2018). Of specific interest to this study is a Comic Con, which is an event specifically organised for fans of television shows,

movies, comic books and games to learn about, enjoy and participate in the distribution of information about their interests (Denwiddie & Hamdan, 2013).

The primary focus of a Comic Con is on comic books and the culture that goes with it. Fans gather to meet creators, experts, and each other. It is a multi-day event, which features a wide variety of activities and panels, with a larger number of attendees participating in cosplay than most other types of fan convention. Since the first official Comic Con was held in 1970 in San Diego, California (United States of America), these events have grown in popularity (The Perspective, 2020). Comic Con events attract large numbers of fans and generates profitable spinoffs for destinations. Many people travel far to attend a Comic Con and spend money on travel, accommodation, food and tickets, amongst others. South Africa hosted its first Comic Con, namely, Comic Con Africa, in September 2018 at the Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit and International Convention Centre, Gauteng province (Comic Con Africa, 2018). Comic Con Africa is an entertainment event comprising of different themes and topics relating to movies, online gaming and fandom. The event also contains a kids-focussed area referred too as KidsCon making this a popular event for the whole family. To date, there has been no known research investigating the fans' motivations for visiting Comic Con Africa.

Tourists visiting pop culture destinations or events are referred to as pop culture fans, who visit pop culture events to experience various elements of popular culture (Lee & Bai, 2016). According to Lee *et al.* (2019), pop culture fans represent a unique destination and event market segment and form part of what is referred to as fan communities (Porter, 2009). Porter (2009) explains that fan communities are places where fans feel they belong and where they are able to express their experiences as humans with others who share similar interests or characteristics. Fans share feelings of belonging, which are extended to strangers with similar interests (Rihova, Buhalis, Moital & Gouthro, 2015). Sabre (2017) refers to fan communities as fandoms and describes it as the gathering of individuals who are passionate about similar contents (e.g., characters).

Taking into account that pop culture tourism is a growing phenomenon, it is not surprising that it has also been researched from different viewpoints including: visitor satisfaction; loyalty (Lee *et al.*, 2019); visitors' decision-making processes (Lee *et al.*, 2017); destination brand (O'Connor & Bolan, 2008); and visitor experiences (Roesch,

2009). Despite vast research on pop culture tourism, the following areas remain under-researched: research contextualising pop culture tourism in South Africa; and research pertaining to pop culture fans' motivations and research specifically of a Comic Con.

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

Zikmund (1996), Mouton (2002) as well as Cooper and Schindler (2008), among others, have indicated that research design provides the overall structure for the procedures the researcher follows to collect data that relate to some specified research objectives. The following sections will elaborate on the sample and data collection.

3.1) SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

A sampling technique is described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) as a method utilised to select the most appropriate respondents for the study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilised a convenience sampling approach, which is exploratory by nature to obtain the right respondents while attaining an equal gender representation. This approach was appropriate since the population was made up of the same group of elements that were attendees of the same event. The visitors to Comic Con Africa were included in the self-administered questionnaires.

3.2) DATA ANALYSIS

A quantitative approach using a survey was employed for this study. For the purpose of this article, the data obtained in September 2019 (519 was collected at the venue and 58 was collected online after the convention (using the Facebook page of the organisers) will be used. The questionnaire used to survey attendees at Comic Con in 2019 consisted of four sections. Section A captured demographic and spending details. Section B addressed visitor decision-making. Section C focused on loyalty and Section D covered travel motivations. After 600 questionnaires were distributed 576

were useful. Convenient sampling was applied. The sample size was based on the previous year's attendee numbers, which was 45,000 visitors over the four-day period (Comic Con Africa, 2018). This decision was based on the guidelines for general research activities proposed by Cooper and Emory (1995) and Krejcie and Morgan (1970). These guidelines are applicable to any defined population and state that for a population (N) of 100 000 the recommended sample size (S) is 384. For the present study, a sample size of 600 was sufficient. The sample size was based on the previous year's number of attendees (45,000). Since the recommended sample size for a population of 100,000 (N) is 384 (S), it can be argued that a sample size of 45,000 (N) a sample 600 (S) was sufficient for this study. Questionnaires were collected on all four days to get a true reflection of money spent and to gather data of attendees who attended various days and not just for the first day. The questionnaires were distributed in increasing increments each day to ensure that the sample population was a true reflection of respondents' spending. The reason for this is two-fold: firstly, because at the end of the festival attendants tended to spend more and secondly, to spread the questionnaires so that the researchers could gather data for all the days and not just for the first day.

3.3) STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data was captured in Microsoft Excel and the statistical analysis were performed by a statistician with the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23, 2020) software. A factor analysis was performed to determine the leading motives for attending Comic Con.

3.4) RESULTS

A total number of 576 questionnaires were completed successfully.

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	284	50%
Female	282	50%
Year of birth		
18 – 25 years	170	32%
26 – 35 years	211	40%
36 – 45 years	102	19%
46 – 55 years	34	7%
56 – 64 years	12	2%
Home language		
English	318	58%
Afrikaans	199	36%
Sotho	16	3%
Other (e.g. German, Chinese)	12	2%
Xhosa	4	0.5%
Zulu	4	0.5%
Occupation		
Professional	137	25%
Student	82	15%
Self-employed	64	12%
Management	63	11%
Administrative	48	8%
Technical	44	8%
Education	41	7%
Sales	26	5%
Other	25	5%
Unemployed	19	3%
Housewife	5	1%
Pensioner	1	0%
Highest level of education		
Degree (similar to a Bachelor's degree / Hons Degree)	197	35%
Grade 12 (similar to a General Certificate of Secondary Education)	163	29%
Diploma (similar to an Intermediate Diploma in Higher Education)	131	23%
Masters degree	42	7%
Other (e.g. apprenticeship)	17	3%
Doctorate (PhD) degree	11	2%
Grade 8 (similar to Secondary level, Junior High)	8	1%
Province		
Gauteng	464	83%
KwaZulu-Natal	29	5%
North West	15	3%
Western Cape	15	3%
Free State	10	2%
Mpumalanga	10	2%
Limpopo	8	1%
Eastern Cape	5	1%
Outside RSA	4	0%
Respondents' annual income		
< \$9375	261	50%
\$9376 – \$14 699	59	11%
\$14 700 – \$28 800	82	16%
\$28 801 – \$35 899	39	8%
\$36 900>	76	15%
Days attended		
1 Day	397	71%
2 Days	55	10%
3 Days	11	2%
4 Days	94	17%
Size of travel group		

1 – 2 persons	184	33%
3 – 5 persons	270	48%
6 – 10 persons	91	16%
11 – 15 persons	9	2%
16 – 20 persons	2	1%

Table 1: Descriptive results.

According to Table 1, the following descriptive data was gathered, which is a representation of the population. Male and female attendees were equally represented with 50% each of the sample collected. The age group that was mostly represented was between the ages of 26-35 (40%), followed by 18-25 years old (32%), and thirdly the group 36-45 years old (19%); 46-64 combined only represented 9% of the population. This can be an indicator that pop culture is for the younger generation. English was the home language mostly spoken by attendees (58%), followed by Afrikaans (36%), while the other languages made up the remaining 6%. Attendees were represented with the highest qualification of a degree (similar to a Bachelor's degree / Hons degree) (35%), Grade 12 (General Certificate of Secondary Education (29%), and Diploma (similar to an Intermediate Diploma in Higher Education) (23%). The occupation of attendees was represented by professionals (25%), students (15%), self-employed (12%), and management (11%). Gauteng was the province in which the majority attendees reside (83%), followed by KwaZulu Natal (5%). North West and Western Cape were equal with 3%, Free State and Mpumalanga shared a 2% each and Eastern Cape and Limpopo both was represented by 1%. The reason for this can be that Gauteng is far to travel for a long weekend from outlying provinces. Respondents' annual income was represented by: 50% for < \$ 9375; 24%; 16% was in the income bracket \$14 700 – \$28 800, followed by 15 % represented by \$36 500 >; 11% of respondents earned \$9376 – \$14 699; and 8% was in the bracket: \$28 801 – \$35 899. This shows that the gaming industry is for higher income groups as it is an expensive hobby (Whitton & Hollins, 2008). The event spanned over four days and the majority attended for only one day (71%), where 17% attended all four days followed by two days (10%), and three days (2%). The size of the travel group was represented as follows: 48% for 3-5 persons; 33% for 1-2 persons; 16% for 6-10 persons; 2% for 11-15%; and lastly 1% for 16-20 persons in a travel group.

3.5) FACTOR ANALYSIS

The purpose of a factor analysis is to describe the covariance relationships among many variables in terms of a few underlying, but unobservable, random quantities called factors. The factor model can be motivated by the following argument: variables can be grouped according to their correlations, that is, all the variables in a particular group are highly correlated among themselves, but indicate small correlations with variables in a different group. If this is the case, it is conceivable that each group of variables represents a single underlying factor that is responsible for the observed correlations. Fields (2009) calls this a 'data reduction' technique. It takes a large set of variables and looks for a way in which the data can be 'reduced' or summarised using a smaller set of factors or components. It is this type of structure that a factor analysis seeks to confirm (Johnson & Wichern, 2007).

Factors	Mean value	Cronbach's alpha (Reliability Coefficient)	Inter-Item Correlation
Factor 1: Brand visibility	3.88	0.90	0.63
Factor 2: Event participation	3.05	0.91	0.57
Factor 3: Acquire pop culture knowledge	3.73	0.87	0.57
Factor 4: Escapism	3.78	0.87	0.62
Factor 5: Celebrity fandom	3.64	0.84	0.55
Factor 6: Value for money	3.88	0.92	0.53
Factor 7: Exclusive merchandise	3.83	0.83	0.51
Factor 8: Social enjoyment	4.17	0.86	0.51
Factor 9: Novelty	4.31	0.82	0.63

Table 2: Factor analysis.

	Factor loading
Factor 1: Brand visibility	
Because the information about Comic Con is enticing.	0.849
Because information about Comic Con is easily available	0.828
Because it is a sociable event.	0.736
Because the Comic Con brand is trustworthy.	0.677
Because Comic Con delivers a quality experience and service.	0.650
The event says a lot about who I am.	0.402
Factor 2: Event participation	
To volunteer at Comic Con.	0.794

To participate in gaming tournaments.	0.745
To increase social status.	0.741
To participate in the competitions at Comic Con.	0.737
To dress up as my favourite fictional character.	0.666
To participate in celebrity panel discussions.	0.625
To attend a workshop or seminar.	0.589
To meet new people.	0.435
Factor 3: Acquire pop culture knowledge	
To improve family/friends' knowledge about pop culture.	0.737
To improve family/friends' knowledge about Comic Con.	0.705
To improve my knowledge about pop culture.	0.636
To improve my own knowledge about Comic Con.	0.588
To familiarise myself with new movies, series or games.	0.328
Factor 4: Escapism	
To seek relieve from boredom.	-0.819
To escape from my daily routine.	-0.813
To relieve my daily stress.	-0.706
To seek adventure.	-0.417
Factor 5: Celebrity fandom	
To get autographs of celebrities or well-known characters.	-0.772
To take photos with celebrities or well-known characters.	-0.737
To meet celebrities or well-known characters.	-0.649
To experience the exhibitions.	-0.484
Factor 6: Value for money	
Because the event facilities are sufficient.	0.672
Because the event facilities are well-maintained.	0.644
Because the event facilities are clean.	0.616
Because it offers value for money.	0.562
Because the event facilities are safe.	0.523
Because it is affordable.	0.510
Because merchandise at this event is affordable.	0.487
Because it is easily accessible.	0.461
Because it is organised by an experience event company.	0.440
Because it has a good reputation.	0.393
Because there is a variety of activities and entertainment to experience at Comic Con.	0.288
Factor 7: Exclusive merchandise	
Because the collectables for sale at Comic Con are unique.	0.722
Because the collectables for sale cannot be bought anywhere else in South Africa.	0.665

Because there is a variety of merchandise to purchase at Comic Con.	0.593
To purchase interesting collectables and merchandise.	0.559
Because the collectables for sale at Comic Con are affordable.	0.491
Factor 8: Social enjoyment	
To be with people who are enjoying themselves.	0.610
To be with people that enjoy the same things that I enjoy.	0.544
To treat my family or friends to a fun filled experience.	0.514
To have fun.	0.499
To spend time with family and friends.	0.491
To relax.	0.403
Factor 9: Novelty	
To experience something new.	0.887
To experience something different.	0.841
To satisfy my curiosity about pop culture.	0.509
Total variance explained	67.13%

Table 3: Factor loadings.

Factor analysis is a technique for identifying the relationship between variables (Foster, Barkus & Yavorsky, 2006). The extraction method used was: Principal Axis Factoring, and the Rotation method used was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation minimises the complexity of the factor loadings to make the structure simpler to interpret. Factor rotation methods preserve the subspace and give you a different basis for it. Varimax returns factors that are orthogonal; Oblimin allows the factors to not be orthogonal, thus the reason for using Oblimin in the current study. The factor analysis (Pattern Matrix) identified nine motivational factors (Table 2) that were labelled according to similar characteristics. The nine motivational factors accounted for 67.13 % of the total variance.

Commonalities are the proportion of variance of each item explained by the extracted factors. Once factors have been extracted, a better idea can be gained of how much variance is, in reality, common (Fields, 2009). In this study all the factors range from 0.51 to 0.63, which means that sufficient variance explained in all items by the nine factors extracted.

Relatively high factor loadings indicate a reasonably high correlation between the delineated factors and their individual items. Any items that cross-loaded on two factors with factor loadings greater than 0.3 were categorised in the factor where

interpretability was regarded as being the best (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

Factor scores for all the motivation factors were calculated as the averages of all items contributing to a specific factor so that mean scores could be interpreted on the original 5-point Likert scale of measurement (1=totally disagree; 2=disagree; 3=unsure 4=agree and 5=totally agree) as a motivational factor. The discussion will be acceding from most important to the least important Factor.

As presented in Table 2, according to the mean, *Novelty* (Factor 9) was the most important motive for attendees to attend the Comic Con Africa and yielded the highest mean value (4.31). This is affirmed by a study by Yoo *et al.* (2018). According to the findings by Yoo *et al.* (2018), certain types of tourists seek novel experiences, which determines their destination choices. In the context of this study, tourists who seek novel experiences may choose Comic Con as this event represents a unique experience. The reliability coefficient was 0.82 and the average inter-item correlation was 0.63. Items include were: experiencing something new; experiencing something different; and satisfying curiosity (Table 3). *Social enjoyment* (Factor 8) had the second highest mean value of 4.17, a reliability coefficient of 0.86 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.51. Factor 8 consisted of items such as to be with people that enjoy the same things that I enjoy and to have fun (Table 3). This factor coincides with a study by Rexaei, Mirzaie and Abbasi (2017) regarding motivation differences among traditional festival visitors based on demographic characteristics. According to Rexaei *et al.* (2017), socialization is an important motivation for attending festivals and events. Factor 8 is furthermore concurred by Chen, Lu and Wang (2016) who established that social interaction enhances perceived enjoyment.

Third place was shared amongst *Brand visibility* (Factor 1) and *Value for money* (Factor 6) with a mean value of 3.88. Factor 1 had a reliability coefficient 0.90 and the average inter-item correlation was 0.63 (Table 2) with items such as information about Comic Con is enticing as well as easily available (Table 3). For Factor 6 (*Value for money*) the reliability coefficient was 0.92 and the average inter-item correlation was 0.53 (Table 2) and included facilities was sufficient for the purpose and facilities are well maintained (Table 3). Factor 6 is consistent with the findings by Du Plessis and Saayman (2015) who highlighted a strong relationship between value for money and

motivation to travel thus supporting the current study. The factor with the fourth highest mean value (3.83) was Factor 7 (*Exclusive merchandise*). The reliability coefficient was 0.83 and the average inter-item correlation was 0.51 (Table 2). Items representing Factor 7 included collectibles are unique and there are a variety for sale (Table 3). According to Marangkum and Thipjumong (2018), shopping for collectables and souvenirs is a popular tourist activity and it reminds visitors of their experiences. More specifically, Marangkum and Thipjumong (2018) found that tourists seek variety when visiting a destination or event, which is in line with the findings (Factor 7) of this study.

Factor 4 (*Escapism*) obtained the fifth highest mean value of 3.78, a reliability coefficient of 0.87 and an inter-item correlation of 0.62 (Table 2) which pertain to the following: seek relieve from boredom and escape daily routine (Table 3). Comic Con is well-known for activities like cosplaying. Kuo, Lutz and Hiller (2016) confirm that cosplaying is a way to escape and release stress. Reichenberger (2021) also acknowledges the importance of escapism as a travel motivation for pop culture events. Factor 3 (*Acquire pop culture knowledge*) held the sixth place with a mean value of 3.73 and a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The inter-item correlation is 0.57 (Table 2). Items under this factor included to improve knowledge about pop culture and familiarise oneself with upcoming movies and games (Table 3). Factor 3 corresponds with the finding from Chi and Phuong (2021) who recognises knowledge enhancement is an important consideration in tourists decision-making regarding which destinations and events to visit.

Second to last place belongs to Factor 5 (*Celebrity fandom*) with a mean value of 3.6, a reliability coefficient of 0.84 and an inter-item correlation of 0.55 (Table 2). To get autographs and photos from celebrities was the top two items in this category (Table 3). Similar to the findings of Armiela (2018), celebrity endorsement positively affects tourists' intentions to visit a specific destination or event. *Event participation* (Factor 2) received the lowest mean value (3.05). The reliability coefficient was 0.91, and the average inter-item correlations were 0.57 (Table 2) with items such as to volunteer at the event and to participate in gaming tournaments (Table 3). In accordance with Rogerson, Gibbs and Smith (2019), play as a form of event participation is a key driver for gamers and hobbyists to travel to events.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main aim of this study was to determine the leading motives for attending a pop culture event, namely Comic Con, by way of a factor analysis. Since events differ, it is critical to determine visitor motives for different events including pop culture events. Not only does this information assist with market segmentation but also with enhancing visitor satisfaction and with developing effective marketing strategies. Pop culture tourism has proven to be an important reason for visitors to visit destinations and events. The importance of pop culture events has also been realised by destinations as a key economic contributor. Hence, studies like this support tourism and its positive economic impact in the local community. A positive impact is needed to ensure that the event is sustainable in the long run. With sustainability comes a more competitive advantage, thereby increasing the visibility of the event.

The descriptive results of this study showed that the average attendee is male or female between the age of 26 and 35 years, speaks English and has a Diploma as the highest qualification, resides in Gauteng, earns R140 000 per annum, attended one day and travels with a group of 3-5 people. An EFA was conducted to determine pop culture fans' motivations for attending Comic Con Africa. The study revealed nine travel motivations in the factor analysis, namely: *novelty, social enjoyment, brand visibility, value for money, exclusive merchandise, escapism, acquire pop culture knowledge, celebrity fandom; and event participation.*

It therefore recommended that pop culture event organisers keep the originality and uniqueness of the event. Event organisers must keep track of changes and trends in pop culture by means of research to ensure that the event remains interesting for its fans. In addition, to enhance the social elements of the event, it is also recommended that group packages be developed and sold alongside weekend passes. This will improve the social components of the event, which are regarded as important motivation for pop culture fans. Regarding the Comic Con brand, it is recommended that Comic Con builds on the international brand in an African context by creating awareness through using African and South African celebrities as cos players to attract local fans. Equally important is the factor of value for money. Clearly pop culture fans

seek value for money; therefore, Comic Con must ensure a quality experience with a variety of activities and performances that will appeal to its fans.

The results of this study make a worthy contribution to pop culture tourism, specifically in a South African context. The motivations of pop culture fans as identified in this study is of vital importance in the planning and marketing of pop culture events such as Comic Con. By keeping pop culture events novel, trustworthy and sociable and by offering value for money experiences, event organisers can ensure a viable and competitive event, which can be positively associated with a destination. Ultimately, by applying the motivations of pop culture fans will ensure an increase in overall ticket sales, visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES

The current study presents some limitations. Firstly, the study was done on only one pop culture event, namely Comic Con Africa. Since events differ, the results of this study cannot necessarily be inferred to other events. Also, the focus of this study was on Comic Con only, which represents merely one of category of pop culture event. Studies on other genres of pop culture events (e.g., film, music, fashion) can contribute to the literature of pop culture tourism.

With regard to further future studies, it is recommended that spending behaviour of pop culture fans be investigated to gain an improved understanding of the economic impact of pop culture fans' spending on the local society. An angle that can also be examined is the different genres represented at pop culture events, more specifically determining the genres that attracts most attention from the event audience. Knowing the most popular genres will help the event organisers with their marketing activities and product offerings by emphasising these genres.

In addition, an analysis of visitor loyalty may also provide valuable insights in terms of visitors' attitudes, perceptions and event satisfaction. Studies regarding the differences between first-time visitors and repeat visitors can also be conducted especially with regard to their spending behaviour and event experiences. This will assist to segment visitors according to frequency of attendance, which in turn may contribute towards the pop culture event's short-term momentum and its sustainability

in the long run. In addition, due to the COVID19 pandemic, people and their behaviour have changed. Investigations are needed to determine the recovery of pop culture tourism post-COVID19. Lastly, an analysis of different marketing strategies for different pop culture events can be analysed as marketing strategies for pop culture events might differ and might be event-specific. It is thus important to gain an understanding of how different pop culture events are marketed both nationally and internationally.

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