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The influence of cultural events organized by hotels in the selection of the establishment

La influencia de eventos culturales organizados por hoteles en la selección del establecimiento

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to provide theoretical and empirical data on the weight that cultural events organized by hotels have in the selection of the establishment. A qualitative exploratory methodology focused on a single point in time and in a non-artificial scenario was adopted. The elements of the investigation were the individual and the organization and the sampling method was the voluntary and non-probabilistic. The data collection was performed through face-to-face interviews with questionnaires serving as guides. Although the cultural events organized by hotels did not appear as a selection factor of the establishments, these events were attended by a considerable percentage of clients, who were influenced by marketing communications located inside the establishments. The study was limited by the data collection period, by the authors' lack of consensus on the subject and little research on the topic.

Keywords

Consumer decision-making behaviour; Cultural events; Marketing; Tourism

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación fue proporcionar datos teóricos y empíricos sobre el peso que los eventos culturales organizados por los hoteles tienen en la selección del establecimiento. Se adoptó una metodología exploratoria cualitativa enfocada en un solo punto en el tiempo y en un escenario no artificial. Los elementos de la investigación fueron el individuo y la organización y el método de muestreo fue voluntario y no probabilístico. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante entrevistas cara a cara con cuestionarios que sirvieron como guías. A pesar de que los eventos culturales organizados por los hoteles no aparecieron como un factor de selección de los establecimientos, a estos eventos asistió un porcentaje considerable de clientes, que fueron influenciados por las comunicaciones de marketing ubicadas dentro de los establecimientos. El estudio estuvo limitado por el período de recolección de datos, por la falta de consenso de los autores sobre el tema y poca investigación sobre el tema

Palabras clave

Comportamiento de toma de decisiones del consumidor; Eventos culturales; Márketing; Turismo

1. Introducción

Being one of the most important forms of tourism (Ferrari, 2002; Forga & Valiente, 2014) and with greater growth (Mayfield & Crompton, 1995), events are organized with the aim of attracting large tourist inflows (Getz, 2008). The hotels that organize them are benefited in a variety of ways, either by cultivating their profile, by reinforcing the brand position (Drake, 2013) or simply by their ability to attract more customers (Crompton, 2006; Litvin et al., 2013).

Several scholars have conducted research in the field of events since the 1960s (Formica, 1998; Getz, 1989). However, although the number of studies on the effects of tourism events has increased dramatically since 1980 (Kim et al., 2013; Uysal & Gitelson, 1994), and the thematic areas have diversified, the focus still remains on a very limited number of topics. That is, there is still much more territory to explore. As is the case with the events organized by the tourism industry (Kim et al., 2013).

Considering that few studies have explored the area of events carried out by hotels (Bernick & Boo, 2013), this investigation sought to fill this knowledge gap by analysing the central issues to understand how the client observes and acts in relation to cultural events organized by these establishments.

The study focused on two objectives:

The first was to determine the weight that cultural events conducted by hotels have on the selection of the establishment. This objective was supported by the fact that several authors refer to the benefits that the events bring to the hotel industry (Bernick & Boo, 2013; Drake, 2013; Forga & Valiente, 2014; Litvin et al., 2013; Soria et al., 2014; Vila-López & Rodríguez-Molina, 2013).

The second objective was to identify the information source that most influences the client to attend the events organized by the hotels. This objective was supported by the fact that the current world, saturated with information and suspicion (Medina & Correia, 2012a), has led the customer to not rely solely on marketing communications (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015) and to search for honest information with real content (Medina & Correia, 2012a).

The results of this research will expose the weight of cultural events held by the hotel industry and determine the main source responsible for persuading people to attend these events.

Considering the limited number of studies in this area (Bernick & Boo, 2013; Kim et al., 2013), the results of this research aimed to create the basis for future studies in the specific area of cultural events organized by hotels.

2. Theoretical approach

2.1. Objective 1: Determine the weight of cultural events organized by hotels in the selection of the establishment

According to Bell et al. (2013), technology is isolating us. As the world moves into an era where technology has penetrated all aspects of life, and where exposure to other individuals is less and less necessary, the craving for real face-to-face personal interaction can be addressed through tourism activities (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

The term event tourism, which formalized the relationship between events and tourism, was created in the 1980s (Getz, 1997). Event tourism has been defined as the systematic planning, development and marketing of festivals and events, as tourist attractions, serving as catalysts and builders of a destination's image (Getz & Wicks, 1993). According to Ritchie (1984), event tourism consists of unique or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to increase the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourist destination in the short or long term.

It is difficult to present a definition of the term cultural events due to the absence of a consensual understanding on what constitutes the culture or events (Richards & Palmer, 2010). The meaning of cultural events is too broad and unclear. Some authors put festivals as a subcategory of cultural events, others do not (Bladen et al., 2012).

Considering the broad definition of culture, cultural events can be understood as events that present a particular expression of one or more cultures (Bladen et al., 2012). These can also be taken as a celebration, by a base audience, of the current artistic and cultural diversity (Yeoman et al., 2004). Bladen et al. (2012) define cultural events as solemn or cheerful events that have a cultural significance.

A cultural event consists of a series of cultural activities, has an established schedule and venue, has an audience and stakeholders, is usually recurring and of a commemorative (Richards & Palmer, 2010) and social nature (Kolb, 2013; Reverté & Izard, 2011), being more constructed than naturally occurring (Robinson et al., 2011). Be it a traditional or contemporary event, they tend to have a ritualistic, ceremonial or sacred structure and characteristics (Shone & Parry, 2010).

In general terms, events are unique moments in time (Goldblatt, 1997; Reverté & Izard, 2011). Every event is unique, that is, although each one can be constantly repeated, the people involved, the place, the format, the chosen time, etc. will make the event unique, and it can never be recreated in exactly the same way (Shone & Parry, 2010).

Events are considered one of the most important forms of tourist attraction (Ferrari, 2002; Forga & Valiente, 2014) and with greater growth (Mayfield & Crompton, 1995). Due to the ever increasing importance of events in tourism, several types of these events are organized as important tourism motivators (Getz, 2008).

The interest in events has, unquestionably, reached a historic high, fuelled by the profile of great cultural, religious and sporting occasions (Baum et al., 2013). At a time when it is possible to work and live with a minimum of physical interaction, the growth of the events industry may be due in part to the human being's need to increase his opportunities for social and physical interaction (Shone & Parry, 2010).

Humans are naturally social beings (Correia, 2011a, 2011b; Yeoman, 2013). They feel the need to be integrated, to interact and to be part of a community (Richards & Palmer, 2010). They want and seek contact with others through various activities, such as events (Correia, 2011a, 2011b). This need emphasizes the fact that the right combination of people, space, time, rhythm, events and animation is what matters for creating a stream of interesting activities (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

Musical expression and dance are among the most attractive and pleasant aspects of a country. Community concerts, parades and welcome parties are appreciated by tourists. Several establishments can give their clients the opportunity to enjoy these arts at their best through the provision of entertainment programs (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). Music festivals in particular have been identified as a viable way to save a decaying tourism industry. Their places of action become social and business meeting places, where the natural purpose is the exchange of ideas and cultural stimulus (Soria et al., 2014).

The design and style of the event or location can also attract the customer (Richards & Palmer, 2010). Attributes such as space, colour, interaction with others, music, light, air quality, smell, environment, temperature and sound are some of the main constituents for the construction of an atmospheric experience linked to feelings of joy (Slåtten et al., 2009).

Contemporary consumers have a sense of entitlement to entertainment (Bernick & Boo, 2013). The public wants to have fun, be entertained, enjoy the fantasy, escape the realities of everyday life (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009) and leave the events with stories and experiences to tell (Yeoman et al., 2004).

According to Getz (1989), the special feature for the appeal of events is the singularity of each. The customer is looking for a unique, personalized and quality event. He aspires, above all, to feel unique, well treated, accepted and socialize (Ingram, 2014).

The event should celebrate a certain lifestyle (Bennett et al., 2014), provide a cheerful atmosphere, feelings of unity, of belonging to a group, intimacy, a sense of identity and of a collective memory (Richards & Palmer, 2010), social integration, trust and mutual support (Shone & Parry, 2010).

Shone and Parry (2010) report that, for any event, there are usually a variety of motives or determinants that lead people to attend them. These may be primary or secondary and are divided into: social reasons (e.g. interaction, community spirit, status or recognition of achievements, philanthropy or charity), organizational (e.g. need to make sales, have an organizational presence, status and recognition, sponsorship and community support), physiological (e.g. relaxation or recreation with others, sexual pleasure, exercise or physical challenges, eating, drinking and having fun) and personal (e.g. seeking new experiences, learning and education, creativity and fulfilment of ambitions).

Five factors present themselves as critical motivators connected to the visitation of festivals and events. These are, in descending order of importance: cultural exploration, socialization, curiosity, family union and escape (Lee et al., 2012). As we can see, cultural exploration is the main motivator that leads the client to attend events. Other motivators include: recovery of a balance and novelty (Crompton & McKay, 1997).

Ingram (2014) mentions that the motivation to attend events boils down to content and connections. The content concerns everything that is meant to entertain the customer (e.g. speakers, thematic sessions, presentations, seminars, videos and music) and the connections relate to the audience that will interact

with each other. In addition, the customer is looking for an event whose quality justifies the time and money he will have to spend.

However, the need to pay an admission fee associated with secondary costs (e.g. transportation, costs of event products, distance, time, effort and the existence of other priorities) affects the decision-making process. In addition, the client wants to avoid unsafe situations, discomfort, doubts, worries, constraints, make complex decisions, be treated in an undifferentiated way or feel like a nuisance or an invader (Yeoman et al., 2004).

Litvin et al. (2013) warn of the dangers of over-reliance on events organized by the public authorities and consequent ignorance of the development of a permanent base of tourist attractions such as corporate events. Silva (2005) mentions that it is not only the government's responsibility to create and promote events. It is certain that it has the special responsibility to create events of a certain magnitude. However, in some cases, it should share this task and be associated with other institutions of society, and may even leave the organization of certain events to some of these other corporations or even support the events that others wish to organize.

If well managed, events act as generators of demand for hotels. The realization of events as a strategy of the hotel industry to combat seasonality, and consequent stability, has received increasing adhesion (Medeiros, 2007). As one of the most important components of the tourism industry, events serve as an important tool for attracting tourists in low seasons and for creating a certain image and awareness of a destination or place (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

In 2011, the presence of attractions (cultural or sporting), entertainment or occurrence of an event were the main criterion in the selection of Portugal as a destination for 13% of tourists (Turismo de Portugal & GfK Metris, 2011), in 2012 this value rose to 14% (Turismo de Portugal & GfK Metris, 2012), in 2013 it decreased to 12% (Turismo de Portugal & INTERCAMPUS, 2013; Turismo de Portugal et al., 2014) and in 2014 it increased again, this time to 16% (Turismo de Portugal & INTERCAMPUS, 2014; Turismo de Portugal et al., 2015).

In addition, between 2013 and 2015, 49% of tourists travelled to Portugal for the purpose of visiting museums, historical heritage and exhibitions; 21% visited the country for gastronomy, wines or participation in wine and gastronomic events; 8% moved for the purpose of attending shows or musical events; and 4% came to attend the New Year celebrations and thematic cultural events (Turismo de Portugal et al., 2015). These travel motifs are presented as contents of cultural events (Drake, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Lehn, 2010; Payne & Barbera, 2010; Reverté & Izard, 2011; Richards, 2001; Richards & Palmer, 2010).

Events present themselves as a motivator for tourism (Kim et al., 2013). The lively atmosphere makes the customer feel good about being there and makes the place more attractive to visit (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

In short, events provide organizations with a strategic and versatile tool to achieve various marketing-related objectives (Crowther, 2010, 2011; Pugh & Wood, 2004). These are widely documented as contributors to a destination's tourism product (Davidson & Rogers, 2011; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). In particular, positive social, economic and cultural impacts are commonly cited as potential benefits to those that organize events (Veres et al., 2008).

2.1. Objective 2: Identify the information source that the client considers most convincing when selecting the cultural event to attend.

Relatively little is known about marketing communications in the context of events (Hede & Kellett, 2011). The essence of effective marketing communication is based on both the sender and the receiver being involved in the communication process (Kitchen & Pelsmacker, 2004; Shimp, 1993).

The contemporary world is saturated with information and suspicion. People are constantly bombarded with consumer marketing content, but they are looking for honest interactions with real content. Considering that the most important message is the one that is passed from one friend to another (Medina & Correia, 2012a), success will depend on how the company and the clients tell reality (Medina & Correia, 2012b).

The marketing communication strategy needs to be considered under the assumption that hotel services are an experience rather than a research product. While in the case of a research product the consumer can determine the quality before consumption, in an experience product or service, its quality can only be determined during or after consumption. Thus, advertising should be developed according to this peculiarity of the hotels (Israeli et al., 2008).

As in most industries, technology has had a profound influence on the hospitality sector (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). The consumer is changing (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). The new technological solutions have facilitated consumer empowerment. Today, consumers are adopting a more proactive attitude in that they explicitly express their opinions and perceptions through word of mouth. This can be expressed in person or impersonally, such as via the web 2.0 (Dwivedi et al., 2007). Being more informed and communicatively empowered, rather than relying solely on business promotion, the consumer uses the internet to be informed (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015). This means that managers need to adapt to this new environment and capture customer feedback in order to obtain valuable information (Šeric et al., 2015).

The marketing communication tools that are available to hospitality companies include advertising, personal sales, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing (McCabe, 2009).

As part of the tourism and hospitality industry communication mix, the advertising tools used by hotels consist of printed media, television, radio, cinema, outdoor media, among others, such as direct mail (Hudson, 2008) and the internet (Bowie & Buttle, 2004).

Similarly, the communication tools traditionally used by event organizers include the press (Falkheimer, 2007; Hede & Kellett, 2011; Pitta et al., 2006), television, radio and direct mail (Hede & Kellett, 2011).

However, it has been argued that many of these tools are losing their effectiveness (Falkheimer, 2007; Hede & Kellett, 2011; Pitta et al., 2006), being that nowadays the use of an official website and participation in electronic communities and social networks, such as Myspace, Facebook and Twitter is more popular (Hede & Kellett, 2011).

The internet has been crucial to tourism (Information Resources Management Association, 2014). The hotel industry has increasingly made use of social medias and of the participatory web 2.0 platforms that facilitate the creation of content (e.g. videos, images and comments) and their online sharing. Tourists are influenced by 2.0 communications and various online content provided by social networks and other sharing websites such as blogs, Dailymotion, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Myspace, Vimeo, etc. (Wided & Sonja, 2014). In this digital age more attention has been given to the development of tourism through such approaches, and these tools are now used by most of the world's countries, which in turn have encouraged the necessary development of the tourism sector (Salim et al., 2012).

Social media now appears as a new way of activism in digital marketing communications. Companies no longer have full control of the relationship with consumers, nor of their relationship with their products, being that the survival of the organization depends on the correct use of the social communication medias (Medina & Correia, 2012a). The communication, generated by the organizers of the event, can encourage the appearance of several articles, created by third parties in the most varied medias and, therefore, uncontrolled, commenting on the communication or products of the company. The communications generated by this extremely important and relevant commentator is called word of mouth (Hede & Kellett, 2011).

Despite the potential of all tools used by companies, the most credible form of promotion, according to consumers' perception, is word of mouth (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015; Bowie & Buttle, 2004; Cakim, 2010; Funk, 2008; Hoffman & Bateson, 2011; Hsu & Powers, 2002; Hudson, 2008; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Kotler et al., 2010; McCabe, 2009; Middleton et al., 2009; Phillips & Rasberry, 2008; Ryan, 2014; Smilansky, 2009; Usunier & Lee, 2005). This type of promotion is invaluable, especially for experience products (Fahy & Jobber, 2015; Hoffman & Bateson, 2011; Kerrigan et al., 2004; Kotler, 2001). As is the case of events (Jackson, 2013) and of tourism and hospitality services (Reid & Bojanic, 2006).

Despite all the vast commercial information the company may display, nothing is as influential as information provided by family, friends and online reviewers (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015; Hoyer et al., 2013). These are more reliable because they come from people who actually bought and tried the product. Although these opinions vary in quality, the large number of online reviews form a reliable general opinion (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015).

The constant growth in popularity of smartphones means that consumers are never offline. Their power to comment on a company's behaviour and make their voices heard around the world, positively or negatively, in minutes, can have a tremendous impact on the reputation of any company (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

Consumers like to talk about their experiences (McCabe, 2009). Word of mouth covers all oral, written or electronic communications (via email or in online communities, forums, blogs, social networks, evaluation websites, etc.) between people (Kotler & Keller, 2012) about offers, promotions, companies or experienced products or services (Dacko, 2008; Kotler et al., 2005; Pride & Ferrell, 2016). According to Bruhn and Georgi (2006), the information provided may be positive (e.g. recommendations) or negative (e.g. deter others

from using certain products or services). Word of mouth communications are presented as unbiased information from someone who has experienced the service (Hoffman & Bateson, 2011).

Proof of the enormous importance of the internet and word of mouth is in the various statistics available on the Turismo de Portugal website. According to it, of the total number of tourists who travelled to Portugal in 2014, 34% became aware of the destination through the internet and 31% through relatives, colleagues or friends. Comparatively, only 13% had already been on vacation in the country; 9% learned through travel agencies; 3% visited the country and wanted to return on vacation; 3% knew the country through the press; 2% through advertising; and 2% by television (Turismo de Portugal et al., 2015).

Although Getz and Fairley (2003) point out that marketing communications are effective in raising awareness about the presence of events, they suggest that events are also effectively promoted through participants (i.e. via word of mouth recommendations). Similarly, Gitelson and Kerstetter (2000) have found that 70% of a target market for an event base on past experiences to guide their decision on whether or not to attend an event, instead of any of the marketing communications used by event organizers. According to Hede and Kellett (2011), word of mouth and viral marketing seem to be very relevant to this market offering.

3. Empirical contextualization and results

The theoretical data validated the research objectives. As such, we sought to analyse if the theoretical statements apply in the empirical context. Specifically, the objectives of the study were:

- 1: Determine how influential are the cultural events organized by hotels in convincing the customer to select the establishment.
- 2: Identify the information source that most influences the client to attend the cultural events organized by the hotels.

3.1. Methodology

This study was developed on the basis of a qualitative exploratory research focused on a single point in time (i.e. cross-sectional studies). Eight hotels that organized cultural events were analysed, therefore this was considered a multiple case study. Considering that the interference degree of the researcher with the hotels, and their clients and directors, was kept to a minimum, the study scenario was the not artificial.

Two different samples were used. Sample 1 was composed of the clients of hotels that organized cultural events and sample 2 was made up of the directors of those establishments.

Sample 1 was obtained from the population of all clients who were hosted in hotels that organized cultural events at the time of the data collection. Of these, the target population consisted of all customers with a minimum age of 13 (however all underage individual was interviewed with the help of a relative). From these, the accessible population consisted of 2229 clients, with effective speaking skills in Portuguese or English, hosted in eight hotels that organized cultural events on the island of Madeira (Portugal). From this population, which is accessible, corresponded the element of the sample that was the individual.

Sample 2 was obtained from the population of all directors of hotels. Of these, the target population consisted of all directors of hotels that organized cultural events. From these, the accessible population was composed by six directors of eight hotels that organized cultural events on the island of Madeira (Portugal). From this population, which is accessible, corresponded the elements of the sample that were the individual and the organization.

The hotels were coded as A, BCD (this hotel contained three letters because it was a resort composed of three interconnected hotels, with the same director and whose guests could attend the events of any of its three hotels), E, F, G and H.

Two models of qualitative questionnaires were used. One for the customers (whose data served to achieve the research objectives) and another for the directors of the hotels (whose information served to enrich the investigation by comparing its data to the one from the clients). The customers' questionnaire was written in Portuguese, English and German (in the case of the German questionnaires, the respondents were asked to give the answers in English). The directors' questionnaire was only written in Portuguese.

Client and director surveys were conducted through face-to-face interviews, with the questionnaire serving as a guide. The interviewer asked the questions and noted in written form the respondents' verbal answers. The sampling method was the voluntary and non-probabilistic.

The clients of each hotel were subject to data collection once a week (each customer was never interviewed more than once during the entire data collection). The clients were approached as they were leaving the events, after the realization of the event or immediately in the following day. The interviews with the directors of the hotels occurred on dates marked by them.

In total, the data collection (of both customers and directors) ran from August 16th, 2016 to October 30th, 2016 (i.e. it lasted 76 days).

3.2. Results discussion

3.2.1. The weight of cultural events organized by hotels in the selection of the establishments

The results of the customers' data revealed that the majority of clients (i.e. 74.79% or 1667/2229) did not consider the presence of cultural events organized by the hotels as a selection factor when choosing the establishments. However, an interesting data was that, although these events were not a selection factor, the majority of clients (i.e. 58.23% or 1298/2229) reported that they have attended a cultural event of the establishments.

Concerning the directors, all (i.e. 100% or 6/6) reported that only some of their cultural events were a selection factor of the establishments and that the attractiveness of each was dependent on the type of event that the hotels organized. In addition, most directors (i.e. 66.66% or 4/6) also reported that more than half of their clients attend their cultural events.

Considering that the events were not a selection factor, but were still attended by the majority of the clients, it may be that the cultural events held by hotels are more of a satisfaction factor and its non-existence may lead to a reduction of the general levels of satisfaction with the hotel or even lead to the loss of the customers' return (i.e. exclusion factor). These assumptions are also supported by the directors of hotels BCD and H, who reported that these events are a satisfaction factor, and by the fact that 9.28% (i.e. 207/2229) of the clients stated that, despite the events not influencing their decision to select the establishment, their presence pleases them.

It was verified that, from the 2229 clients, only nine reported that the presence of events was the most important selection factor. Specifically, five clients mentioned that they chose hotel A because it organized avant-garde and niche-focused cultural events, and four reported that they chose hotel BCD because it held a lot of cultural events every day. However, these numbers are too small for us to infer that the presence of large numbers of events or differentiated events influence the selection of hotels.

Another interesting data was that independent hotels (i.e. not belonging to hotel chains) contained more customers who did not observe as important the presence of cultural events. This leads us to believe that hotels belonging to hotel chains, because they are popular to the point of being able to spread their brand, are more likely to make customers expect entertainment (such as cultural events) and that independent establishments are not as likely to carry such demands from customers because they are seen as smaller establishments in terms of organization scale.

Data analysis revealed that the more cultural events the hotels organize and the more tools they use to publicize them, the more clients will observe the presence of such events as a selection factor. It has also been found that increasing the number of tools within the hotels to publicize the events will lead to an increase in the number of individuals attending the events.

The empirical data was not in sync with the literature, which described events as selection factors of the destination (Ferrari, 2002; Forga & Valiente, 2014; Ritchie, 1984), mentioned that these serve to put the hotels in line with the new market interests and tendencies (Medeiros, 2007) and indicated the culture as one of the main motivators for traveling (Chang et al., 2014; Turismo de Portugal & GfK Metris, 2011, 2012; Turismo de Portugal & INTERCAMPUS, 2013, 2014; Turismo de Portugal et al., 2014, 2015). Could it be that only cultural events held by the government and tourism authorities have the capacity to become selection factors?

However, the customer data that indicated that cultural events are attended by the majority of the clients is in line with the literature, which pointed to the great popularity of events (Baum et al., 2013; Bennett et al., 2014; Bernick & Boo, 2013; Getz, 2008; Getz & Frisby, 1988; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Mayfield & Crompton, 1995; Okech, 2011; Shone & Parry, 2010; Turismo de Portugal & GfK Metris, 2011, 2012; Turismo

de Portugal & INTERCAMPUS, 2013, 2014; Turismo de Portugal et al., 2014, 2015; Yeoman et al., 2004), as well as to their power to attract customers (Alves et al., 2010; Bernick & Boo, 2013; Crompton, 2006; Davidson & Rogers, 2011; Drake, 2013; Getz, 2008; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Kim et al., 2013; Litvin, 2013; Medeiros, 2007; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Shone & Parry, 2010; Veres et al., 2008; Yeoman et al., 2004).

The research revealed that there is a disagreement between the literature and the collected data regarding the power of the cultural events organized by hotels as a selection factor of the establishments. However, there was a harmony between the literature and the empirical data regarding the events being attended by large numbers of individuals. The fact that most clients attended the cultural events of the establishments showed that these are more of a satisfaction factor than a selection factor.

3.2.2. Most influential information source to convince customer to attend the cultural events organized by the hotels

Although half of the directors (i.e. 50% or 3/6) considered marketing communications to be more influential and the other half (i.e. 50% or 3/6) advocated word of mouth, most customers (i.e. 72.65% or 943/1298) reported that the source that most influenced them to attend the cultural events held by the hotels was the marketing communications and not the recommendations from other clients.

Within the marketing communications, it was possible to observe that the majority of customers (i.e. 65.10% or 845/1298) were more influenced by communication tools located inside the hotels, with only 7.55% (i.e. 98/1298) demonstrating to be more influenced by tools that are possible to find outside the establishments. Considering that cultural events organized by hotels did not present themselves as a selection factor, this may indicate that, not being a factor during the choice of the hotel, the client does not seek for information (from either word of mouth or marketing communications) regarding the events held by the hotels. So, not having searched for this information, the client only becomes aware of the events when he is already staying at the hotel and sees posters, pamphlets, newspapers, etc. mentioning the presence of events in the establishment. As such, the customer is influenced by the only information source to which he was exposed (i.e. marketing communications). What we can infer from this is that, although this research did not explicitly verify that marketing communications are actually more influential than word of mouth (in the case of cultural events held by hotels), because, for such, only customers who had been exposed to both sources should have been interviewed, in practice, the marketing communications available within the hotels are still the tools that the directors should most use to inform the client about the events, as these are the tools to which the client is most exposed.

Within word of mouth, it has been verified that information from familiar people, such as family and friends, is more influential than information from strangers. That is, 7.01% (i.e. 91/1298) against 5.62% (i.e. 73/1298) respectively. This seems to indicate that we consider the word of mouth from individuals that are part of our social circles to be more reliable and influential.

Regarding the harmony of the data, the empirical data was not in line with the literature, which pointed to the opinion of other customers (i.e. word of mouth) as the most credible form of promotion (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015; Bowie & Buttle, 2004; Cakim, 2010; Funk, 2008; Gitelson & Kerstetter, 2000; Hoffman & Bateson, 2011; Hoyer et al., 2013; Hsu & Powers, 2002; Hudson, 2008; Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Kotler et al., 2010; McCabe, 2009; Medina & Correia, 2012a; Middleton et al., 2009; Phillips & Rasberry, 2008; Ryan, 2014; Smilansky, 2009; Usunier & Lee, 2005).

Taking into account these data, we can observe that the information differs, with the literature pointing to the power of word of mouth and the directors being divided in this matter. However, the majority of clients demonstrated to be more influenced through marketing communications.

4. Conclusions, limitations and future research

4.1. Conclusions

This investigation allowed us to reach the objectives set and it was possible to obtain a collection of data that were, so far, largely lacking in the literature.

The divergence between the theoretical and empirical data regarding the weight of cultural events organized by hotels as a selection factor of the establishments, with the literature characterizing events as travel motivators (Bernick & Boo, 2013; Crompton, 2006; Drake, 2013; Getz, 2008; Kim et al., 2013; Litvin et al., 2013; Litvin, 2013) and the empirical data qualifying them as a satisfaction factor, has led us to infer that

it is likely that only large events, such as those conducted by the government authorities, are capable of attracting the client. Furthermore, all the directors of the hotels mentioned that the weight of their events as a selection factor was dependent on the type of event. This leads us to believe that, in the course of the data collection, the hotels did not organize their most consolidated events and that there is the possibility that only these most cherished events are a selection factor of the hotels.

Considering that events have not revealed to be a selection factor, it may be that people do not search for information about these events before staying at the hotel. Thus, the only source that made them aware of these events was the communication tools present inside the establishments and, in this way, this was the most influential source, because it was the only source to which the client was exposed. For these reasons this research cannot affirm that marketing communications are more influential than word of mouth, as this would require the exclusive inquisition of individuals who had been exposed to both communications. But in practice, the truth is that most customer are only exposed to the marketing communications inside the hotels, so it is possible to state that, since these tools are the main responsible for informing the client about the events, these are the communication tools in which the directors should focus to promote their cultural events.

4.2. Limitations

The research was, however, limited by some factors. Starting with the lack of a consensus in the literature regarding the correct way to approach (Bryman, 2012) and classify investigations in general (Alasuutari et al., 2008; Babbie, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Fortin, 2000; Petre & Rugg, 2010; Ven, 2007).

The fact that the empirical data were collected during the summer (a time when the good weather invites the client, even during the night, to leave the establishment and enjoy the good weather) may have limited the generalization of the obtained data. We suspect that a data collection in the winter (when the more severe weather conditions oblige the customer to remain inside the establishment and the presence of entertainment, as is the case of cultural events, becomes more important) would increase the power of events as a selection factor of the hotels.

The study was also limited to the hotels that agreed to participate in the investigation (i.e. eight), as well as to the clients (i.e. 2229) and directors (i.e. six) who agreed to be surveyed, so it does not represent the whole panorama of hotels that organize events on the island of Madeira (Portugal).

4.3. Future research

Through this research it was possible to create the bases for an array of future studies in the field of cultural events organized by hotels. In the future, it should be studied if there is a specific type of cultural event that is more conducive to being seen as a selection factor. This suggestion is supported by the statements of the directors of the hotels, with all of them indicating that only some of their events could be considered a selection factor.

The power of cultural events as a customer satisfaction factor requires a future study. This suggestion is supported by the directors of the hotels BCD and H, who classified their events as customer satisfaction factors. In addition, the fact that a small percentage of the total customer sample indicated "not important" or "not very important" and added "but it is good to have" also reinforces this proposal.

As indicated by the director of hotel H, it may also be that, instead of being a selection factor, these events are an exclusion factor. That is, although the presence of events does not lead to the customer selecting the establishment, their absence may lead to the consumer not choosing the hotel or stop visiting it. As such, it would be interesting to analyse if these events are more of a satisfaction or an exclusion factor.

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