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Social, Cognitive and Traditional Motives in Christmas Market Tourism: A Case Study from Poland

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Abstract: This study offers a novel and significant contribution to the understanding of cultural tourism by exploring visitor motivations at one of Poland's largest Christmas markets, situated in Gdańsk. While Christmas markets are deeply rooted in European tradition, research on their appeal in the context of contemporary consumer behaviour, especially in the face of globalisation and secularisation, remains limited. By examining a diverse range of motives - spanning from social gatherings and shopping to tradition and inspiration - this research provides a fresh perspective on how Christmas markets can cater to both traditional and evolving interests. The study's insights highlight how event-driven tourism can effectively support regional visitation beyond peak tourist seasons, offering a model that could be applied to other locations seeking to expand their tourism appeal throughout the year. Furthermore, the findings emphasise the strategic importance of culturally significant events in strengthening the tourism economy and community engagement within the Baltic region and beyond.

Keywords: event tourism; christmas market; motives; tourist behaviour; recreation events.

JEL Classification: D12; M31; Z32.

Introduction

Originating in the Middle Ages within Roman culture, Christmas markets have evolved into significant commercial and cultural events. In these early times, around the 5th century, they were associated with a period of joy and preparation, contrasting with other areas of Christian culture that viewed this period as a time for concentration and mortification. Christmas markets, such as the ones in Strasbourg, Vienna, Budapest, Madrid, Edinburgh and Gdańsk, attract throngs of visitors – both tourists and locals. Christmas markets are events with a significant marketing potential, especially for cities that host them. Apart from it, as noted by Broeckerhoff and Galalae, two significant features of Christmas markets: openness to diverse – historical and cultural – contexts and capacity to account for various types of meanings, make these events an important part of a calendar of many people. Simultaneously, the researchers note the necessity of adjusting the offer of markets to the consumer needs of their participants, functioning in diverse environments (Szymanderska, 2005; Egresi *et al.* 2021; Broeckerhoff and Galalae, 2022).

Detailed recognition of motives underlying the unwavering popularity of Christmas markets is thus an interesting issue due to theoretical and practical reasons. It cannot be concluded that the motives have remained unchanged since the Middle Ages or are only related to the Christian heritage of the event. Progressing secularisation and globalisation call for discerning other causes of the popularity of Christmas markets. Changes in the lifestyle of societies and generation changes (Kotler *et al.* 2021; Kennedy *et al.* 2021) discussed in literature may play a significant role in this respect. Participants of Christmas events may be influenced by a range of

motives distinct from those in the past and unlike those identified in analyses of other types of events. This may result from the nature of Christmas markets, which are events combining commercial, cultural, gastronomic and, for some, also religious aspects (Spennemann & Parker, 2021; Parker & Spennemann, 2021; Ogden, 2024).

Recognition of these motives in the context of the Christmas market in Gdańsk, which is one of the largest and most popular events of this type in Europe, started with a survey carried out in November and December 2002. Gdańsk, being a seaside city, experiences the greatest influx of tourists in the summer months given its climatic conditions. The Christmas market that is held in November and December is thus an important factor stimulating the development of tourist industry outside the high season (Marcher *et al.* 2019) and increasing the attraction of such venue as Gdańsk. Lynch and Quinn (2022) also draw attention to the impact of the place where an event is held on the social, cultural and physical dimension of the event. Thus, creation of event marketing is significant especially in the context of event location (Ponzini, 2021; Di Vita and Wilson, 2020). An event may be treated as a resource in the process of formation of a brand of a location (Ceballos *et al.* 2020), its positive image and recognisability (Sudaryanto, 2015) among residents, visitors and tourists.

The study of participation motives at the Gdańsk Christmas market provides valuable insights for both marketing strategies and cross-cultural perspectives, shedding light on participant preferences that vary depending on local and global contexts. In the face of globalisation and secularisation, which are reshaping the perception and nature of many cultural events, traditional religious aspects of Christmas markets are becoming less prominent, while commercial and cultural values are taking centre stage. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how contemporary Christmas markets can cater to the needs of consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds, which is crucial for international marketing efforts.

The analysis of motives – including shopping, seeking inspiration, preserving tradition, and social aspects – underscores the importance of tailoring event offerings to meet the modern expectations of attendees. This knowledge serves as a valuable tool for organisers aiming to increase attendance and engagement in both local and international contexts by developing diversified strategies that promote the authenticity, uniqueness, and appeal of these markets.

On an international level, these findings can aid cities and organisers in attracting foreign tourists, enabling the development of universal yet flexible marketing strategies that take into account cultural differences while emphasising elements that appeal to a broad audience. Such research also serves as a foundation for broader cross-cultural analyses, allowing for comparisons and trend identification across different countries, thereby enhancing our understanding of how traditional events can effectively operate in the age of globalisation. Thus, these results are not only practically relevant but also support the development of advanced segmentation methods and tourism promotion on an international scale, thereby strengthening the brand position of both the event and the city in the global tourism market.

The purpose of the survey that was carried out among the participants of the Christmas market was to understand the main motives that are guiding the visitors who decide to take part in the event. Such knowledge is of considerable implementation value, as it allows for tailoring the marketing policy of market organisers and the host – the city of Gdańsk – to the motives disclosed by the attendees.

The first part of the paper presents a review of literature related to the motives of engaging in recreation events. Next, the authors discuss the results of a survey concerning the motives of participation in the Gdańsk Christmas market, conducted in November and December 2022, and explore their theoretical and practical implications. The motives guiding the visitors of the Christmas market in Gdańsk were studied with the use of a questionnaire survey, prepared specially for the purpose of the study. The results were subjected to exploratory factor analysis, which allowed for differentiating four groups of motives of participation in the Christmas market, most representative for the respondents. The variances in the disclosed motives within the examined group were analyzed using a single factor variance analysis, ANOVA, conducted in the SPSS package. The paper presents the initial phase of the analyses, which will be utilized in the development of a model to investigate the motives of event attendees and their segmentation.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Motives of Participants of Recreation Events

Given that Christmas markets focus on commercial, gastronomy and cultural offer, in the course of the study a reference was made to the research devoted to motives of participants of similar events. Attendees of recreational events primarily consist of local residents in the vicinity of the event's location, one-day visitors, predominantly from the surrounding region, and tourists lodging in the specific area. In spite of these differences, the motives related to the desire to participate in an event may be convergent for persons who belong to these

three groups in the dimension of an experience that they want to have, or the mode of recreation selected by them (Funk and Bruun, 2007).

When analyzing the rationales of event attendees, it is possible to refer to the traditional notion of travel motives as a spectrum, formulated by Crompton (Crompton, 1979). On one side of such a continuum are the social and psychological motives, while on the other there are the cultural and education motives. This dichotomous outline assumes joint occurrence of various motives, which should be examined together. Among cultural and recreational motives, Crompton distinguishes novelty and education, understood as a desire to get to know and learn something new. Among social and psychological motives, Crompton lists the necessity of changing the environment, relaxation, prestige, establishing or reinforcing social relations and socialisation. Crompton elaborates this concept in his later works referring it, among others, to the motives of participation in specific events. When examining the motivation of festival attendees, it is observed that they are primarily driven by cultural factors, specifically the aspiration to explore cultural novelties, as well as psychological factors, including the pursuit of balance and interaction with an external group, as evidenced by their gregariousness (Crompton and McKay, 1997).

An important part of Christmas markets is the gastronomy offer; thence, it seems essential to indicate motivation related to the choice of a place to have a meal as a contextual event related to food (Sundqvist, 2023). Sundqvist primarily draws attention to the necessity of organising the meals in a way that makes it possible for individuals to experience pleasure of being with others. According to him, it is the social motive of gregariousness that is significant when people decide to eat out. The researchers who analysed a food festival in Spain drew attention to another aspect related to the role of food as the main element of the event (del Pilar Leal Londoño *et al.* 2022). They concluded that local associations and organisations involved in promotion of food may influence the image of a place where the festival is held, reinforcing local identity and culture, in particular in reference to the emotions in the narrative which food evokes in this context. The narrative concerning gastronomy may also focus on showing it as a representation of social and cultural distinctness of a region (Rojas-Rivas *et al.* 2020).

1.2. Participants of Christmas Events

Teams comprising Brida, Disegna and Osti (2012) and Brida, Disegna and Scuderi (2014) carried out studies of participants of Christmas markets in northern Italy in 2008, 2009 and 2011, which were used for their segmentation. In the first two studies, three segments were distinguished. The first one included 'business people' who came to the market as if by accident – they did not have other duties at the moment and they were in the vicinity. The second group consists of 'Christmas enthusiasts' for whom attending the market holds significance. Their main motives include the desire to experience the Christmas atmosphere, to try the local products, to relax, to have fun and to shop. The third group was called 'general tourists', *i.e.* persons for whom the main motive was to visit the city and the region and also the Christmas market (Brida *et al.* 2012).

In the third investigation, which utilized a different approach, the researchers identified six categories among market attendees. These segments varied in terms of the type and intensity of their motives for participation. The groups mainly differed in their level of interest in children's attractions, the inclination for social gatherings with friends and relatives, and the eagerness to participate in various activities at the market. The most commonly mentioned motive, which is tasting local food and beverages, remained consistent across all six segments. Furthermore, in five of the groups, there was a notable emphasis on the aspiration to immerse themselves in an extraordinary holiday atmosphere, explore the city, and partake in distinctive and innovative activities. It is important to highlight that none of the recognized segments listed shopping as their primary reason for attending the market. Subsequent research conducted by the Brida, Meleddu, and Tokarchuk team (2017) on the Christmas markets in Meran, Italy, uncovered varying degrees of utility value for the participants of the event. Apart from travel costs, the utility value was affected by the type of experience related to the visit at the fair and the perceived authenticity of the event. Also Castéran and Roederer (2013) refer to the significance of authenticity perceived by Christmas market attendants; they examined this issue using the example of the Strasbourg Christmas Market. In accordance with their findings, the perception of authenticity, defined as involvement in an event that is unique in terms of its location and offerings, has an impact on the behavior of participants, including its financial aspects.

In this paper, the inspiration for formulating classes of motives subjected to analysis was a classification where five classes of motives stimulating people to action are distinguished. These are functional motives, related to the rationalisation of choice; hedonistic motives, relying on the experienced emotions; social motives, related to the relations occurring within member groups (family, event participants), as well as symbolic motives, *i.e.* leading

to self-expression via the perspective of consumed products and cognitive motives, related to learning new things, getting to know new places, traditions, tastes and others (Bęben 2013).

2. Research Method

2.1. Context

The study was carried out during the Christmas market organised in Gdańsk (Poland) between 18 November and 23 December 2022. Last year, the event was attended by approx. 700,000 guests including residents of Gdańsk, tourists and one-day visitors. As every year, the Christmas market was organised in the centre of Gdańsk, in a place attractive for tourists and residents. The Christmas market is a commercial and cultural place, intended for children and adults. During the event, which in a basic dimension has a commercial and gastronomy nature, also cultural events are held, in particular artistic in the form of workshops and exhibitions and musical in the form of concerts and carol singing. The offer for children in 2022 encompassed a ride in St. Claus' sleigh in a VR version and a visit to Lucek the Elk who spoke with a human voice. The market also had its very characteristic elements and events, e.g. a carousel and a visit by St. Claus. The main part of the Christmas market is at the Targ Węglowy, where the data for study were compiled. The study was performed with the use of CAPI (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing), i.e. direct interviews with the respondents recruited among event participants. The survey concerned various elements of the market, including Christmas lights, assessment of the offer and other aspects examined cyclically by the B. Synak Pomerania Research Institute, at the commission of the event organiser.

Ultimately, following the validation of the measurement instrument, the survey section addressing the motives for market participation included sixteen statements. These were categorized into five primary types of motives: functional (five statements), hedonistic (two statements), social (three statements), symbolic (four statements), and cognitive (three statements). The respondents assessed the degree to which a given statement was consistent with their behaviour on a 7-degree Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

2.2. Respondents

201 respondents took part in the survey. This is a typical number that is observed in studies carried out at events by an entity performing the study. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents profile characteristics

Profile characteristics	%
Gender	
Male	37,25
Female	62,75
Age	
18-24	19,62
25-34	36,76
35-44	17,65
45-54	12,25
55-64	6,86
65+	6,86
Education level completed	
Primary Education	1,96
Basic Vocational	18,24
Secondary Education	33,82
Post-secondary Education	9,80
Higher Education	36,27
Children	
No Children	43,00
One Child	24,00

Profile characteristics	%
Two Children	20,00
Three Children	11,00
Four and more Children	2,00
Residential region	
Gdańsk	29,35
the Tri - City (Metropolitan Area - Gdańsk, Sopot, Gdynia, except Gdańsk)	33,83
the Pomeranian Province	26,37
Other parts of Poland	10,45

Source: Author's own work.

Given the fact that the sample was not selected randomly, it cannot be stated that the event was local, but persons participating in the study may be divided into three groups in a simplified approach: one-day visitors (approx. 60.0%), residents (29.5%) and tourists (10.5%).

2.2. Procedure

Responses related to the indicated motives underwent exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to ascertain the structure of motives that best corresponded to the observed situation. Following the EFA using the maximum likelihood method, four groups of motives were selected with the use of varimax rotation (Table 2). Statements with a factor load higher than 0.4 were selected for further analysis, as recommended for a study sample of this size (Hair *et al.* as cited in: Sztemberg-Lewandowska 2008). Thus, the list of motives comprises fourteen statements.

Table 2. Motives for participation in Christmas market selected in the exploratory factor analysis

Name of factor	Motives	Factor			
		1	2	3	4
Shopping motives	To use the opportunity of buying unique presents	0.843			
	On account of the extensive offer of products	0.660			
	To buy something interesting	0.612			
	To buy presents	0.596			
	To see the Christmas commercial offer	0.554			
Searching for inspiration motives	To learn the trends in Christmas decorations		0.942		
	To learn the new trends in Christmas cuisine		0.728		
Traditional, pre-Christmas activities motives	To cultivate Christmas tradition			0.549	
	To feel the Christmas vibe			0.547	
	To do something different			0.498	
	To spend time actively			0.457	
	Because it is one of the biggest markets in Europe			0.446	
Social meeting motives	To meet with friends				0.888
	To meet other people				0.743

Source: authors' own compilation.

The four main factors that were selected explain 45.4% of variances. The 4-factor model explains the motives observed in the studied group to an acceptable degree. The Tucker Lewis Index amounts to 0.90, while the RMSEA index is 0.05, which fits within the acceptable value ranges. The size of the chi-square statistics is $\chi^2(74) = 127$, $p < .001$, yet this is not a condition necessary for model acceptance (Sztemberg-Lewandowska, 2008). The single-factor variance analysis, ANOVA, conducted using the IBM SPSS package, was employed to determine which variables influence the variations associated with the motives of participation in the Christmas market.

3. Analysis

The shopping motive, as the first factor, explained a significant 15.48% of variance, indicating the commercial nature of Christmas markets as a primary attraction. It accounts for functional aspects, related to making unique

and interesting purchases and the motive that was previously determined as cognitive, yet consistent with the process of shopping, *i.e.* getting to know the commercial Christmas offer. These declarations of consumers show the Christmas market as an event with a primarily commercial nature, where the participants are looking for inspiration and exceptional Christmas presents. The visitors do not want to buy just anything – the purchases must be original. The second factor refers to searching for inspiration in decorations and Christmas cuisine (11.64% of explained variance). It is related to the cognitive motive. Both these factors show the significance of the Christmas market as a venue that also performs exhibition functions. Another factor that was taken into account refers to the tradition and pre-Christmas activities (9.69% of explained variance). It is primarily expressed by the desire of doing something different in the Christmas spirit and nourishing tradition, as declared by the respondents. Declarations related to these motives refer to the hedonistic and symbolic nature of the Christmas market. The last factor (motive) explaining 8.62% of the variance was described as the motive of a social meeting – here, it is primarily understood as the inclination to meet with friends and other people. The Christmas market where the study was conducted, similarly to many others, had a gastronomic selection that provided an opportunity for communal dining. Additionally, it offered a variety of activities and options for individuals to enjoy their time together.

In turn, the analysis of the respondents' answers to individual questions shows that the most conscious and clear motive for participating in the event is, in the respondents' opinion, the motive related to engaging in traditional pre-Christmas activities. Responses to questions comprising this construct are characterised by the lowest standard deviation and the most decisive declarations of the respondents (on average at 5.20, *i.e.* between somewhat agree (5) and agree (6)). The respondents' responses regarding the motives for social gatherings (average value of answers on a scale from 1 to 7) also fall between somewhat agree (5) and agree (6), but with a notably higher standard deviation, indicating a wider range of responses related to this construct. Table 3 displays the average values for responses associated with each specific motive.

Table 3. Average values of indications according to the declared motives

Factor	Average	Standard deviation
Shopping motives	4.75	1.26
Motives of searching for inspiration	4.37	1.75
Motive of traditional, pre-Christmas activities	5.20	0.84
Motives of social meeting	5.09	1.44

Source: authors' own compilation.

The shopping motive is definitely less clear in the respondents' declarations. In the questions comprising this construct, the respondents' declarations range between neutral (4) and somewhat agree (5). In turn, the motive of searching for inspiration had the lowest average indicator among studied constructs. Hence, it should be noted that when comparing the motives identified in the course of factor analysis and declarative indications of respondents, the visitors at the Christmas market were not aware of the motives stimulating them to participate in the event which they mainly perceived through the perspective of Christmas atmosphere, traditions and meetings related to it.

To assess the significant inter-group variations related to declared motives, we employed single-factor variance analysis using the ANOVA test within the IBM SPSS package. Our investigation revealed that gender is the distinguishing characteristic of respondents who attend the Christmas market in search of inspiration. On the other hand, respondents driven by the inclination for social interactions exhibited differences in terms of the number of children and age. The results illustrating the significance levels of these variations are presented in Table 4.

To assess the significance of identified differences, post hoc analyses were performed. Given that the data do not meet the assumptions about variance homogeneity, while the groups of persons declaring individual motives and characteristic descriptive features are unequal, the Games-Howell post hoc test was applied.

In case of diversification of the group on account of sex, women covered by the study significantly more often (MPI; M=4.59; SD=1.70) looked for inspiration at the Christmas market (MPI) than men (MPI; M=4.01; SD=1.79). In turn, the number of children was a significant differentiating variable in the case of guests visiting the Christmas market for social purposes (MST). And thus, for individuals with one child (MST; M=5.71, SD=1.04) and individuals who declared that they had no children (MST; M=5.12; SD=1.41), the average values of indications are much higher in comparison to those who had two children (MST; M=4.65; SD=1.49) or three

children (MST; M=4.52; SD=1.69). As far as the respondents' age is concerned, ultimately the Games-Howell test did not show the age groups between which the difference is statistically significant.

Table 4. Differences in Motives by Gender, Number of Children, and Age.

Descriptive variable	Motive		Sum of squares	df	Average square	F	Significance
Sex	Motives of searching for inspiration	Among groups	16.223	1	16.223	5.386	0.021
		Within groups	608.464	200	3.012		
		Total	624.686	201			
Children	Motives of social meeting	Among groups	35.185	3	8.796	4.517	0.002
		Within groups	387.545	198	1.947		
		Total	422.73	201			
Age	Motives of social meeting	Among groups	143.258	51	2.703	1.451	0.042
		Within groups	279.472	150	1.863		
		Total	422.73	201			

Source: authors' own compilation.

In a further part of the analysis, also relations between the disclosed motives and the sources of information used by the respondents were studied. This may be useful in the process of preparing efficient marketing communication. The survey accounted for the sources where information and advertisements about the Christmas market were published. The study included the respondents' statements regarding their active use of eight information sources related to the Christmas market. These sources encompassed local newspapers, a dedicated internet site for the Christmas market, and Facebook. The source that to a significant degree differentiates the respondents who declared all motives was Facebook.

Table 5. Results of ANOVA variance analysis for the respondents declaring selected motives of participation in the Christmas market on account of active Facebook use

Source of information	Motives		Sum of squares	df	Average square	F	Significance
Facebook	Shopping motives	Among groups	33.845	6	5.641	3.841	0.001
		Within groups	289.305	197	1.469		
		Total	323.15	203			
	Motives of social meeting	Among groups	27.694	6	4.616	2.302	0.036
		Within groups	395.037	197	2.005		
		Total	422.73	203			
	Motive of traditional, pre-Christmas activities	Among groups	15.467	6	2.578	3.927	0.001
		Within groups	129.33	197	0.656		
		Total	144.797	203			
	Motives of searching for inspiration	Among groups	63.817	6	10.636	3.736	0.002
		Within groups	560.869	197	2.847		
		Total	624.686	203			

Source: authors' own compilation.

The Games-Howell tests showed that persons who do not use Facebook ('I definitely do not use it') attributed lower values to the responses to questions comprising the constructs of shopping motives (MZ; M=3.82, SD=1.35) than persons who claimed to use Facebook actively (MZ; M=4.98, SD=1.11). Individuals who do not use Facebook listed motives related to traditional, pre-Christmas activities less frequently (MTPA) (MTPA; M=4.62; SD=0.73) than individuals who are active (MTPA; M=5.39; SD=0.70) or very active (MTPA; M=5.53; SD=0.77) on Facebook. Also, persons who do not use Facebook listed motives related the searching for inspiration less frequently (MPI; M=3.41; SD=1.95) than active (MPI; M=4.72; SD=1.61) or very active (MPI;

M=5.24; SD=1.65) Facebook users. The Games-Howell tests did not show any significant differences in groups divided with respect to Facebook use in case of the social meeting motive.

Following this, we will discuss the results of significant differences among groups categorized based on other sources of information, which were found to be significant in relation to individual motives. The local newspaper (e.g., *Dziennik Bałtycki*) played a significant role in distinguishing individuals who stated that they attended the Christmas market for social gatherings and shopping. Similarly, frequent usage of the local news website 'trójmiasto.pl' was significant in differentiating respondents based on the motive of seeking inspiration. Individuals who claimed to use the trójmiasto.pl website (answer 'yes', MPI M=5.19; SD=1.53) significantly more often indicated motives of searching for inspiration as the cause of participation in the Christmas market than individuals who responded 'not really' (MPI; M=3.59; SD=1.49), 'no' (MPI; M=3.40; SD=1.59) and 'definitely no' (MPI; M=3.55; SD=1.92). Even though various local media were analysed in detail in the course of the study, yet their more extensive presentation in the paper seems to be purposeless, as the conclusions will potentially have no universal character nor be of significance for many readers. However, they are interesting for the event organiser as they allow for better planning of marketing communication.

4. Discussion

As the popularity of Christmas markets in Poland continues to rise, understanding what motivates visitors to participate in these events becomes increasingly important. Currently, there is limited research on whether the motivations of visitors to Polish Christmas markets align with those of attendees in other regions of the world. The study conducted had the objective of comprehending the motives displayed by attendees of the Christmas market in Gdańsk. The analysis aimed to demonstrate a variety of participation motives in the event and assess whether these motivational factors align with the preferred sources of information regarding the event.

The study corroborated the importance of motives outlined in the literature, such as the desire to savor the unique Christmas ambiance and the inclination to engage in something out of the ordinary, which were also recognized as motives for participating in Christmas markets by the researchers Brida, Disegna, and Scuderi (2014). At the same time, it must be noted that the originality of Christmas markets may also be understood as their authenticity and exceptionality (Castéran and Roederer 2013). Apart from it, the motive of shopping at the market was also common for both studies. In the study of participants of the Christmas market in Gdańsk, it had a greater differentiating significance than in the studies of Brida *et al.* (2012). However, one motive from the group related to savory cuisine did not emerge as a significant factor in explaining the behavior of Christmas market participants after the EFA, despite the gastronomic offerings constituting a major portion of the market's stalls. In contrast, the motive associated with sampling local cuisine and beverages was a noteworthy factor in the responses of Christmas market attendees examined by the Brida research team in 2014. Nonetheless, this finding is not unexpected, as participants of the Derbyshire Food and Drink Fair in the United Kingdom, an event primarily dedicated to the enjoyment of food and beverages, similarly did not prioritize this motive as their primary reason for attending the fair. As their motives of participation, they indicated the intention to become engaged, to be present and to discover, which may be considered motives of searching for inspiration, joining others, consumption, and entertainment, *i.e.* motives related to social meetings (Alonso *et al.* 2015)

Brida *et al.* (2014) divided the participants of the Italian Christmas markets on account of participation motives into six groups. However, the respondents primarily differed in terms of the significance of motives related to social gatherings which take place at the market. The respondents stressed the significance of various types of fun as the main reasons for attending the market. According to these studies, the market was treated by the participants as an exceptional opportunity, primarily for social meetings, which brings it closer to a festival in the respondents' perception (Crompton and McKay 1997). The examination of motives of people visiting the Christmas market in Gdańsk did not reveal such great significance of the motive of social meetings. It accounted for the smallest part of the explained differences. Meeting with the family, after performance of factor analysis, was not included in this construct, which eventually encompassed meetings with friends and other people. The survey encompassed queries regarding the motives for family time, yet these did not align with any of the four distinct factors identified.

Conclusion

To the authors' knowledge, this study investigating the motives of participation in the Gdańsk Christmas market represents the first research of its kind conducted in Poland. Christmas markets are developing in this part of Europe, and they find an increasing group of fans, both on the side of organisers and visitors. In spite of common elements and many identical factors motivating guests to visit them, each may have its individual specifics. That

is why it is worth conducting research, along with identification of differences, as they may be of significance for the attendance numbers at the event and may attract these guests who are the target market segment for the organisers. It must be remembered that in spite of the fact that the markets are an element of the cultural heritage of the region and its promotion, they also have a commercial dimension and should bring profits, both for the exhibitors and the organisers. Thence, the study of participation motives in the market has great practical significance. This study's insights can guide event organizers in developing targeted marketing strategies. Future research could explore the transferability of these findings to other cultural contexts.

Motives associated with shopping are more frequently expressed by individuals who actively engage with Facebook and a local news website, *gdańsk.pl*; however, they do not peruse the local daily paper (*Dziennik Bałtycki*). Conversely, respondents indicating the motive of social gatherings are primarily those who are childless or have one child, typically of a young age. They also do not read the local press where the information about the event was published. The respondents declaring the motive of traditional, pre-Christmas activities confirm active use of Facebook. The most significant differences between the respondents were revealed by the study of characteristics of persons looking for inspiration at the market (cognitive motive – searching for inspiration). This group of respondents most often includes women, individuals who use Facebook and the local news websites, *i.e.* *trójmiasto.pl* and *gdańsk.pl* actively. They listen to radio Eska and they do not use public transportation.

As shown, the descriptive variables did not turn out to be the factors that would significantly affect the majority of the declared motives. Consistency in expressing particular motives for participation is more closely associated with active engagement on Facebook and local news websites, reflecting trends in media utilization and the influence of social media on the intent to participate in various events (Schivinski *et al.* 2019). The traditional media, such as the newspapers and the radio, which were considered in the study, did not have such significant impact on the diversification of consumers as compared to their activity on-line.

Limitations

The primary constraint that influenced the formulation of results in this study was the sampling approach, which entailed a purposive but random selection conducted by surveyors (individuals from the Christmas market who willingly responded to the questions). In the analysis of the study, the responses of foreign participants of the Christmas fair were not taken into account due to the small number. However, the study has great potential; therefore, plans have been made to implement stratified sampling during the next year's edition of the Christmas market and to include more reasons for attending related to, for example, staying in the vicinity of the Christmas market due to residence or work and accidental involvement in the event. The authors of the study are convinced that supplementing the construct should allow for clarifying a much greater level of variability than 45% of the variance. In relation to this, bearing in mind the cyclical nature of such event as the Christmas market in Gdańsk, next year the authors will try to identify a greater portion of the motives declared by the participants of the Christmas market. An important aspect of further research will also involve examining the expenditures of those who declare individual motives.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Anna Młynkowiak-Stawarz: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Validation, Visualization

Robert Bęben: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review and editing

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that they have not used generative AI (a type of artificial intelligence technology that can produce various types of content including text, imagery, audio and synthetic data. Examples include ChatGPT, NovelAI, Jasper AI, Rytr AI, DALL-E, etc) and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process before submission, but only to improve the language and readability of their paper and with the appropriate disclosure.

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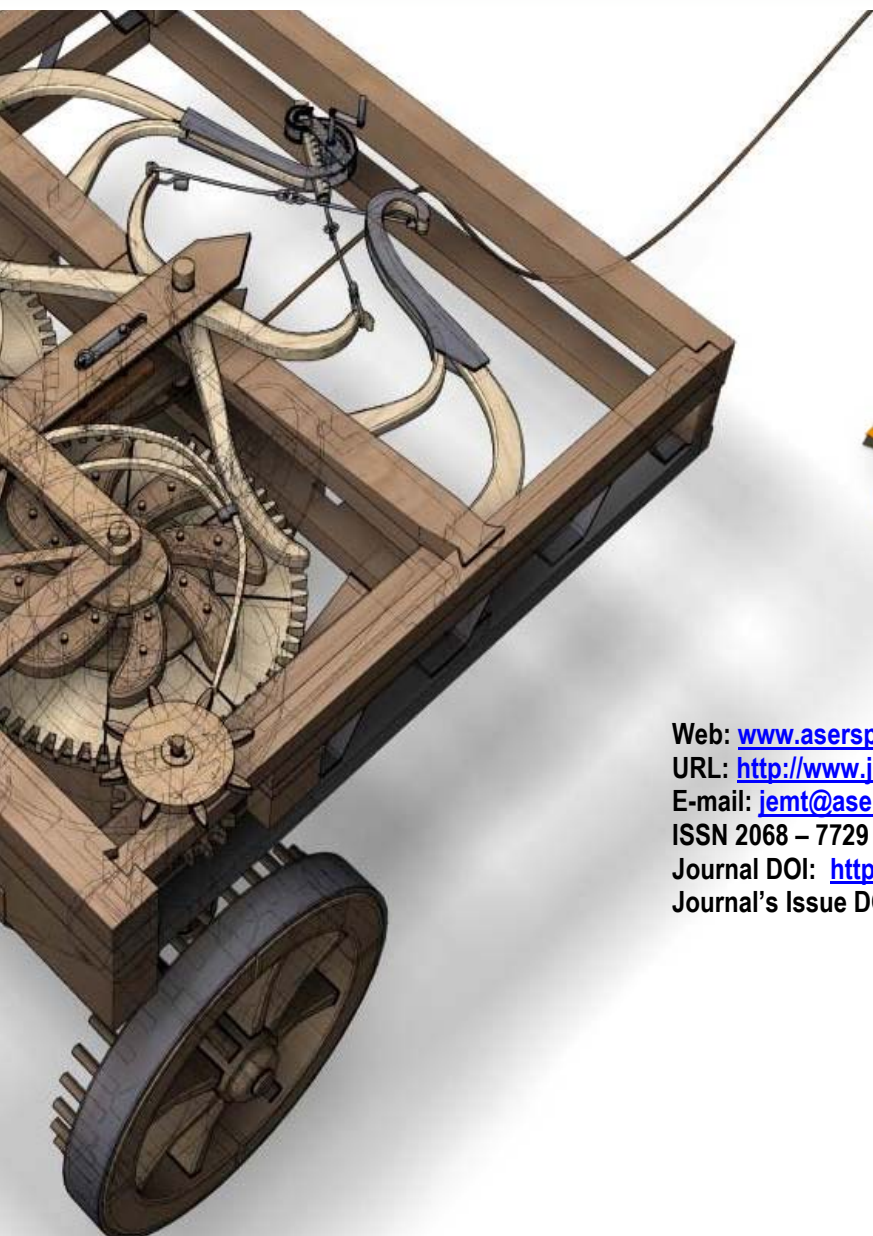
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