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Investigating Consumers' Motives for Attending Major Cultural Events

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Abstract: Cultural events are increasingly recognised as drivers of tourism, social cohesion, and local economic activity. However, limited empirical research exists, especially on the motivations influencing attendance, particularly in African contexts. This study, therefore, explores consumers' motives for attending major cultural events in South Africa, focusing on the Cape Town Carnival (CTC) event. The study followed a quantitative research design, using survey data collected from attendees during the 2023 and 2024 editions of the event. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS software to identify the key reasons for attending this annual event. Findings reveal that attendees were primarily motivated by the pursuit of fun and entertainment, the influence of family and friends, and the convenience of the event's location. Cultural appreciation and loyalty among repeat attendees also emerged as significant themes, while other factors such as the outdoor atmosphere and spontaneous participation were less common. These insights highlight the multifaceted nature of consumer behaviour at cultural events. The study recommends that organisers focus on enhancing the experiential and cultural value of the carnival event. It also highlights the importance of leveraging social networks and accessibility to help broaden participation. Overall, the findings provide valuable guidance for event marketing and destination branding in Cape Town.

Keywords: Cape Town Carnival; event marketing; consumer motivation; cultural events; tourism events

JEL Classification: M31; O1

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1. Introduction

Cultural events remain important to tourism development as they foster community identity, enhance social cohesion, and advance local economic opportunities (Fyttopoulou et al., 2021; Zarotis, 2021; Zunaidi et al., 2022). Globally, such events are favoured and promoted as unique experiences for celebrating local culture and heritage, while drawing visitors to host destinations (Lopes & Hiray, 2024). In South Africa, cultural events such as the Knysna Oyster Festival, Cape Town Carnival (CTC), the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (KKNK), the National Arts Festival, the Cape Town Jazz Festival, and many others have been instrumental in showcasing the country's diversity and creativity. These events are celebrated for providing opportunities for cultural expression and contributing to destination positioning (Lobo et al., 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of cultural events as tourism assets, there is limited empirical research examining why consumers attend them, particularly in the South African context. Over the last two decades, most existing studies (see e.g., Duran & Hamarat, 2014; Giaccone & Galvagno, 2021; Lee & Hsu, 2013; Perron-Brault et al., 2020; Rivetti & Lucadamo, 2023) have been concentrated in the developed regions. This thus leaves a gap in understanding event attendees' motivations, especially in emerging tourism markets. This lack of context-specific insights presents a challenge for event organisers and destination marketers. The effectiveness of marketing and implementation of strategies has been noted to depend on knowledge about the behaviour of event consumers (Seturi, 2023). Without this contextualised and empirically based evidence, opportunities to strengthen visitor experiences and increase tourist traffic to destinations could be easily missed.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to generate data-driven insights into consumer motivations at a selected major cultural event in Cape Town, South Africa. By investigating attendees' motives, the study could provide practical guidance and insights for various event stakeholders. For example, event managers, tourism marketers, and policymakers could use this to design and promote cultural events that align with consumer expectations. At the same time, it enables them to better enhance the cultural and economic value of the event. Furthermore, the study findings contribute to the broader body of knowledge on event tourism in developing country contexts, addressing a gap in scholarly literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons why people attend the Cape Town Carnival event, to assist in generating insights that inform effective event marketing and destination branding strategies in South Africa.

2. Literature Review

The literature presented in this section offers a critical review of existing literature that relates to consumer motivations for attending cultural events. The reasons for attending, mostly covered as the motivation factors, require a close analysis as they influence attendee behaviour and overall event success (Nongsiej & Lakavath, 2019). Previous research (for example, Dodds et al., 2022; Hutton et al., 2013; Karg et al., 2021) has revealed that a deeper understanding of audience predispositions can inform event strategies such as planning, risk management, and the development of targeted messages. In addition, an examination of levels of event engagement could reveal important information that could offer insights for long term impact and cultural legacy of cultural events (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021).

Cultural events such as carnivals and festivals are increasingly recognised as key drivers of tourism development, community identity, and destination competitiveness (Akhundova, 2024; Ilieva et al., 2024; Lopes & Hiray, 2024). In addition to increasing visitor traffic to regions where they are hosted, cultural events are celebrated for stimulating local economies and providing platforms for cultural expression (Akhundova, 2024; Zarotis, 2021; Zunaidi et al., 2022). They are also favoured for their role of enhancing social cohesion and promoting intercultural exchange (Oliveirra, 2024). Within this context, an understanding of consumers' motivations for attending cultural events has become central to event management and marketing research. Most motivation studies in relation to event attendance (see e.g., Adesiji & Olajumoke, 2022; Tichaawa & Idahosa, 2020; Perron-Brault et al., 2020; Rivetti & Lucadamo, 2023) provide insights into the reasons why individuals attend specific events. These studies also provide insights into how the identified motives influence visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and behaviour.

Several event motivation theories have been used to explain why individuals attend different types of events. These theories often draw on push and pull factors (Dann, 1977). On one hand, the push factors, which are more of the internal human needs such as socialisation or the desire for entertainment, cause people to attend events (Agbabiaka et al., 2023). On the other hand, the pull factors, composed of the external event attributes such as cultural offerings, accessibility, and marketing communication, make individuals attend cultural events (Borges et al., 2021). Several researchers argue that cultural events often fulfil multiple motives simultaneously, for example, seeking novelty, escape from daily routine, and cultural enrichment (Agbabiaka et al., 2023; Borges et al., 2021; Rivetti & Lucadamo, 2023). The multifaceted nature of these motivations highlights the importance of ensuring that event organisers cater to diverse visitor needs.

Empirical studies across global cultural contexts consistently identify fun and entertainment (Georgoula et al., 2021; Tichaawa & Idahosa, 2020; Vinnicombe & Sou, 2017) as dominant motivations of attending cultural spectacles. Events such as

carnivals and festivals provide opportunities for excitement, leisure, and escape (Alshammari & Kim, 2019). As a result of this, it fulfils visitors' intrinsic needs for enjoyment (Yolal et al., 2012). Equally important are the social motivations with aspects such as friends and family's influence, as well as peer groups (Pitts, 2020). These motivations highlight the importance of shared participation and the collective nature of event experiences.

In addition to entertainment and socialisation, cultural events attract attendees seeking cultural appreciation and learning opportunities. Festivals and carnivals showcase local culture, heritage, art and craft skills, music, and dance, which provide experiences that enhance cultural understanding (Hemmonsbey et al., 2024; Machisa et al., 2018). This is important, especially in destinations such as South Africa, where cultural diversity and heritage are central to tourism narratives. Accessibility and convenience, including location and affordability, have also been highlighted as critical motivators influencing attendance (Ramukumba, 2017). Saayman and Saayman (2006) note that, usually in urban contexts, proximity encourages participation.

Research in South Africa underscores these event attendance motivation patterns but also highlights unique contextual dynamics. However, studies on events such as the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, Cape Town Good Food and Wine Show, and the National Arts Festival reveal that while entertainment remains key, cultural pride, identity, and community belonging are strong in determining event attendance behaviour (Hattingh & Swart, 2016; Kruger & Saayman, 2019; Viljoen, 2023). Event loyalty and repeat visitation are also noted as important motives for attending events; for example, consumers could return annually because of their past positive experience (Rejón-Guardia, 2023). In addition, when the event harbours symbolic importance to consumers, they would likely be drawn to it. However, research on carnival events and festivals, especially in South Africa, remains limited, thus providing a gap in understanding the motivations underpinning attendance at cultural events such as the Cape Town Carnival.

The presented literature in this section emphasises that motivations for cultural event attendance are diverse. These range from entertainment and socialisation to cultural appreciation and convenience. While international studies provide valuable insights, there remains a need for context-specific research in South Africa. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining consumer motivations for attending the Cape Town Carnival event, thus contributing to both theory and practice in cultural event tourism.

2.1. Underpinning Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between consumers' motives for attending a cultural event such as the CTC. It also shows the implications these motivations hold, especially for event management and its marketing. At its core, the framework places "consumer motives" as the primary reasons for attending the event. These highlight how individual and social factors result in participation and attendance in cultural events.

The first set of motives reflects the search for fun and entertainment, which emerges as the dominant factor influencing event attendance (Carvache-Franco et al., 2025; Hazel Xu & Zhang, 2021). This indicates that cultural events such as the CTC must prioritise delivering engaging, enjoyable, and memorable experiences that appeal to diverse audiences (Agrikolianskaia, 2023; Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022). Closely linked to this is the role of social influence, where friends and family recommendations or invitations, and encouragement are seen as critical in influencing attendance. Social influence as a motivating factor highlights the importance of leveraging word-of-mouth communication. In this case, social networks are a critical part of event promotion strategies (Kodaş & Köz, 2023).

Cultural appreciation is also critical as a meaningful motivation for attending an event (Hemmonsbeey et al., 2024). For many attendees, the carnival provides a platform to celebrate and experience South Africa's cultural diversity, artistry, and creativity (Snowball & Antrobus, 2021). This motivation suggests that cultural authenticity and heritage expression are central to the event's appeal. Finally, accessibility and loyalty are recognised as practical and relational motives. Proximity to the event's location makes attendance more convenient (Son & Krolkowski, 2025), while repeat attendance underscores the event's ability to foster loyalty and cultivate long-term connections with its audience.

These motives collectively influence event attendance, represented by the CTC event. Event attendance is often the outcome of various interacting factors, including psychological, social, and cultural influences. The framework further extends the implications of attendance to two critical domains, which are event marketing and destination branding. By understanding consumers motivations at cultural events, the organisers can design marketing campaigns that highlight entertainment value, strengthen cultural themes, and exploit social networks to attract more audience. At a broader level, aligning the carnival event with Cape Town's destination brand can reinforce the city's image as a vibrant, culturally rich, and globally competitive tourism destination.

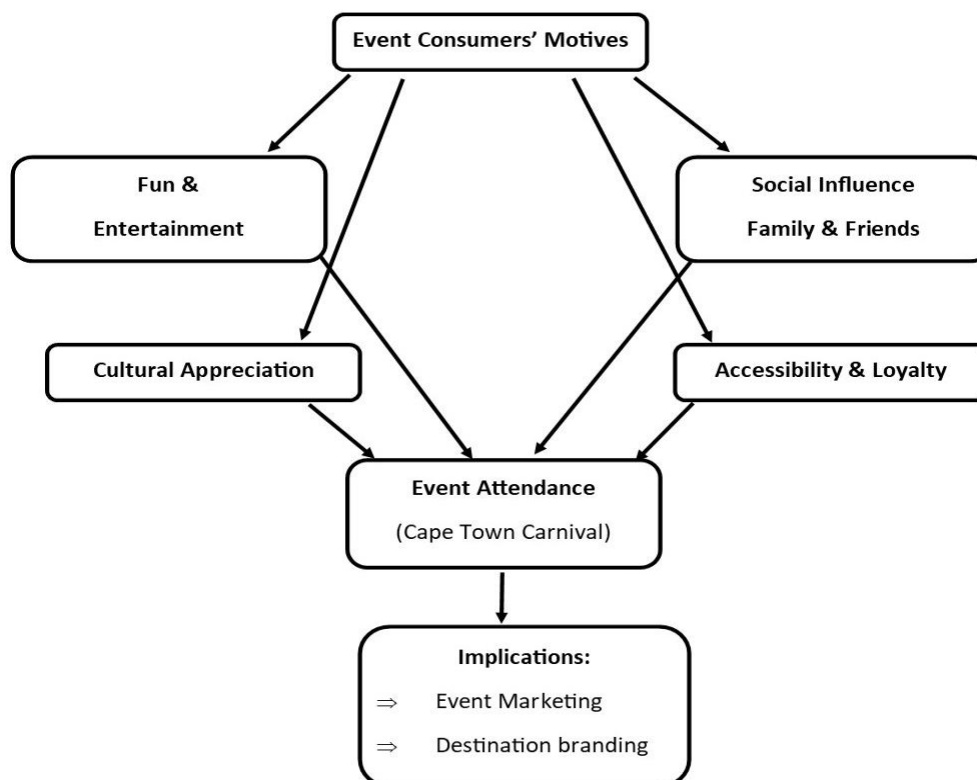


Figure 1. The study's underpinning conceptual framework

Source: Authors' construction based on literature

The framework demonstrates that consumer motives are multi-dimensional, ranging from hedonic enjoyment to cultural identity and practical accessibility. These motivations directly influence attendance and participation and, in turn, shape strategies for sustainable event growth and destination development. The model provides practical insights for enhancing the CTC's long-term competitiveness and cultural significance.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design embedded within the positivist paradigm to investigate the reasons why consumers attend a major event in Cape Town. The positivist paradigm was considered appropriate as the study sought to measure and quantify observable motivations (Park et al., 2020) using a structured survey instrument that permits the generalisation of insights. More specifically, the Cape Town Carnival was used as a case study for this study. The CTC has been

hosted annually in Cape Town since 2010 and is known for showcasing local creativity and diversity (Machisa et al., 2018). This event features a street parade of floats, music, dance, and costumes reflecting South Africa's rich heritage (Cape Town Carnival, 2024; Machisa et al., 2018).

The study relied on primary data collected during the 2023 and 2024 editions of the event. A structured questionnaire was developed drawing from existing literature on event motivations (see e.g., Carvache-Franco et al., 2025; Duran & Hamarat, 2014; Hattingh & Swart, 2016; Hemmonsbey et al., 2024; Viljoen, 2023). The final questions were refined through consultation with the event organisers to ensure contextual relevance. The questionnaire contained closed-ended items where the study participants had to select the items from the provided options. Trained fieldworkers from a local university in the area administered the surveys in person at designated spectator zones during the event. In trying to avoid duplicating the responses through double participation, the fieldworkers had to first confirm that respondents had not previously completed the survey. A total of 1,212 valid responses were gathered across the two years. This provided a sufficiently large sample for descriptive statistical analysis and enhanced the reliability of findings.

The study fully complied with all the applicable ethical research standards. First, permission to conduct research at the event was sought and granted by the organisers. Ethical clearance was later obtained from the university's ethics committee (Clearance Certificate No: 2022_FBMSREC 003). Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their rights before completing the questionnaire.

The collected data were captured and processed using IBM SPSS software (version 30). Descriptive statistical techniques, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were employed to summarise respondent motivations. These methods were considered suitable to provide an overview of dominant and secondary motives influencing event attendance. The analysis formed the basis for interpreting consumer motivations and drawing implications for event marketing and destination branding.

4. Results and Discussions

This section presents the study results, starting with the demographic characteristics of the sample (see Table 1), results on sources of information about the event, and finally, the reasons for attending the CTC event. In terms of the gender distribution of the sample, an almost balance was achieved with dominance of women who accounted for 57.3% of the study participants. This result reconfirmed previous studies' findings (see e.g., Hemmonsbey et al., 2024; Muresherwa et al., 2023), revealing a higher number of women attendees at tourism events. For the age categories, the results showed much dominance in the 21 to 40 years of age,

combined accounting for 62.6%. The average age of the respondents was 34.7 years (approximately 35 years) and ranged from 18 to 80 years. The event attendees were generally the young to middle-aged population, highlighting a relatively young population attraction to the event, a finding seen in some recent event studies (Kourkouridis et al., 2023; Muresherwa et al., 2023).

Table 2. Respondents' demographic and attendance characteristics

Variable	Category	Freq	%
Gender	Male	518	42.7
	Female	696	57.3
Age <i>Range: 18 – 80 years</i> <i>Average Age = 34.7 years</i>	18 – 20 years	148	12.2
	21 – 30 years	386	31.8
	31 – 40 years	374	30.8
	41 – 50 years	183	15.1
	51 – 60 years	84	6.9
	61 – 70 years	32	2.6
	+70 years	7	.6
Historical racial categories	Black	375	31.2
	Coloured	543	45.2
	Indian	58	4.8
	White	206	17.1
	Asian	20	1.6
Previous attendance	No	440	36.2
	Yes	774	63.8
Number of times attending CTC	Once	385	31.7
	2-3 times	345	28.4
	4-5 times	377	31.1
	6-7 times	231	19.0
	8-10 times	103	8.5
	more than 10 times	77	6.3
Group composition	Solo	145	11.9
	Family	582	47.9
	Friends	424	34.9
	Friends & Family	63	5.2

Source: Survey Data 2023 and 2024

Regarding the historical racial categories, the study participants most identified with, 45.2% of the event consumers classified themselves as Coloured, followed by Black/African, who constituted 31.2%. More than fifteen per cent (17.1%) of the study participants were White, while those identifying themselves as Asians constituted 1.6% of the study participants.

The festival attendees were also asked if they had attended the CTC before, and if so, the number of times they had attended the event in the past. This information was

crucial as it could indicate event consumption patterns and growth, particularly showing whether the event appealed to new or existing audiences. Event organisers could use this to assess their event marketing efforts and strategies to improve the event, which could keep the consumers, as well as attract new ones (Del Chiappa et al., 2017). As illustrated in Table 1, most of the event attendees (63.8%) have indicated their prior attendance, while a large proportion (36.2%) of the study participants indicated that it was their first time, as they had not attended previous editions of the carnival event. Despite the event continuing to appeal to its usual audience (repeaters), it is still capturing the attention of a new audience, thus the higher first-time visitors (Hemmonsbeey et al., 2024). Subsequently, of those who indicated that they have been to the CTC event before, they had to specify the number of times they have attended the event since its inception more than a decade ago. The study results showed 28.4% of the event attendees have indicated that they have attended 2-3 times in the past, while 31.7% indicated that they have at least attended the event once. Those who had attended the event between 4 and 5 times constituted 31.1% of the study participants. The latter indication validates a significant number of first-time visitor attractions. However, it is clear from the prior attendance, between 2-5 times (59.4%), that the CTC attracts repeat visitors.

4.1. Sources of Information About the CTC

The findings, as illustrated in Figure 2, highlight the dominant communication channels through which the study participants learned about the CTC. These findings offer insights into the motivational factors influencing attendance. Word of mouth (38.4%) emerged as the most influential source, underscoring the importance of social influence and peer networks in motivating participation, a finding that has featured in earlier studies such as Hemmonsbeey et al. (2024). This result aligns with literature on event tourism, which recognises interpersonal recommendations as a trusted form of information. The word-of-mouth recommendation plays a critical role in enhancing motivation to attend, especially through shared experiences and social validation.

Social media platforms also played a substantial role in promoting the event. Facebook (31.1%) and Instagram (30.4%) were the leading digital channels, followed by TikTok (18.8%) and Twitter (10%). These findings suggest that digital engagement strongly motivates younger and tech-savvy audiences, who are drawn to the Carnival's visual and experiential appeal showcased on these platforms. The growing influence of TikTok further reflects shifting trends in digital behaviour, where short-form video content resonates with consumers seeking entertainment and novelty.

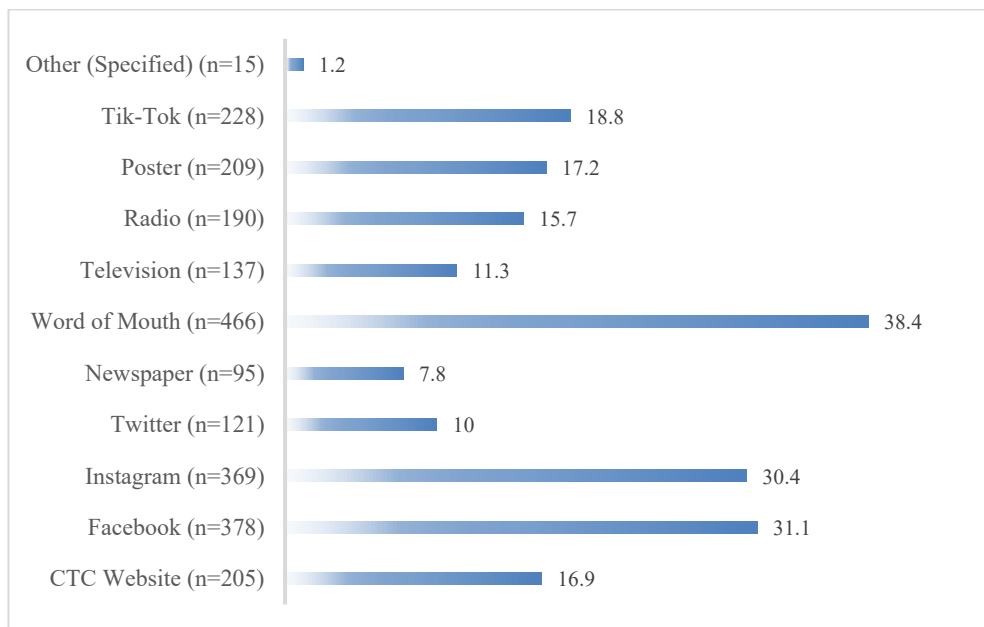


Figure 2. Sources of Information about the CTC event

Source: Survey Data 2023 and 2024

Traditional media maintained a supplementary but notable role. Posters (17.2%), radio (15.7%), and television (11.3%) contributed to awareness, indicating that while new media dominate, physical and broadcast channels remain relevant in reaching local and older audiences. Newspapers (7.8%) were the least effective among the traditional channels, pointing to declining reliance on print media for event promotion. Interestingly, the official CTC website (16.9%) accounted for a moderate share of information sources, suggesting that while official event platforms are used, they are secondary to peer-driven and social media channels. The small percentage of participants who cited “other sources” (1.2%) shows limited reliance on alternative communication channels.

From a motivational perspective, these results confirm that social influence, digital engagement, and community networks are central to driving attendance at the CTC. Word of mouth and social media combine both trust and immediacy, enhancing the perceived attractiveness of the Carnival. Meanwhile, the continued relevance of posters and radio suggests that accessibility and visibility remain important for motivating attendance, particularly among residents.

Overall, these findings imply that event organisers should prioritise integrated marketing strategies that harness the credibility of word-of-mouth promotion, the

reach of digital platforms, and the inclusivity of traditional media to strengthen attendance motivations and sustain the Carnival's growth.

4.2. Reasons for Attending the CTC Event

The other part of the survey sought to reveal participants' previous attendance behaviour, sources of information, reasons for attendance, and the composition of festival attendees. The primary reason for attending the CTC event could uncover meaningful insights into visitor attendance (Muresherwa et al., 2023). Table 2 revealed a larger proportion (38.8%) of the attendees thought it would be a "fun experience," while a significant amount of 16.7% had indicated that they were "invited by a friend or family member," revealing the power of word-of-mouth recommendation (Pallavicini, 2017). Close to 200 study participants, constituting 14.3% of the attendees, indicated that they attended because they wanted "to enjoy the cultural experience," a key factor for influencing attendance (Kotze & Visser, 2008). The results show that the experiences of the actual event were the primary motivations. Other reasons cited as primary reasons for attending the event included "accidental," which constituted 1.7% of study participants who "accidentally" got captivated by the event and attended, "regular attendee" (10.8%), "close to my place of residence" (12.2%), permitting ease of access to the event, among other cited reasons.

Table 2. Primary reason for attending the Cape Town Carnival

Primary reason for attending CTC	<i>Freq</i>	<i>%</i>
Regular attendee	131	10.8
Fun to experience	470	38.8
Close to my place of residence	148	12.2
Invited by a friend or family member	202	16.7
Accidental	20	1.7
Outdoor event	57	4.7
To enjoy the cultural experience	173	14.3
Other (please specify)	11	0.9

Source: Survey Data 2023 and 2024

For those who indicated "other" for the reasons for attending, the following explanations were revealed: "close to work," "meeting people," "not seen for two years" – highlighting the desire to see how the event was, especially after the Covid-19 outbreak, when the event was halted (Hemmonsbeey et al., 2024). Some participants indicated that they wanted to "see what's on offer," while others gave reasons such as "love carnivals." Regarding the composition of spectating groups, the study participants were asked to indicate how their groups were composed (see Table 1). Most attendees indicated that they attended as families (47.9%) while

34.9% as “friends.” These findings also illuminate the results on reasons for attendance, where invitation by friends and family members was favourably indicated. Solo attendance also showed a significant proportion (11.9%), which indicates the potential of the event to attract new people. Other (5.2%) referred to the group composition being both “friends and family.”

These findings provide valuable insight into consumer motivations and behaviours. As revealed by the study, most of the attendees were driven by the expectation that the event would be a fun experience. This reinforced the Carnival’s role as a source of leisure and entertainment in the city. Moreover, social influence featured prominently, with many participants citing invitations from friends and or family, signifying the power of word-of-mouth in determining attendance decisions. Cultural appeal was another strong motivator, as a notable proportion attended to enjoy the cultural performances and experiences offered by this annual cultural spectacle. These findings align with the push–pull motivation framework, where intrinsic factors such as enjoyment and socialisation (push) interact with external attributes like cultural offerings and accessibility (pull) to influence attendance. For event marketing and destination branding, this highlights the importance of promoting the event’s festive atmosphere. The findings also highlight the value of positioning Cape Town as a vibrant cultural tourism destination that appeals to diverse visitor segments.

5. Conclusion

This study examined consumer motivations for attending the CTC event, revealing that entertainment, social influence, cultural appreciation, accessibility, and loyalty were central drivers of participation. The study findings underscore the multifaceted nature of event motivation, where the intrinsic desires for “fun” and “cultural enrichment” (push factors) intersect with external event attributes such as “accessibility” and “social networks” (pull factors). Theoretically, the study contributes to the event tourism literature by affirming the relevance of the push–pull framework in understanding motivations for cultural event attendance within a South African context.

The study results also provide valuable guidance for event organisers and destination marketers. In further marketing of this event, the organisers could emphasise the Carnival’s festive entertainment value. While doing this, they must keep promoting the event’s cultural authenticity, which is crucial, especially in strengthening marketing campaigns. Leveraging word-of-mouth through community ambassadors and strengthening digital engagement, particularly via social media platforms, could also be implemented to further expand the event’s reach.

Future studies should consider comparative analyses with other South African cultural events to assess whether similar motivational patterns exist across the different contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how motivations evolve, especially in response to societal shifts such as post-pandemic recovery. This study affirms the Carnival's role as both a cultural celebration and a tourism driver. The study offers theoretical insights and practical strategies to enhance its sustainability, inclusivity, and contribution to destination branding.

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