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Profiling food festivals by type, name and descriptive content: a population level study

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Profiling food festivals by type, name and descriptive content: A population level study

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to classify and describe food festivals and examine the patterns in food festival naming and festival descriptions in online media.

Design: This research represents the first population-level empirical examination of food festivals in the United States using a purpose-built dataset (N=2626). Methodology includes text mining to examine food festival communications.

Findings: Food festival size varies across local and regional spheres within the country. Food festivals employ geographical (place-, destination-based) associations in their names. Food festivals' descriptions and online communications showcase a welcoming environment predominantly emphasizing family-oriented and live entertainment experiences. Food festivals across the country show common naming patterns based on the elements of longevity, recurrence, location name, brand name, geographic scope, theme, and occasion.

Originality/Value: The study makes an original contribution to the theory and practice by identifying festival forms, styles, functions, and their diversity. A population level examination of food festivals does not currently exist. Therefore, this research will serve as a foundation for scholarly work in the future and as a benchmark for evaluating current and future research.

Keywords: Food; Festivals; Tourism; Branding; Food festivals; Destination image; Food branding.

1. Introduction

Food is a key element drawing tourists to destinations through events (de Jong and Varley, 2018) and festivals (Lee and Arcodia, 2011) in both rural areas (Sims, 2009) and wider destinations at-large (Yang et al., 2020). There exists a symbiotic relationship between tourism and food with important outcomes for hospitality and tourism (Andersson et al., 2017; Madaleno et al., 2019; Okumus et al., 2007). Despite varied definitions (Okumus, 2020), food tourism consists of “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel” (Hall and Sharples 2003, p. 10). This research considers the crucial importance of food festivals as a sub-segment of food tourism (Getz, 2010).

Food festivals have a strong connection to place and destination image (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, from a social and cultural perspective, food festivals increase awareness of culinary culture and traditions (Lewis, 1997). From an environmental perspective, food as a product of climatic and geomorphological features of the place is related to the use of local products and sustainable development (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997; Sims, 2009). Local food products and food festivals are increasingly used for social, economic, and environmental benefits (de Jong and Varley, 2018; Sims, 2009). Food festivals offer residents and tourists authentic

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3 experiences and destinations increasingly use food festivals in enhancing destinations product
4 portfolio (Mariani and Giorgia, 2017). As territorial brands, food festivals contribute to
5 destination attractiveness as animators and key marketing components (Getz and Page, 2016),
6 and destination competitiveness (Lorenzini *et al.*, 2011; Quan and Wang, 2004). Further, Lee
7 and Arcodia's (2011, p35) food festival definition highlights the region and locality specific
8 components of the food and associated programs. Thus, food festivals as a destination feature are
9 considered as vital components in the tourism ecosystem (Getz and Page, 2016).

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12 This research aims to classify and describe food festivals and examine the patterns in
13 food festival naming and festival descriptions in online media. Specifically, we use geographic,
14 temporal and heritage-based attributes to profile food festival characteristics in the United States
15 at a national level with a dataset that was purpose built for this effort (N=2626). The following
16 research questions frame and guide this research:

17
18 RQ1: What are the characteristics of food festivals in the United States at a national level?

19
20 RQ2: What themes, associations and patterns can be identified in food festival names?

21
22 RQ3: What information do food festivals communicate online?

23
24 This research represents the first of its kind to consider the entire population of food
25 festivals in a large country (the United States) filling a gap oft cited in the literature (Getz and
26 Page, 2016). We add profile characteristics by analyzing patterns in the naming of food festivals
27 and examine the online descriptions of food festivals using text mining. Lastly, using online
28 festival information as a proxy for visitor experiences and activities, a portfolio of communicated
29 offerings is generated to advance the understanding of tourism offerings in food festivals.
30 Additionally, themes related to branding are explored through text-mining analyses to identify
31 how festival organizers use descriptive content to communicate their event.

32 33 34 35 **2. Background**

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38 Classifying a population level of food festivals, this research seeks to systematically compare
39 different experiences communicated by varied food festivals. Food festival research benefits
40 from different methods and approaches to classify festivals and food (Getz and Page, 2016). This
41 section serves to review current approaches in festival research. Complimentary to this is a body
42 of literature focused on food classification. For example, one such classification relates to the
43 provenance and origin features of the food to indicate heritage based on locale and customs
44 (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997). The locale category represents food festivals themed after locally grown
45 or sourced raw food products stemming from a place's climatic and geomorphological features.
46 Customs-related food festivals represent non-locale category festivals utilizing food- and/or
47 beverage-related themes linked to products and events that stem from human factors, such as
48 recipes and food preparation. We utilize this typology and classify food festivals into locale and
49 customs categories. Our study is guided by a review of relevant typologies summarized in **Table**
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54 **Table 1**
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As presented in table 1, approaches are diverse and based on different attributes. A comprehensive typology developed by Timothy and Pena (2016) focuses on the concepts of heritage, community, identity and authenticity specific to food festivals. We choose to adopt this typology for the purposes of this research given its maturity and non-overlapping categories. The first category (traditional) considers culinary festivals that highlight traditional foods. The celebration is either a traditional food such as Poke or rooted on the traditions of a particular indigenous group such as Native Americans. Festivals that celebrate the foods of immigrant cuisines (ethnic) is the second category. These ethnic food festivals *may also incorporate* ethnic music, art, and dance as secondary components of the festivals. A third category is harvest festivals which celebrate crops, livestock, poultry, fishing and the gathering of wild foods in general (Lewis, 1997). Iconic foods or local specialty produce are the fourth category. These food festivals celebrate a food commodity identified with the locale of the festival either as a place where it is grown such as the Gilroy Garlic Festival in California or a place associated for the production of a certain food such as the Chocolatefest in Hershey, Pennsylvania (Mason and Paggiaro, 2009). Kuznesof *et al.*, (1997) support similar classifications based on the connection of food to the traditions and heritage or origins of a specific region and the people living therein. Their specific sub-components of tradition and heritage are customs and locale *as discussed previously*. Locale is expressed as where the food is produced, and customs are defined as the characteristics of the food as they pertain to ingredients, method of cooking, and means of serving or presenting the food unique to an area. This is similar to a simpler typology of local food festivals by Çela *et al.*, 2007, celebrating food that is grown or processed locally. Competitions represent the fifth category and include culinary competitions related to food (e.g., chili and barbeque competitions). The sixth category (special purpose) consists of special purpose festivals that celebrate a specific culinary agenda. These identify food festivals as highlighting a certain diet, food movement or destination goal (Frost and Laing, 2013). Special purpose festivals that focus on utilizing food as entertainment to increase tourism as part of a destination initiative may be considered ‘modern festivals’ as entertainment may supersede the importance of food and place (Andersson *et al.*, 2017). Prior festival classifications (Gibson *et al.*, 2010; Janiskee, 1991; Silkes *et al.*, 2013) include food and drink or wine categories as festival types. We thus consider these festivals as belonging to the beverage festival type. **Table 2** provides a detailed description of food festival types *as laid out in this research alongside exemplars*.

Table 2

Table 1 also includes studies profiling individual festival characteristics. While typologies use qualitative features such as theme, authenticity, heritage, culture and experiential features, profiling studies use quantitative characteristics such as size, scope, frequency, duration, date, venue, program content, target group, ownership and other factors (Getz, 2010; Getz and Page, 2016). It is important to note that majority of the attributes utilized to describe and classify festival characteristics are related to geographic dimensions such as administrative areas (city, town, village), location (urban, rural), scope (global, international, national, regional, state, local) or temporal dimensions factors such as the longevity or age, duration, season. Further, while much of the research on both festivals and food festivals to date are based on a single case or of small sample sizes, a few of studies did attempt whole population samples, albeit on smaller populations. Building on these prior studies conducted in Denmark (Kwiatkowski, 2018), Norway (Andersson *et al.*, 2013), Australia (Gibson *et al.*, 2010) and the

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3 regional United States (Janiskee, 1991, 1994, 1996), we strive to create a high-level view of food
4 festivals in the United States. We focus on geographic, temporal, and heritage-based typology
5 characteristics to analyse the distribution of food festivals in the country. Understandably, the
6 United States represents a much larger country with a significantly larger population.
7

8 Recognizing the role and importance of naming patterns for food festivals, we seek to
9 identify themes, associations and patterns in food festival names. The naming patterns like
10 festival's typological characteristics provide important information about a festival's identity,
11 form and function (Getz and Page, 2016). To put it simply, a festival name has potential to play a
12 role as a heuristic asset for strategy, marketing and branding function. From a strategy
13 perspective the way a festival is named can be used for stakeholder relationships (Mariani and
14 Giorgio, 2017). Associations to a place, the tourism industry, and the community will be more
15 likely to engage. This engagement is necessary for efforts such as funding, getting DMOs
16 support for promotion, and recruiting volunteers to name a few. The name of a festival thus
17 serves as a branding element for food festivals.
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20 In turn, food is a key destination feature often representing its nature, history, culture and
21 identity (Ellis et al., 2018; Henderson, 2009), food festivals can be an asset because of their
22 strong connection to place and destination image. Research discusses the branding value of food
23 festivals as part of the destination foodscape (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019) when
24 successfully expressed through communicated narratives (Lichrou *et al.*, 2008). As such,
25 research shows how branding elements can enhance management and marketing efforts of
26 festivals (Lopez and Leenders, 2019). Recent evidence suggests that the four perspectives used
27 (country-of-origin; destination branding; public diplomacy; identity-based) in branding places
28 can inform branding application to food festivals (Kladou *et al.*, 2017). The name, logo, slogan,
29 tagline, products, services and experiences of a food festival are identity elements (Kladou *et al.*,
30 2017). The primary identity of festivals lies in their definition as public themed celebrations
31 (Timothy and Pena, 2016). Therefore, festival names not only identify the theme of the specific
32 celebration but also reflect its communicated identity (Ma and Lew, 2012).
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36 Representing the supply side, identity, name, and characteristics of organizers are critical
37 as the focal food festival brand (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the congruence among place,
38 provenance of food, the organization brand, and festival identify are of critical importance to the
39 success of food festival branding (Lorenzini *et al.*, 2011; Sims, 2009). Kladou *et al.* (2017) view
40 the name, logo, and slogan as symbolic brand elements and emphasize their role in destination
41 branding efforts. They propose that the processes of expressing, impressing, mirroring and
42 reflecting serve as four functions of identity-based place brands. Food festivals are also
43 mediators of culture, identity and image of a place and fundamental to destination attractiveness
44 (Kladou *et al.*, 2017; Lorenzini *et al.*, 2011). Names of food attached to places are readily
45 recognized due to place connotations. Examples such as Buffalo wings, Texas barbeque, New
46 York pizza, Chicago deep dish, and Louisiana fried chicken continue to proliferate (de Wit,
47 1992). Food festivals are similarly linked to locations (e.g. Taste of Chicago, The New York
48 Times Food Festival) or use the name of the specific region, city, or other form of geographic
49 entity as a form of geographic co-branding.
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52 Therefore, it is important to view food festival communications from the supplier side of
53 the information using a combination of geographic, temporal, and naming conventions to better
54 understand the brand communications that help create the identity of the festival (Simeon and
55 Buonincontri, 2011). Food festivals may be inseparable from place or in some cases co-identify
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3 with the place where they are located (Kwiatkowski, 2018; Timothy and Pena, 2016). A critical
4 examination of the patterns in food festival naming is, therefore, an important step as it plays a
5 vital role in community festival identity to the food tourist at large. While festival brand identity
6 is primarily communicated through the name, practical information and value proposition are
7 communicated through the festival description used by traditional and digital media (Kesgin *et*
8 *al.* 2019; Simeon and Buonincontri, 2011), and this digital online information may provide a
9 substitute for exploring actual experiences and activities (Montoro-Pons and Cuadro-Garcia
10 (2021). These descriptions may provide detailed information, educate consumers and shape their
11 expectations (Frost and Laing, 2013). They are used to inform, persuade and remind consumers
12 to prompt potential action (i.e. food festival attendance) and help position the festival (Fisher,
13 1987). Festivals descriptive content are communication cues and inherently conveys experiential
14 value and takes various forms, but websites and online media have become the dominant sources
15 (Gilstrap *et al.*, 2021).
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19 The experiential and emotional characteristics of events and festivals have been an
20 emerging research theme (Silkes *et al.*, 2013). Visitors are drawn to festivals with experiential
21 value expectations such as novelty, excitement, and escape from everyday routine (Lyu *et al.*,
22 2020). Festivals may provide pure entertainment, including art, music, and other cultural
23 experiences (Getz, 2010). Programming of festivals includes food and beverage sales as well as
24 live entertainment as core components, and contexts/competitions, live music, arts and crafts,
25 and parades as common components (Janiskee, 1995). Research reveals that the design (e.g.
26 festivalscape) and entertainment elements of festivals have the most positive effect on emotions,
27 satisfaction, and loyalty for the attendees (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Research shows that the type of
28 experiential value that tourists expect to receive is often grounded in the festival's historic and/or
29 geographic context (Getz, 2010; Ma and Lew, 2012). As such Ma and Lew (2012) observe that
30 while traditional festivals highlight place aspects, modern festivals emphasize entertainment
31 features in their positioning efforts.
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34 Food festivals essentially are social experiences for residents and visitors. The physical
35 environment or servicescape and the festival atmosphere are as important as festivals'
36 programming for attendees to enjoy their experiences. Food festivals therefore may be seen as
37 blended spaces bringing people and places together for a purpose (e.g. have fun with family
38 while enjoying a local festival as well as try new dishes). As such Gratton *et al.*, (2011) identify
39 naturescape, builtscape, socialscape and programscape as critical elements of, what they call as,
40 the blended festivalscape. The blended festivalscape offers a framework to design and manage
41 festivals to stimulate positive memorable experiences for attendees. Moreover, the blended
42 festivalscape can be a part of festivals' ongoing narrative communication (Gilstrap *et al.* 2021).
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45 Taken together, production and consumption of food festivals infuse meaning into tourist
46 and resident experiences (e.g. destination foodscape, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019) in
47 places or destinations (Frost and Laing, 2013; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Lichrou *et al.*, 2008;
48 Mariani and Giorgio, 2017). While the activities, attractions and experiences at specific festivals
49 have been documented broadly in single and multiple case research, extant literature lacks
50 country level analyses. This research provides a country level dataset of tourism offerings of
51 food festivals and hence can help in advancing the food tourism branding literature. Specifically,
52 this research showcases the way in which festival organizers use language to communicate their
53 staged events.
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3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and sampling strategy

A challenge in festival studies is the lack of a large population level dataset. In order to build a population dataset for food festival a baseline of the festivals within a population was needed. We utilized the Google Events API to create a list of food and food related festivals in the United States. This resulted in a list of 3761 festivals. Much like Google search results, this was an expansive list that included numerous listings that did not truly represent food festivals, several repetitions, and some entries that were incomplete. Examples of these include local wing eating competitions scheduled just one time, church barbecues, neighbourhood cookouts, and similar events. The list also contained some private party food festivals that were onetime events. However, this part of our effort was only to get a baseline to use as a reference to guide our data collection. For this study, we sought to identify a single source to avoid differences in format and to limit variations between multiple data sources.

Each author independently sourced and discussed food festival sources and directories. This was accomplished by using multiple Google searches in Incognito mode to eliminate personalization of search results. Authors considered directories, lists, and websites that ranked consistently high in organic search results containing details on food festivals. These included sources such as EventBrite, Wikipedia, State Festival lists, Foodreference, and Festivalnet. The listing of food festivals from the highest-ranking food websites (FoodReference) was chosen and the data were transferred manually to create a population dataset. This initial list contained 3,185 festivals, which was nearly 85% of our baseline reference obtained through the Google Events API, so it was deemed representative.

As before, we reviewed the list to check for inconsistent entries and duplicates. We identified 7 non-food related festivals and eliminated them leaving us with 3178 food festivals. Further, we noted some duplicates and food festivals that did not provide any descriptive information beyond a name and eliminated those. Finally, we noted that some food festivals used very few words in the description or simply repeated the name of the festival along with reiterated location information. This led us to delete 341 additional rows leaving us with a final tally of 2837 food festivals. All data collection, cleaning and coding occurred between October 2019 to Jan 2020.

3.2. Data analysis

Festival characteristics encompassing season, population, and location were bolted on to the dataset manually. The seasons were identified using the US agricultural growing zones, the population and location information was taken from official state websites. Longevity and duration attributes were added manually through an examination of the festival names and programme information. Each of the locations was then assigned to one of eight U.S. tourism destination regions (Lollar and Van Doren, 1991).

Then we used two frameworks to classify festivals. First, the regional food typology by Kuznesof *et al.* (1997) consisted of the provenance and origin features to indicate heritage and

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3 locale components in two categories: locale and customs. Second, the typology by Timothy and
4 Pena (2016), was used to categorize festivals into traditional, ethnic, harvest, iconic,
5 competitions, beverage, and special purpose types. Finally, food festivals referencing food or
6 drink products were classified based on the World Health Organization (2003) classification list.
7

8 Guided by the category descriptions provided by the frameworks, two authors coded the
9 entire dataset independently. Upon completion, the lists were compared and differences were
10 identified. For each discrepancy, the author hitherto not involved in the coding completed the
11 classification task independently and compared results. During this process, 211 festivals were
12 eliminated from the analysis leaving a total of 2,626 festivals. A larger portion of these were
13 repetitive events that had the same name but were simply 'franchised' to different locations. For
14 example, The Nourished Festival and the Strawberry Festival were run by a private farm and
15 country store in different locations on different dates at least 10 times each. Such festivals also
16 did not fit into any category. Ultimately, we chose to eliminate these festivals as they did not
17 represent food festivals in the truest sense and instead were more akin to promotional events by
18 small private enterprises. For our final step in the analysis, we subjected the text in the festival
19 descriptions to text mining to better understand the experiences and activities conveyed in the
20 online festival descriptions. This allowed us to understand use of language in the communication
21 of the festival to potential visitors.
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27 **4. Results and discussion**

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30 The first research question (*RQ1*) sought to understand the characteristics of food festivals. Food
31 festivals in the United States typically last about two days. About two thirds (68%) of festivals
32 are one (n=1121) or two-day celebrations (n=667). The average duration of food festivals overall
33 was 2.3 days. Comparatively, this is shorter than cultural festivals in other countries such as
34 Australia (3.3 days), but longer than food festivals (<2 days) in Denmark (Kwiatkowski, 2018).
35 Of the 2626 festivals, 936 explicitly indicated their age/longevity in their festival names (e.g. 25th
36 annual ... festival). Most of these (n=335) were between 20-39 years old with a large number
37 (n=234) claiming to be over 40 years old. Contrasting these findings with prior research, we see
38 that there are a significant number of food festivals established prior to 1980 (Gibson *et al*, 2010;
39 Janiskee, 1994; Kwiatkowski, 2018). Food festivals in the United States seem to exhibit higher
40 longevity when compared to those of other countries (Kwiatkowski, 2018).
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43 A majority of festivals are held during the destination's primary growing and harvesting
44 season with most festivals (70%) held in the fall (n=922) and summer (n=912) months. Only
45 30% of festivals are held in the spring (n=617) and winter (n=175) seasons. These results
46 corroborate the findings of Kwiatkowski (2018). The results also align with Janiskee's (1991,
47 1994, 1995) observations and reinforce the characteristics of food festivals being a part of the
48 agricultural cycles of planting and harvest as well as the concurrent influence of travel and
49 tourism activities in the warmer seasons.
50

51 The four major state destinations for food festivals are California (n=268), Florida
52 (n=182), New York (n=112) and Texas (n=99) (Figure 1). These four states are amongst the
53 most populous with significant agricultural activity. In terms of U.S. tourism destination regions,
54 the majority of festivals (74%) are in the Southern (n=694), Great Lake (n=468), Pacific (n=420)
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and Mid-Atlantic (n=369) States. The remainder of the festivals are in the Southwest (n=206), New England (n=183), Rocky Mountain (n=146) and Midwest (n=140) States of tourism destination regions.

Figure 1

To complement the profiling, food festivals were further categorized according to the regional food and heritage types. While two thirds (67%) of festivals offer customs (n=1763) dominated regional food, a significant number of food festivals offer locale (n=863) driven regional food. Festivals featuring iconic foods (37%), beverages (22%), and special purpose (18%) were among the most dominant in the heritage (77%) category. Other heritage food festivals included competitions (9%), ethnic (5%), harvest (5%) and traditional (3%) types. **Table 3** presents a profile of food festivals in detail.

Table 3

Iconic festivals are older and longer in duration than other heritage type festivals. Southern and Great Lake States are top tourism destination regions hosting half of the iconic festivals. Iconic festivals are popular in summer and fall. Consistent with the literature, iconic festivals are associated with locale driven regional foods and provide tourists authentic culinary experiences and add to destinations' attractiveness in popular travel seasons (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997; Timothy and Pena, 2016). Except for the Rocky Mountain States, iconic food festivals are the most popular festival type in all U.S. tourism destination regions. Beverage festivals on the other hand are shorter in duration than all other festivals types. Further they are popular in the spring, summer and fall seasons with nearly equal proportions in the Pacific, Mid-Atlantic, Southern and Great Lakes States tourism regions. Special purpose festivals are less connected to specific destination features, but rather highlight a specific culinary agenda such as a certain diet or food movement. The growing popularity of special purpose festivals is in line with earlier suggestions by scholars (Frost and Laing, 2013; Timothy and Pena, 2016). Research argues that the combination of broad entertainment and food are used together as the primary experiential driver of tourism to destinations and these special purpose festivals are less oriented towards the heritage characteristics of the food and place (Andersson *et al.*, 2017; Quan and Wang, 2004). Special purpose festivals are popular across spring, summer and fall seasons contributing to the destination portfolio of events especially in Southern and Pacific States destinations (Janiskee, 1995). Competitions are understandably the shortest in duration and are spread out evenly across the three warmer seasons. Like iconic festivals, Southern states are prominently seen as the host for competitions.

One-way ANOVAs show that age differences between the festival types are significant, $F(6, 904) = 32.58, p < .00$, across each group of festivals with the average age of iconic food festivals being the highest ($M_{age} = 38.55$) and the average age of beverage type festivals being the lowest ($M_{age} = 16.82$); harvest ($M_{age} = 30.24$), ethnic ($M_{age} = 29.78$), special purpose ($M_{age} = 22.82$) and Beverages ($M_{age} = 16.82$). The age of festivals is also statistically and significantly different across the destination regions, $F(7, 903) = 4.66, p < .00$, The Great Lakes States ($M_{age} = 37.01$) host the oldest food festivals when compared to major U.S. tourism destination regions including

the Mid-Atlantic ($M_{age}=23.68$), New England ($M_{age}=26.40$), Pacific States ($M_{age}=28.63$), and Southern States ($M_{age}=28.66$). Similarly, we find statistically significant differences in the average duration of the festivals with iconic festivals having the highest average duration ($M_{duration}=2.65$) followed by special purpose ($M_{duration}=2.40$), ethnic ($M_{duration}=2.37$), traditional ($M_{duration}=2.22$), harvest ($M_{duration}=2.16$), beverage ($M_{duration}=2.00$), and competitions ($M_{duration}=1.86$).

The second research question (RQ2) investigated themes, associations and patterns food festival names. Our analyses of the names of food festivals showed that the terms festival ($n=1439$) and fest ($n=407$) were used by most (70%) to describe the core nature of the event. The second most frequently used word was annual ($n=1166$). The usage of annual conveys the tradition and established nature of the food festival and its recurrence. Top words by frequency of appearance included wine ($n=344$), food ($n=188$), beer ($n=172$), taste ($n=163$), harvest ($n=84$), bbq ($n=84$) strawberry ($n=83$) seafood ($n=75$), and days ($n=71$).

Food festival names contain a combination of administrative areas, natural and cultural environment and geographic scope. Administrative areas (e.g. state, city, county) were the most common geographic indication to communicate the festival locations ($n=1270$). Natural environment descriptions associated with physical landscape features such as valleys, beaches, mountains, rivers, lakes as well as cultural locations and landscape features ($n=116$) were also apparent. Some names also contained geographic scope ($n=101$) such as world, global, international, national, regional, and local were used in food festivals names.

In terms of the food and drink themes, festivals contained fruits and vegetables ($n=748$), accounting for 28% of festivals. These festivals were specifically named after a specific plant-based food. Five categories of plant-based food included: fruits ($n=379$) including strawberry (84), apple (78), watermelon (36), peach (29); vegetables ($n=279$) including chili (63), corn (56), pumpkin (53); mushroom and herbs ($n=35$); nuts ($n=28$); pulses and grains ($n=26$). These findings demonstrate that festivals celebrating the locality of agricultural production is common. The second naming theme observed was dominated by alcoholic beverages (27%), utilizing the terms wine ($n=344$), beer ($N=172$), and spirits. A significant number of festivals (16%) were also named after categories of meat and poultry ($n=231$), or fish and shellfish ($n=184$).

Our analysis of festival names revealed that there are common patterns used by festivals organizers in naming festivals (**Table 4**). The structure of food festival names includes up to seven elements: longevity, recurrence, location name, brand name, geographic scope, theme, and occasion. For example, the 122nd Annual Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival of Sonoma/CA references five of these elements (122nd [longevity] Annual [recurrence] Valley of the Moon [location] Vintage [theme] Festival [occasion]). Longevity and recurrence associations are used to project continuity (Benjamin et al., 2012). An important pattern in naming food festivals is not only the inclusion of references to occasion, longevity, recurrence, and geographic place identification but also the presence of brand names, geographic scope, and products used for image enhancement (Iversen and Hem, 2008) as part of festival naming.

Table 4

Overall, the most frequent components were location ($n=1693$), recurrence ($n=1166$) and longevity ($n=934$). It appears to be a standard practice that festival reference the term festival in

their names and the food theme. However only a small number ($n=81$) of festivals used broad geographical terms such as national or regional, or sponsor/brand name ($n=112$) references.

Further analysis compared the similarities and differences of mean scores and percentages in difference food festival types and tourism regions based on three core naming components: location, recurrence and longevity (see **Table 5**).

Table 5

One-way ANOVAs showed that average name component score in Midwest States ($M=3.06$) is significantly $F(7, 2618) = 6.22, p < .00$ lower from all U.S. Tourism Destination Regions including Great Lakes ($M=3.38$), South West States ($M=3.43$), New England ($M=3.45$), Pacific States ($M=3.63$), and Southern States ($M=3.51$), except Mid-Atlantic States ($M=3.31$) and Rocky Mountain States ($M=3.35$). While these are statistically significant, in practice, these differences may have little influence. T-tests showed that the average name component scores for single day ($M=3.37$) and two or more days festivals ($M=3.48$) was indeed different ($t = -2.37, p=0.01$), however, the differences are infinitesimal. Similarly, the difference between naming component scores for multi-themed festivals ($N=369, M=3.21$) compared to single themed ($N=2257, M=3.47$) was different ($t = -4.18, p > = 0.00$) but miniscule.

Our third research question (RQ3) sought to understand the information conveyed by the festival's online description. The text of the festival descriptions retrieved during our data collection process served as the basis for our text analyses. This text serves to introduce and describe the festival and the portfolio of activities that it offers. For the purposes of analysing this large body of text we turned to text mining (Amadio and Procaccino 2016; Mariani *et al.*, 2018). Text mining and big data approaches are well documented in the literature as effective means of working with population level data (Gerard *et al.*, 2016). An inventory of the festival descriptions was built from the raw descriptions collected. To avoid confusion from excessive use of punctuation marks and words that do not add significant meaning, we used a stop word list to eliminate punctuations and remove stop words. We followed this with stemming. Stemming allows for better comparisons and aids in obtaining a higher-level understanding of the text. For example, 'festival,' 'festive,' 'festivals' and similar words could be stemmed to *festiv*. Similarly, *entertain* captures words such as 'entertainment,' 'entertaining' and so on. Finally, a document-term matrix was built from the cleaned corpus. The document-term matrix provided a way to compare words across the descriptions, which allows us to create sums of columns of words to get a total term count of each word. This process is commonly utilized for the creation of word clouds. Words (stemmed) such as *food, event, festiv, music, and wine* appear in nearly all descriptions, whereas words such as *parade, help* and *offer* appear less frequently.

Frequency analyses are based on unigrams (per-word counts). Understandably, one word is insufficient to gather meaning as relationships between words provide nuance and context. To further explore these descriptive contents, we utilized the n-gram word model. Bigrams contain two words that are adjacent to each other in a sentence and trigrams contain three words. Descriptions include bigrams like *welcome-annual* ($n=917$), *family-fun* ($n=705$), *live-music* ($n=499$), *live-entertainment* ($n=354$), *join-us* ($n=160$), *craft-beer* ($n=128$), *car show* ($n=111$), *wine-festival* ($n=98$), and *food-vendors* ($n=95$). Bigrams appear to reinforce the importance of family fun, live music, and food and beverage. Similarly, the trigrams show a similar pattern emphasizing the welcoming words, *annual-year invite* ($n=611$), followed by *live music*

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3 *entertainment* (n=311) and *children friendly family fun* (n=68). Taken together, the most popular
4 activities include live music and entertainment, and food festivals prominently describe
5 themselves as family-fun-focused, entertainment-driven escapes.
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7 Festival descriptions clearly emphasize live music and live entertainment and invite
8 visitors for food and family fun. Many food festivals also frequently feature small classic car
9 shows as part of their attractions much like live music and entertainment. It is likely that these
10 food festivals may have originated primarily around the experiences of food tourism but over
11 time have added and emphasized broad features of fun and live entertainment to expand their
12 reach. Text analyses also reveal certain patterns which are not immediately apparent. For e.g.,
13 using LIWC (Fang et al. 2016), we note that there is a higher rate of words that are related to
14 leisure in special purpose food festivals (M=7.97) but relatively lower in competitions and
15 traditional food festivals (M=7.24). However, these differences are not statistically different
16 (p=.719).
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19 **Table 6**
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21 We then subjected to a parts of speech analysis to identify patterns in the descriptions.
22 We found two significant themes that relate to branding. First, most descriptions (n=1899) used
23 adjectives such as best, most, oldest, biggest, etc. The use of adjectives was more prevalent in
24 smaller festivals and in more rural places. Second, most festival descriptions (n=1451) included
25 adverbs such as truly, warmly, too among others. The use of adverbs was also more common in
26 smaller festivals. Overall, it appears that smaller and rural festivals try to compensate for their
27 size limitations by using more adjectives and adverbs to attract attendees. Indeed t-tests confirm
28 that festivals in the less common tourism destinations (M=2.01) were indeed different ($t = -2.11$,
29 $p=0.01$) and appear to use more adjectives than those hosted in the states of California, Florida,
30 Texas and New York. Similarly, we find that festivals with shorter durations tended to use more
31 adjectives. For example, while the Taste of Chicago festival is a prominent and long duration
32 festival, it makes no use of adjectives in its name.
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36 **5. Conclusions and implications** 37 38

39 The purpose of the current research was to better understand the characteristics food festivals at a
40 population level in the United States. Results indicated that at the regional level, majority of
41 festivals are in the Southern, Great Lake, Pacific and Mid-Atlantic States. California, Florida,
42 New York and Texas are top state level destinations to host festivals. A typical food festival is
43 held either in the fall or summer months as one or two-day events. Nationally, iconic food
44 festivals represent the greatest proportion. Nearly half of the festivals emphasize the
45 administrative area in their festival names. Food festival names are associated with natural,
46 cultural, and geographic references. A significant number of festival names contain plant-based
47 food and beverages. Festivals have a common naming pattern including references to longevity,
48 recurrence, location name, brand name, geographic scope, theme, and occasion. Location (65%),
49 recurrence (44%) and longevity (36%) are most frequently used naming components. The
50 naming patterns differ by festival characteristics (e.g. duration, destination regions). The
51 portfolio of activities and experiences promoted in food festivals' online descriptive content.
52 Festival communications emphasize non-food related tourism features. Broadly, most emphasis
53 is on live music and entertainment, as well as children and family friendly fun. Smaller festivals
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3 tend use more adjectives and adverbs in their descriptive content. These findings will be of
4 interest to researchers and practitioners.
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6 Our research makes three main theoretical contributions. First, our research is the first of
7 its kind to investigate food festivals at a population level. This is our primary contribution to the
8 literature as the first national population level investigation in the United States. The insights
9 gained from this population study extends our knowledge of food festivals which has thus far
10 been limited in both scope and geography. Our impetus was to address this gap and provide a
11 benchmark for future research on food festivals for both researchers and practitioners. Second, as
12 a population-level study, this research offers insight into hitherto implied elements in the food
13 festival domain. Specifically, this research provides an understanding of festival characteristics
14 based on longevity, duration and continuity at national, regional and local levels. We find that
15 differences exist in scope, geography and festival types. While this has been implied, it was
16 unexplored. Third, this effort provides a benchmark with which to calibrate past and future
17 studies for generalizability and representativeness (Getz and Page, 2016). As Getz and Anderson
18 (2016) suggest, this provides the basis on which to conduct research to analyse the portfolio of
19 events (e.g. geographical and temporal distribution) between specific locales.
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23 Further the findings provide insights for ongoing theorizing of food festivals as a
24 component of destination branding (Dragin-Jensen and Kwiatkowski, 2019). Our results show
25 that festival names commonly include place associations. It is fair to state that place associations
26 are purposeful and used to complement and enhance destination attractiveness. Arguably, our
27 investigations did not capture tourism destination attractiveness, therefore, we recommend future
28 research to explore this dimension. Of particular interest is the conceptual model of food and
29 cuisine image in destination branding as put forth by (Lai *et al.*, 2017). Lai *et al.* (2017) posits
30 that destination marketers provide information through media sources (e.g., websites) to develop
31 and maintain their image (Lichrou and Van Doren, 2011). The insights gained from naming and
32 descriptive content patterns are linked to the cognitive image elements of destinations (Mariani
33 and Giorgio, 2017).
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36 While our contributions are primarily for the literature, our work does have practical
37 implications for managers of food festivals. This research contributes to the food festival naming
38 practices as well as the communication of food festival descriptions. Conveying a food festival
39 image to desired target visitors is a fundamental managerial activity. Festival name is an
40 important component of the image formation process. Names must be simple and distinctive to
41 attract visitor attention (Kladou *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, festival names must be unique and
42 memorable. We commend organizers who are already embracing these strategies. We
43 recommend that organizers continue utilizing geographical associations to indicate identification
44 with place and enhance the image of the festival. The use of longevity and recurrence references
45 in the name would go further in creating positive associations in terms of continuity and stability
46 perceptions (Benjamin *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, our results suggest that food festival names, on
47 average, appear to be more similar to each other than different. Many even use similar or
48 identical names. This suggests the need to better understand the motivations of the organizers
49 and their motivations in naming festivals. Greater insights can be gained by combining and
50 comparing food festival descriptions and reviews across review websites, social media platforms,
51 as well as media/expert coverage (newspaper, food bloggers) to identify the alignment and/or
52 discrepancy between the positioning of the festival in the minds of visitors. This is left to future
53 research.
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We acknowledge the value in focusing on specific festivals or a festival category, *and* population-level studies provide the basis from which greater generalization can be achieved (Getz and Page, 2016). For instance, future research should explore if festivals in specific regions of the country as a whole choose to position themselves differently (e.g. meta-event Mariani and Giorgio, 2017). This approach is also consistent with the Lai et al. (2017) model of food and cuisine image in place branding. Many festivals, however, do not use geographical references or other distinctive associations in the communicated festival name. We recommend that these food festivals implement geographical or co-branding associations to benefit from identification and image enhancement (Iversen and Hem, 2008). As illustrated in the text mining of online festival descriptions, public descriptions of festivals tend to commodify the experience with use of generic words such as ‘food’ and ‘music’. We suggest that experiential and emotional cues be highlighted in these descriptions to create anticipation and help enhance visitor engagement levels. As suggested by Yang *et al.* (2020), food festival success is directly related to prior knowledge of the food and activities at the event. Hence, promotions focusing on the distinctive activities or the authenticity of the food are likely to be especially effective. This is yet another opportune area for future research.

Finally, our research notes that special purpose festivals and competitions are very popular in the Spring-Fall seasons in the Southern and Pacific states, states already rich in iconic festivals. As these festival types do not need connections to local food, they may be used to attract culinary tourism capitalizing on favorable weather. Smaller destinations may be able to similarly utilize these festivals to attract visitors, especially within rural communities. Such efforts can also capitalize on local food used as ingredients.

6. Limitations and future directions

In sum, festivals serve to enhance the community through image and identity creation (Dragin-Jensen and Kwiatkowski, 2019). Festivals influence how the community is viewed both by locals as well as visitors and help create cohesion and economic activity in the community (Çela et al., 2007). Celebrations such as food festivals serve as the finest exemplars for heritage interpretation (Timothy and Pena, 2016) and therefore provide deep insight into the destination and place meaning (Ellis *et al.*, 2018; Mariani and Giorgio, 2017). Thus, food festival research is of tantamount importance particularly in this experience-driven economy, especially in a post pandemic recovery environment as food festivals are typically held in outdoor spaces. Finally, we find that there is a need to explore the special purpose and beverage categories further as these are more recent but appear to be growing in number. A possible explanation is that these categories do not need local or geographic anchors and therefore can be hosted in any region of the country, especially if they have extended warm seasons.

Our study is not without limitations. First, our dataset, while comprehensive may have missed some festivals if they lacked an online presence. Second, our data collection process and data cleaning resulted in dropping 559 festivals due to insufficient data, duplication, and short descriptions. While unlikely, we acknowledge that these may have affected our final results. Our work was guided in part by prior festival categorization efforts collected from online inventories. It is acknowledged that other techniques, criteria, or lenses may be applied to obtain different classifications than those presented here. Future research should develop population-level data for research using web scraping of data from sites such as Google, Facebook, and Eventbrite.

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3 Specifically, appending attendance data, sponsor information, and revenue data would yield rich
4 results and provide another basis for classification of food festivals. Similarly, the importance of
5 obtaining information from the food festival organizers (supply side) would be valuable. For
6 example, it would be of significant interest to both academics and practitioners to see differences
7 between festivals on positioning, attendance, and event portfolios when DMOs, state tourism
8 boards, or similar organizations are involved in the marketing of these festivals (e.g. meta-event
9 Mariani and Giorgio, 2017). Finally, we invite others to join us in this effort to encourage
10 comprehensive population-level research efforts.
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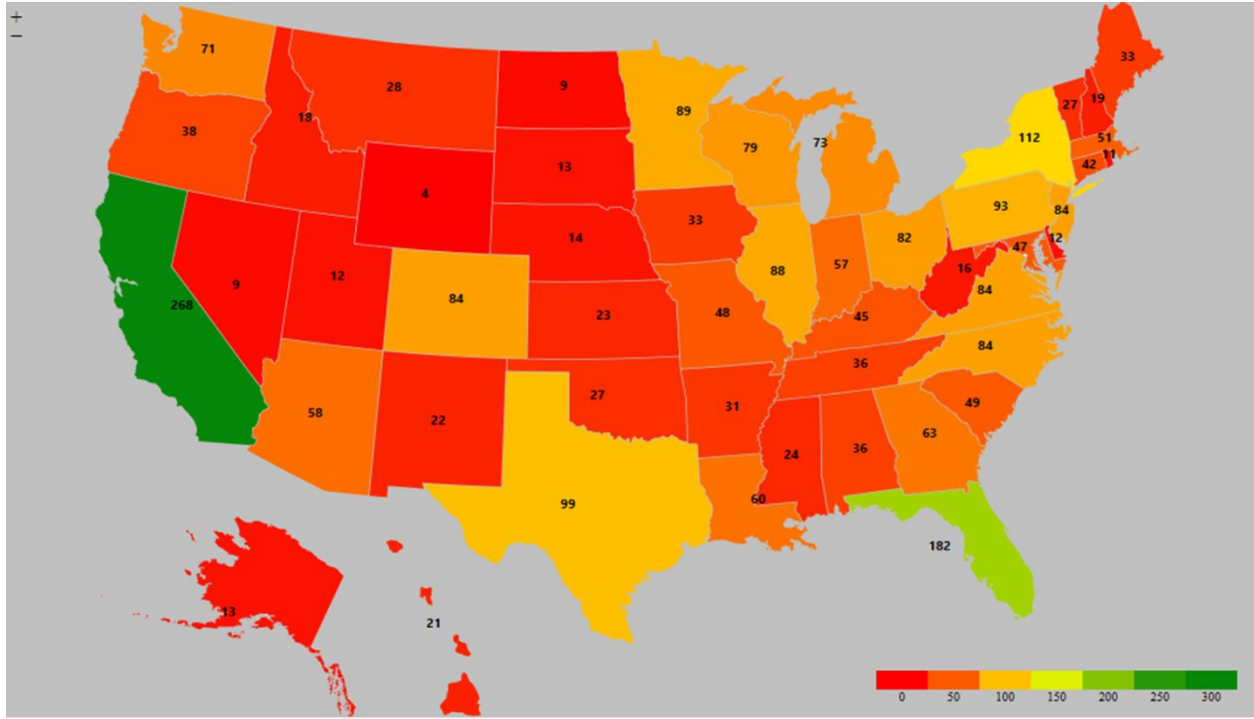


Figure 1 Food festival map of the United States

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Table 1 Typology and profiling studies

Source	Festival type	Attributes and Categories
Janiskee (1991; 1994; 1996)	Community	Attributes: Temporal patterns (month, weekend, holidays), geographic distribution, growth rate, programming and venues. Categories: Community festivals, rural festivals
Lewis (1997)	Food	Attributes: Food festivals as an American cultural event Categories: Ethnic food of an immigrant nation, Rationally constructed food festivals
O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002)	Art and cultural	Attributes: Population size, special geography and major theme Categories: 'Home-grown festivals', 'Tourist-tempter', 'Big-bang'
Hall and Sharples (2003)	Food	Attributes: Scale of attendance and promotional base (local, regional, national and international) Categories: Generic (no local food focus), generic (but focused on local food), multiple/themed categories, single categories of product, single specific product/food type
Paleo and Wijnberg (2006)	Music	Attributes: Competitive/non-competitive, for-profit/not-for-profit), degree of institutionalization/innovativeness, scope Categories: Competitive (for-profit, wide-ranged, one-track format, high institutionalization/innovativeness, national Non-Competitive: not-for-profit, focused-range, multivenu format, low institutionalization, not innovative, international
Lee and Arcodia (2011)	Food	Attributes: Longevity, visitor awareness, organizers, funding/sponsorship, purpose Categories: Regional food festivals
Ma and Lew (2012)	Heritage	Attributes: Connect to place, and whether traditional or contemporary in origin. Categories: Local heritage festivals, local modern festivals, national heritage festivals, global modern festivals
Silkes <i>et al.</i> (2013)	General	Attributes: Food, wine, history, ethnic food tourism elements. Categories: Town celebration, food, history, transportation, ethnic, arts and crafts, music, national holiday, flowers, wine, antiques, university, other
Timothy and Pena (2016)	Food	Attributes: Heritage, community, identity, authenticity. Categories: Indigenous, immigrant, harvest, iconic food, competitions, special purpose, secondary

Table 2 The descriptions and examples of food festival types by heritage

Food Festival Types	Highlights	Examples
Indigenous/Traditional	The traditional food	13th Annual Livermush Festival, Marion, North Carolina
Ethnic	Foods of immigrant cuisines	46th Annual French Food Festival, Larose, Louisiana
Harvest	Celebration of crops, livestock, poultry, fishing and wild food	West Virginia Pumpkin Festival; Alaska Kodiak Crab Festival
Iconic	Celebration about locally grown specialty produce	Georgia Peach Festival (Bryon, Fort Valley); 39th Annual Hilton Apple Fest (New York)
Competitions	Culinary competitions	American Royal World Series of Barbecue in Kansas City, Missouri
Special purpose	Aspect of food or destination	Taste of Chicago
Secondary/Beverage	Food as prominent element / Beverages as primary theme	Gables Hispanic Cultural Festival (Coral Gables, Florida)

Table 3 Food festival characteristics by heritage type

Types	Age	Duration	Season	Region	Regional food
Iconic (N=975)	Age:(M=39) 1-9yrs:4% 10-19yrs:15% 20-29:17% 30-39:24% 40-49:15% 50+yrs:25%	Days: (M=2.65) 1-day: 32% 2-days: 28% 3+days:40%	Fall (36%) Spring (20%) Summer (39%) Winter (5%)	Great Lakes (21%) Mid-Atlantic (11%) Midwest (6%) New England (7%) Pacific (14%) Rocky Mountain (4%) Southern (30%) Southwest (7%)	Customs:20% Locale:80%
Beverage (N=590)	Age: (M=17) 1-9yrs: 33% 10-19yrs:38% 20-29:14% 30-39:12% 40-49:4% 50+yrs:0.5%	Days: (M=2.00) 1-day: 57% 2-days: 23% 3+days:20%	Fall (30%) Spring (27%) Summer (33%) Winter (10%)	Great Lakes (16%) Mid-Atlantic (18%) Midwest (5%) New England (5%) Pacific (20%) Rocky Mountain (10%) Southern (18%) Southwest (8%)	Customs:100% Locale:0%
Special purpose (N=481)	Age: (M=23) 10-19yrs:19% 20-29:35% 30-39:21% 40-49:6% 50+yrs:5%	Days: (M=2.40) 1-day: 49% 2-days: 18% 3+days:33%	Fall (31%) Spring (29%) Summer (32%) Winter (8%)	Great Lakes (15%) Mid-Atlantic (15%) Midwest (3%) New England (9%) Pacific (20%) Rocky Mountain (5%) Southern (26%) Southwest (7%)	Customs:100% Locale:0%
Competitions (N=247)	Age:(M=25) 1-9yrs: 14% 10-19yrs:34% 20-29:15% 30-39:22% 40-49:10% 50+yrs:6%	Days: (M=1.86) 1-day: 50% 2-days: 28% 3+days:22%	Fall (31%) Spring (27%) Summer (34%) Winter (8%)	Great Lakes (13%) Mid-Atlantic (11%) Midwest (10%) New England (5%) Pacific (9%) Rocky Mountain (4%) Southern (33%) Southwest (14%)	Customs:100% Locale:0%
Ethnic (N=133)	Age: (M=30) 1-9yrs: 11% 10-19yrs:27% 20-29:22% 30-39:13% 40-49:16% 50+yrs:11%	Days: (M=2.37) 1-day: 27% 2-days: 27% 3+days:46%	Fall (36%) Spring (17%) Summer (44%) Winter (2%)	Great Lakes (20%) Mid-Atlantic (18%) Midwest (5%) New England (5%) Pacific (14%) Rocky Mountain (2%) Southern (28%) Southwest (9%)	Customs:100% Locale:0%
Harvest (N=131)	Age:(M=34) 1-9yrs:10% 10-19yrs:17%	Days:(M=2.16) 1-day: 35%	Fall (74%) Spring (7%) Summer (17%)	Great Lakes (19%) Mid-Atlantic (15%) Midwest (5%)	Customs:41% Locale:59%

	20-29:22% 30-39:17% 40-49:17% 50+yrs:17%	2-days: 34% 3+days:31%	Winter (2%)	New England (11%) Pacific (15%) Rocky Mountain (6%) Southern (21%) Southwest (8%)	
Traditional (N=69)	Age: (M=30) 10-19yrs:17% 20-29:31% 30-39:3% 40-49:17% 50+yrs:17%	Days: (M=2.22) 1-day: 42% 2-days: 30% 3+days:28%	Fall (38%) Spring (28%) Summer (30%) Winter (4%)	Great Lakes (17%) Mid-Atlantic (16%) Midwest (9%) New England (6%) Pacific (9%) Rocky Mountain (3%) Southern (33%) Southwest (7%)	Customs: 100% Locale:0%

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Table 4 Common structure of food festival names

Longevity	Recurrence	Location name	Sponsor	Geographic Scope	Theme	Occasion
10th	Annual	Red Bank	Guinness		Oyster	Festival
122nd	Annual	Valley of the Moon			Vintage	Festival
27th	Annual	Grainger County			Tomato	Festival
122nd	Annual				Strawberry Days	Festival
12th	Annual				Chowderfest	
8th	Annual				Beer & Chili	Festival
8th	Annual	Florida			Key Lime Pie	Festival
9th	Annual				Turkish Food	Festival
9th	Annual	Sun Shine State			Steak	Cook-Off
4th	Annual		Valrhona		Hot Chocolate	Festival
8th		Northeast Florida			Veg	Fest
56th	Annual			National	Blueberry	Festival
	Annual	Sertoma			Chili	Cookoff
				National	Peanut	Festival
				International	Rice	Festival
				International	Greek Food	Festival
			Jungle Jim's	International	Wine	Festival
				Great American	Beer	Festival
			The Hermitage		Food truck	Festival
		Wichita	Wagonmaster		Downtown Chili	CookOff
		Yale			Bologna	Festival
		South Carolina			Peach	Festival
		Kodiak			Crab	Festival
		Warwick			Applefest	
					Huckleberry	Festival
					Wurstfest	

Table 5 Naming components analysis

Naming components	Location	Recurrence	Longevity
(Full sample %)	65%	44%	36%
Heritage Types			
Iconic (M=3.61)	66%	52% highest	41%
Beverage (M=3.37)	68%	41%	33%*
Special purpose (M=3.29)	72% highest	33%* lowest	26%*lowest
Competitions (M=3.35)	52%*	47%	36%
Ethnic (M=3.20)	50% lowest	38%*	37%
Harvest (M=3.29)	54%*	44%	32%*
Traditional (M=3.48)	59%*	48%	42% highest
Regions			
Southern (M=3.51)	66%	47%	38%
Great Lakes (M=3.38)	63%*	43%*	34%*
Mid-Atlantic (M=3.31)	61%*	37%*	33%
Southwest (M=3.43)	65%	46%	34%
New England (M=3.43)	63%*	49%	38%
Midwest (M=3.06)	47%* lowest	38%*	24%*lowest
Pacific (M=3.63)	74% highest	50% highest	42% highest
Rocky Mountains (M=3.35)	61%*	38%*	30%*

Notes: * indicates lower percentage score than the category average

Table 6 Analysis of descriptive content

Tokens	No of Festivals	Examples
Adjectives	1889	Best, most, oldest, biggest, large, huge, exciting, original
Adverbs	1451	Truly, warmly, tastefully, delicately
Bi-grams	917 705 499 354 160 128 111 95	Welcome-annual Family-fun Live-music Live-entertainment Join-us Craft-beer Wine-festival Food-vendors
Tri-grams	611 311 68	Annual-year-invite Live-music-entertainment Children-friendly-family

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