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How important is Food at Farmers' Markets? Evidence from Bardon Farmers' Market, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

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Abstract *Contemporary farmers' markets include many leisure activities, both for children and adults, from face-painting and bouncy castles to cooking and bicycle repair classes. Among so many activities it is easy to ask just how important is simply selling farm produce anymore? This paper considers the nature and role of contemporary farmers' markets, primarily through the prism of outcomes of research into customer motivations that the writers undertook at Bardon Farmers' Market, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Key findings relate with asking respondents to rank order six potential motivating variables. These were: 1) Purchasing Fresh Produce 2) Purchasing Ready to Eat Food 3) Purchasing Packaged Foods 4) Purchasing Arts and Crafts 5) Attending Events/ Activities/Including Concerts 6) Social Interactions/Meeting People. The results indicated a high level of concern for sociability and a reduced level of concern for food purchase against previous studies. The elevation of sociability at Bardon Farmers' Market gives the market managers a key indicator in future management of the market, for instance around vendor choice, vendor mix and social, events and play provision. Any elevating social importance of farmers' markets, farmers' markets as third places, could have implications for public policy and policymakers, for example in planning around transportation and ageing.*

Key words Farmers' markets, third place, retailing, pop-up, Australia

JEL Codes: L66, M31, Q10, R22

1. Introduction

Farmers' market is a substantial retail growth phenomenon. US Department of Agriculture reported ("New Data Reflects") 8268 farmers markets in America in 2014, an increase of 76% against 2008. For Australia there are no clear figures. That comes out of no clear definition of what a farmers' market is what retailing permissible within the farmers' market nomenclature. There is though clear and substantial growth, with even Australian Association of Farmers' Markets, with its immensely strict definition to exclude non-farm goods and workers recognising 70 farmers' markets in 2004, rising to 170 now (Abernethy, 2016). This article was, though, written and its research undertaken against a backdrop of much wider changes in the retail grocery sector, arguably changing trends in shopping in general, sometimes with disastrous consequences for both individual retailers and whole shopping milieu.

Globally grocery sales are migrating online. Australia is no exception, though a relatively slow adopter. Mintel report ("Online Grocery Clicks in the UK") that in UK in 2016 14% of shoppers were doing all their grocery shopping online, the cohort doubling since 2014. For USA Weinswig (2018) flags Food Marketing Institute and Nielsen findings again showing online grocery shoppers doubling in number in a year post 2016. Both suggest that 70% of US shoppers could be buying groceries online by 2022. For Australia, Nielsen research (Murray, 2018) reported for the year ending 2017 a 22.9% increase in new online grocery shoppers. Beverages and pet supplies, heavy items, are the fastest growing category. Notably, fresh produce is the slowest growing online grocery category, with only 14.5% year on year growth. It has been suggested (Cloutman, 2017) that Australia's ageing population, restricted in mobility, has acted as a driver of online growth.

KPMG reported ("China's Connected Consumers") in December 2017, out of China's fourth annual Connected Consumers Survey that 77% of respondents labelled online shopping as their favourite leisure activity. Both South Korea and UK have higher online adoption rates for FMCG purchase than Mainland China ("UK online grocery"). Growth of online shopping has led to brick and mortar store closures. Gough (2017) has reported 13.30% of UK shops as currently empty. The USA bricks and mortar retailing environment has been challenging since around 2015, branch closures including Macy's, Sears, J.C. Penney and K Mart. Already, in April 2017, Thompson (2017) was reporting nine major US retail bankruptcies.

Australia has hit similar problems. Speciality Fashion Group, subsequent to its November 2017 Annual General Meeting, is targeting a network of 700 stores in 2020 compared to over 1000 stores in 2017 ("Retail giant Speciality Fashion"). Myers net profit slumped from $60.6 Million in 2016 to $11.9 Million in 2017 (Hatch, 2017). Abano (2017) flags up that Myers has trimmed 74,670 sqm of floor space since September 2015.

Clearly these figures are stark. However, if all they represent is a changing balance of distribution channel adoption by vendors in response to changing consumer behaviour, then so be it, a changing architecture to the retail landscape, but that landscape is one that shows consumer captivation by some physically present forms, such as farmers' markets and other "pop-up" retail and dining forms, whilst migrating from bricks and mortar. What is the attraction of farmers markets, pop up and guerrilla marketing? Arguably, a summary of literature on pop-up, such as Warnaby and Shi (2017), in essence comes down to pop-up as having the attraction of ephemeral experience, the exciting opposite of always there bricks and mortar. It will be gone shortly, but meantime offers intense experience, maybe novelty, before popping up somewhere else or not. Farmers' markets offer what will be there, who will be there anticipatory excitement. Yet, whilst clearly pop-ups in the sense that they have to be set-up, literally built, and taken down on every occasion of operation, they mostly work to a regularised schedule. This enables them to offer an interesting combination of the pleasures of anticipation and ephemerality with a degree of institutionalisation. This may fit perfectly with leisure experience and leisure shopping experience, but also necessitous shopping.

Cockburn-Wooten *et al.* (2008) noted a generally blurred boundary between leisure and domestic obligation. In looking at the leisure possibilities in grocery shopping they, arguably, were looking at a worst case scenario. Nonetheless, they argue that "family leisure" is offered, with that seen as child-centred and purposive time spent with the children. This view is particularly social context driven. Perhaps more usual would be to see, say, shopping for fashion as leisure shopping (Cockburn-Wooten *et al*., 2008). Perhaps browsing as against necessarily purchasing is a key concept to leisure shopping, that element of taking your chances on what you might chance upon embodied in "window shopping". Equally, though, browsing can be highly purposeful information-gathering, including price-comparison, and that could be leisurable. Certainly Jarboe and McDaniel (1987) see browsing as having a wide range of behavioural and self-reporting possibility.

In fact, when the shopping mall was in its heyday, it wasn't necessarily the case that deep explanation either was or could be given for spending time at the shopping mall. Terminology was, for instance, of teens "hanging out". Pitman (2003) had as an interviewee psychologist Kimberly Schonert-Reichl who offered that "Teenagers go to the mall to meet their friends and because they're hoping for a chance to run into the boys or girls they're interested in." The implication is a largely not-specific, but essentially social mission. That might or might not include purchasing some goods. Equally, it might or might not include purchasing say, a coffee. Open to question is how much all demographics perform social missions and need safe, retentive environments to do so outside of the home or work (or school) environment, together with where such environments are to be found. Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) simply dubbed such places Third Places, neither home or work. Oldenburg (1999) offered many possibilities. These include cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars and hair salons.

Worthy of note is how often the arena for social activity, even social support, is a commercial provision, though the balance could be addressed by considering, for instance, public libraries and community centres. Rosenbaum *et al.* (2007) have, though, specifically presented "how deficits in social support motivate consumers to replace lost social resources by forming relationships with customers and employees in commercial "third places". Waxman (2006) found speciality coffee shops as strong elements in residents' social interactions and community connection. Cheang (2002), considering attendance by older adults at a fast-food restaurant found buddies congregating to play, have fun, laugh, engage in personal expression, simply be involved in cross-sociability. Maybe food or drink was not of much importance for sustenance, their role being as social lubricants? Clearly the fast-food restaurant attendees that Cheang (2002) surveyed were co-creators of an experience, much as Caru and Cova (2007) describe. The fast food restaurant and the items its sells are by no means the be all and end all of the experience. To use the Caru and Cova (2007) terminology this is not a simple encounter with finished products. In fact it might be surmised from the survey that the primary, maybe only, reason for choosing the particular place, at the least by the leader, was purely convenience while her husband went off to the swimming pool.

Nonetheless, the restaurant gave space within which the group of older adults could have, in fact co-create, an experience, develop a narrative, and in so doing affirm and reinforce their own identities and relationships.

Watson (2009) argued markets as "significant public and social space for different groups in the locality as a site for vibrant social encounters, for social inclusion, and the care of others, for "rubbing along" and for mediating differences. Certainly as a phenomenon farmers' markets are of increasing importance and one whose social function has begun to be recognised. Indeed Stephens (2015) spoke of going back to the future. Referencing farmers' markets, this was put forward: "In the beginning, they came for the produce. In the end, they came back for the community". Stephens quotes Gary Mortimer, a Queensland University of Technology academic: "People go out to work and come home from work and don't interact with their communities. The people we do see are out there on Sunday morning at the market. We know the guy we buy the coffee from, the guy we get our meat from and there's community there" (Stephens, 2015).

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2. Literature review

As indicated above farmers' markets are a rapidly growing phenomenon, with that growth contrary to the trend in physical retail. However, the research at Bardon Farmers' Market that prompted this article is part of a relatively small body of work on farmers' markets at all, though what have been written have mostly been both customer-focused and customer motivation focused. Gumirakiza *et al.* (2014) and Pascucci *et al.* (2011) may be exampled as writers on customer motivation. Particularly little has been written for Australia, Coster and Kennon (2005) being the main exception. Within this body of work sociability has been considered co-equally in multivariate analysis of motivations. As far as the researchers know, there has been no study specifically focused on sociability as an element at farmers' markets, its strength (or weakness) and reasons for it. The area is a research gap, but one that the researchers' Bardon Farmers' Market study illuminated through the strength of its findings around sociability, although the study was not designed to look exclusively or even specifically at sociability.

3. Methodology of research

This article uses as a major point of reference a survey of consumers at Bardon Farmers' Market, Brisbane, Queensland undertaken at the market on Sunday 29th April 2018. The survey's components were a quantitative, questionnaire-based random sampling of respondents and a qualitative survey of a small sub-set of the original respondents. Demographic details were gathered from respondents. Ascertaining attendee motivations in visiting the market was the core of the research, together with some concern to locate attendee attitudes around food. The main survey question required respondents to rank order their motivations across six motivational suggestions: purchasing fresh produce, purchasing ready to eat food, purchasing packaged foods, purchasing arts and crafts, social interactions/meeting people, attending events and activities including conferences. Quantitative survey data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were considered. Application of Cronbach Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) deemed reliability at .694, reliable.

4. Data analysis and results

Data collected on Sunday 29th April 2018 at Bardon Farmers' Market was subjected to a wide range of descriptive and inferential analyses using SPSS and several statistical tools. Descriptive demographic data gathered were as per table 1 below:

Table 1. Socio-demographic data for customers attending Bardon Farmers' Market

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	69	63.9
	Male	39	36.1
Age	18 - 25	11	10.2
	26 - 35	28	25.9
	36 - 45	29	26.9
	46 - 55	17	15.7
	Over 55	23	21.3
Annual income	Less than $30,000	12	11.1
	30K - 54,999K	21	19.4
	55K - 89,999K	25	23.1
	90K - 129,999K	22	20.4
	130K +	28	25.9
Highest level of Education	Year 11 or below	3	2.8
	Year 12 or equivalent	10	9.3
	Certificate III or IV	4	3.7
	Bachelor Degree	41	38.3
	Graduate Diploma or Cert.	16	15.0
	Postgraduate Degree	33	30.8
Primary shopper	No	35	32.4
	Yes	73	67.6
Home produce garden	Yes	42	38.9
	No	66	61.1

Main points were that 63.9% of the respondents were female, with 36.1% male. Most Bardon attendees were in the age group 36-45 years (26.9%) and most (25.9%) were high income earners, in the band of over $130, 000 annual income. Educationally, the largest group was those with bachelor degree education (38.3%), 67.6% of respondents were a primary shopper for the family and most do not have a home produce garden (61.1%). Turning to inferential statistics, the Bardon Farmers' Market conceptual framework saw reasons for attending the market as potentially deriving from three sets of independent variables that is demographic variables, attitudinal variables and motivational variables. The demographic variables became the study's H1 hypothesis set, attitudinal variables the H2 hypothesis set and motivational variables the H3 hypothesis set.

Demographic variables considered were gender, age, educational level and income. Attitudinal variables considered were concerns for food safety, for the environment, for the origins of food, to support local businesses such as growers and suppliers. Motivational variables considered were to purchase fresh produce, to purchase ready to eat foods, to purchase packaged foods, to purchase arts and crafts, for social interactions and meeting people, to attend events and activities including concerts. Accepting and not accepting hypotheses H1a through H3e was against a 0.05 significance level. Results were as per table 2 below:

Table 2. Summary of hypothesis test outcomes for customers attending Bardon Farmers' Market

Hypothesis	Decision	Statistical Tool Used
H1 Hypotheses Demographic		
H1a Gender	Partial Reject*1	Independent sample t-test
H1b Age	Partial Reject*2	One way analysis of variance
H1c Educational Level and H1d Income	Reject	One way analysis of variance
H2 Hypotheses Attitudinal		
H2a Food Safety	Accept	Pearson's product moment correlation
H2b Environment, H2c Diet/Health H2d Food Origins, H2e Support Local Business	Reject	
H3 Hypotheses Motivational		
All Hypotheses	Accept	Pearson's product moment correlation

**1 Gender and Purchasing Arts and Crafts and Attending Events/Activities/ Concerts accepted.*

**2 Age and Purchasing Arts and Crafts and Attending Events/Activities/ Concerts accepted.*

Clearly, the H2 attitudinal hypotheses were of little importance, concern for food safety being the exception. The H1 hypotheses were rather a mixed bag, but were mostly rejected, particularly around educational level and income. Gender and age were partially rejected, in both cases arts and crafts and attending events, activities and concerts being accepted as reaching the significance threshold. Next in the inferential statistical testing was to consider the H3 hypotheses in rank order from most to least important determinant of attendance at Bardon Farmers' Market. The summary is as per Table 3 below:

Table 3. Rank order of motivations for customers attending Bardon Farmers' Market

Motivational Variables	Mean ± SE
Purchasing Fresh Produce	1.60 ± .107
Social Interactions/ Meeting People	3.08 ± .137
Purchasing Ready to eat Foods	3.19 ± .142
Attending Events /Activities/Including Concerts	4.20 ± .140
Purchasing Arts and Crafts	4.31 ± .135
Purchasing Packaged Foods	4.61 ± .130

The rank order was tested for statistical significance through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), locating significance as (α): .05, and substantiated through the Duncan Multiple Range Test. Statistical significance was affirmed. This rank order of the motivational variables at Bardon Farmers' is the knub issue in referencing the Bardon Farmers' Market research in this article. The reason for this is difference, as against comparable studies. Sociability as a motive scored significantly higher than elsewhere. The qualitative interviewing of a sub-set of respondents to the quantitative survey very much confirmed the importance of sociability and did so in a situation where interviewees were essentially given free range to discuss whatever they wanted. Interviewers intervened with the odd supplementary question or clarifier, but their task was essentially limited to keeping interviewees on track, focused on motivations.

One interviewee in the qualitative survey rather summarized in all matters. When asked why she attended Bardon two reasons were offered, buying fresh produce and meeting friends. When asked what she actually did while at Bardon

Farmers' Market, two simple replies were made: "Had long chats with friends", "Had breakfast". Another interviewee offered her family attends "to drink coffee, buy strawberries and listen to live music with our young son". That interviewee offered what they had actually done as "shopped, sat at the tables with coffee and listened to the guitar". Another spoke of attending for "fruit and veg shopping" and also "breakfast". Again the interviewee reported having shopped and also "sat and ate brekky". Sociability elements were mentioned by all interviewees. One outlier was an interviewee talking of looking to buy "treats". From observation by the researchers though that seemed remarkably honest, particularly in connection with jewellery and clothes purchases, which appeared to be spontaneous, un-planned, purchases.

Overall researcher observation was that shopping was got out of the way quickly. Next came the arguably more important focus around leisured sociability. It truly prompts the question as to what was the primary concern? That particularly becomes the case when the references to taking breakfast are considered in that the purchase of prepared foods, from observation, appeared not to be to take off-premises, but to eat at the farmers' market as constituting the content of those frequently mentioned breakfasts. It looked as though the sociability was the pre-condition of the food purchases. At the same time is to be noted that the purchase of packaged foods was inconsequential. There is, though, despite the "timetable" given above something important to be remembered in that sociability can also be expressed, sometimes lengthily, while shopping, meaning that the sociable interaction is with the vendor, a seemingly important element of farmers markets (e.g. Hunt, 2007). One vendor at Bardon Farmers' Market talked at length with a researcher about his counselling customers, the context being personal relationships, such can be the relationships of intensity and trust built between vendors and customers. Overall, the market manager, market owners and vendors, though many farmers' markets do the same, make huge efforts to promote sociability. The market owners are a farmer run co-operative, which, following Betz and Farmer (2016) on governance might have had the implication of being less customer-centric than otherwise. As it is probably the major job of the market manager on each market day is to set out a huge area of tables and chairs and set up the music stage.

5. Discussions

It is worth repeating that in one sense it seems odd to ask whether farmers' markets are about food, when purchase of fresh foods is always the main reason for customer attendance given by survey respondents. However, the Bardon Consumer Quantitative Study could be important in that it indicates an elevated importance of sociability as against other studies. Findings in the qualitative survey, where interviewees could essentially take the discussion wherever they wanted confirm the interest in sociability. A recent comparative on farmers' market attendance motivations is provided by the work of Gumirakiza *et al.* (2014), sampling at Utah and Nevada Farmers Markets. 78% of respondents attended primarily to purchase fresh produce. Only 14% attended primarily for social interaction and 5% to purchase ready to eat foods. At the other end of the scale Pascucci *et al.* (2011), surveying in Italy, found 69% of respondents said they usually meet friends or acquaintances at the market.

For Australia, Koster and Kennon (2005) found the primary reason shoppers attended the farmers' markets surveyed was to buy fresh produce. The secondary reason was to support local growers. Social interaction with friends and relatives were the focus of less than 5% of attendees. Manning Farmers' Market, Perth, Western Australia, consumers were surveyed from the same conceptual framework and using the same questionnaires as at Bardon (Azavedo, 2017) with the following results that saw fresh produce purchase rank ordered first, followed by ready to eat foods and social interactions and meeting people third, as per Table 4 below:

Table 4. Rank order of motivations for customers attending Manning Farmers' Market

Motivational Variables	Mean ± SE
Purchasing Fresh Produce	1.33 ± .058
Purchasing Ready to Eat Foods	3.00 ± .091
Social Interactions/ Meeting People	3.20 ± .102
Purchasing Packaged Foods	4.13 ± .094
Attending Events /Activities/Including Concerts	4.62 ± .094
Purchasing Arts and Crafts	4.66 ± .088

Note. Reprinted from Azavedo, M. (2017). Factors determining customer attendance at Manning Farmers' Market, Perth, Western Australia. Unpublished doctoral special study. Shinawatra International University, Bangkok, Thailand.

The same conceptual framework and questionnaires had previously been used with consumers at Victoria Park Farmers' Market. Perth, Western Australia (Azavedo, 2016). In fact for Manning and Victoria Park, the rank order ran purchasing fresh produce, followed by purchasing ready to eat foods, then social interactions/meeting people. Outcomes are fully-listed in table 5 below:

Table 5. Rank order of motivations for customers attending Victoria Park Farmers' Market

Motivational Variables	Mean± SE
Purchasing Fresh Produce	1.96± .100
Purchasing Ready to Eat Foods	2.71± .117
Social Interactions/Meeting People	3.23± .128
Attending Events/Activities/Including Concerts	3.77± .120
Purchasing Packaged Foods	4.64± .110
Purchasing Arts and Crafts	4.67± .102

Note. Reprinted from Azavedo, M., (2016). Factors determining customer attendance at Vic Park Farmers' Market, Perth, Western Australia. Unpublished master's thesis. Stamford International University, Bangkok, Thailand.

As with Bardon Farmers' Market it is important to consider the qualitative results alongside the results from the quantitative survey, to gain a fuller picture of consumer behaviour and how elements in it might cross-support each other. At Victoria Park Farmers' Market breakfast was, specifically, mentioned by 57% of participants in the qualitative survey. The references to breakfast concerned buying breakfast at the farmers' market and eating it there. This specific fitted into the general pattern of eating and drinking, "enjoying the environment", as one participant put it. Events and activities were little-mentioned by participants. However, exceptions are worthy of note. One lady was very vocal that she had attended specifically for the kite-making. She had diarised this lengthily in advance

Food was mentioned very little by Victoria Park participants, but worthy of note was the context of the mention, a reference to food being seen as something bought and consumed at Vic Park Farmers' Market and, often prepared on the spot. There was, therefore a limitation of response in this category, in favour of other lexis, such as breakfast or bagel, because of the particular perception of food. Music was mentioned by 57% of participants. In one case it was mentioned as a specific reason for attending Vic Park Farmers' Market. Three participants mentioned, specifically, listening to music, as opposed to it being, simply, an overall part of the scene. That said, one participant summarised: "Acoustic music sets a great atmosphere".

The Manning Farmers Market qualitative customer survey saw breakfast specifically mentioned by 37% of participants. The references to breakfast concerned buying breakfast goods at the farmers' market and eating them there. Coffee had been purchased by 50% of participants. This was taken on-site at the farmers' market. Sitting with a coffee was specifically mentioned. Fresh Produce was mentioned by participants. 75% of interviewees had purchased or were to purchase fresh produce. But it was easy to get the sense of an important relationship between prepared food and coffee forming a nexus as breakfast, though few participants mentioned that in a social context, though sitting and listening to music was mentioned, as was sitting with dogs.

6. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Looking back over many years of farmers' market research (e.g. Coster & Kennon, 2005, Gumirakiza *et al*., 2014) it would be very foolish to conclude other than that the pre-eminent shopping experience at farmers' markets is the purchasing of fresh produce. The purpose of this article is emphatically not to suggest otherwise. However, that does not invalidate that attending a farmers' market may not primarily be a shopping experience, but a broader leisure experience, with the purchase of goods and services, food included, only part of the experience, maybe a part supportive of attendees' leisure aims, for instance purchasing coffee and/or prepared foods to take whilst socialising with friends or watching the kids at play on a bouncy castle.

It is precisely the aim of this article to suggest on the one hand that farmers' markets could be seen as classic third places, whilst though suggesting that their format is not classic, is innovative and can be seen as part of a broader "pop-up" movement in current retailing and events practice. In that context, Farmers' Markets represent an appropriation of space, temporarily, for a few hours. In the case of Bardon Farmers' Market it uses part of what is normally a car park. During that time arguably the Overdiek (2017) consideration of pop-up shops as "to immerse the users in shared experiences which include products" is also an entirely appropriate consideration of farmers' markets in general and Bardon Farmers' Market in particular.

If there is truth in the concept of farmers' markets as third places that has implications for farmers' market management, for instance in the areas of vendor choice, what the vendor mix should be, what social and events provision should be made and what play provision. Additionally, there may also be implications for public policy-making if the farmers' market is a point for sociability in an area, an important social outlet, particularly for those who could easily become socially isolated. That is a mental health argument, but the argument is also buttressed by the potential physical health advantages of the availability to the individual of fresh produce and high-quality foodstuffs. Maybe, taking the case of Bardon Farmers' Market, Brisbane City Council should, for instance, give the market consideration in its planning around transportation and ageing. The major focus of this article has been a study of consumer attendees at Bardon Farmers' Market, Brisbane, Queensland, data for which was gathered on Sunday 29th April 2018.

Limitations of that study must be noted, notably limitations in place, time and population size. Care must be taken in terms of generalisability, though similarity to results found elsewhere and recently may indicate a degree of generalisability, particularly for Australia. If the very nature of farmers' markets, and the role of sociability in that, has become open to question, as this article may indicate, there needs to be further research whether through quantitative questionnaire or qualitative interview. That research must reveal around a range of simple indicators for instance whether prepared food purchases were eaten at the farmers' market or taken out, together with relative expenditure levels on each. Similarly, relative expenditure levels in general could be asked after. Finally, a temporal element should be introduced to questioning, meaning around time spent on shopping and time spent socially, just chatting or "kicking back" listening to the live music.

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