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FESTIVALS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A co-created transformation of attendees and organisers

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Introduction

Social media (SM) enrich tourism experiences by transforming the way people search, create, share and discuss information and converting them into co-designers, co-producers, co-marketers and co-distributors of tourism offerings (Sigala 2017; Sigala & Gretzel 2018). The festival sector is no exception. Festival operators adopt SM not only to increase their effectiveness (Inversini & Sykes 2013; Pasanen & Konu 2016) but also to appeal to new attendees who expect to use SM for accessing festival services and information; interacting with, sharing and discussing their experiences with various festival stakeholders (e.g. organisers, artists, local communities and other attendees); and co-designing and co-creating their festival experiences (Lee, Xiong & Hu 2012; MacKay, Barbe, Van Winkle & Halpenny 2017; Morey, Bengry-Howell, Griffin, Szmigin & Riley 2016). SM are compatible with the nature of festivals as a way to socialise, entertain and contribute to the self-development of attendees.

SM in festivals have attracted very few studies focussing on the marketing and co-creation of festival experiences (Csiszár 2016; Gyimóthy & Larson 2015; Hoksbergen, Insch & Insch 2016; Hudson & Hudson 2013). Hence, no systematic research exists investigating how SM are transforming the operations of festival operators as well as the behaviour, decision-making and experiences of attendees. To address these gaps, this chapter adopts a co-creation approach for examining the use and impact of SM on both attendees and organisers.

Social media and festival experiences: a co-creation approach

Festivals are places that unite people with similar interests, ideas and values to celebrate together and share common experiences. It is this shared collective experience as part of the festival 'product’ and its compatibility with SM functionality that make festivals a relevant context for SM. SM enable attendees to interact, share and influence each other’s experiences (Gyimóthy & Larson 2015) as well as build festival communities (Hede & Kellett 2012). The following SM features support the formation and quality of festival experiences and the benefits that attendees get (Sigala 2018b):

- **Sharing** of multimedia content with an international audience.
- **(Virtual) Presence**: the ‘always on’ attendee and his perception that ‘everyone is watching him’ creates the (online) festival atmosphere and reinforces the motivation...
(or addiction) to use SM in order to maintain and build relations, self-promotion and impression management.

- **Conversations**: online dialogues and interactions significantly impact the co-construction of travel content and meaning, which in turn influence the way tourists select, interpret and evaluate their experiences.

- **Identity**: attendees create their SM profile which is used for networking with others and/or for building/promoting their idealised self.

- **Relationships**: socialising, networking, interactions and sharing resources through SM help attendees develop and maintain social bonds and relations with others and feel that they belong in a community.

- **Groups**: SM users create and join groups, as interactions/collaborations are facilitated and strengthen when they happen within groups.

Few studies show the influence of SM on festival experiences. Networking websites, blogs and forums enable attendees to achieve socio-psychological benefits (such as social capital development and feelings of involvement), which in turn foster feelings of social group belonging and intentions for repeat festival visitation (Gyimóthy & Larson 2015). People increasingly use SM in all stages of their festival experiences (Hudson & Hudson 2013) in order to interact with others, share common experience and engage with festival activities (Flinn & Frew 2013), which in turn generates them social, ludic and symbolic value and meaning (Gyimóthy 2013). SM support and foster tribal gathering in festivals, as attendees can better connect to each other and develop bonds based on their common interest and exchanges (Gyimóthy & Jensen 2014). In summary, the properties of SM (networking, sharing, collaboration, community and dialogues) enable attendees to co-create experiences by generating values of belonging (creating and participating in communities), bonding (communicating, sharing, collaborating), detaching (insulation and territoriality by creating one’s space online for passive self-consumption of festival content), communing (fun-making, trusting, embracing), connecting (helping, relating, confiding/sharing) and amiability (acknowledging, advising, conversing) (Rihova 2013).

These examples are compatible with and within the theoretical frames of the experience economy co-creation, and service dominant logic (SDL), whose applicability in the festival context is advocated (e.g. Gyimóthy & Larson 2015; Hayes & MacLeod 2007; van Limburg 2008). These overlapping perspectives recognise that festival experiences are not created to be sold, i.e. value-in-exchange (Vargo & Lusch 2004), but they are co-created through the active participation and interactions of the various festival actors (e.g. attendees, artists, operators, communities, sponsors). Attendees gain value not through purchasing but through festival ‘consumption/living’ (value-in-use) and by immersing themselves into the sociocultural festival context (value-in-context), which in turn brings them meaning and self-enhancement. Value is not embedded in offerings; instead, customers have to co-create and make meaning out of it via the consumption and co-production of experiences (Firat & Dholakia 2006) as well as the interpretation of experiences that are facilitated and fuelled through SM interactions. As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 14) state, ‘the personal meaning derived from the co-creation experience is what determines the value to the individual’. Hence, attendees do not seek to ‘buy’ experiences but meanings, and so, to make their festival appealing and meaningful, festival organisers need to facilitate meaning-making co-creation processes amongst all the festival stakeholders.

Csiszár (2016) showed how interactions within an online festival community enabled attendees to co-create values and meanings of their festival experiences. This also influenced
how the organiser formed the official festival message and promotion strategy. The findings confirmed the impact of online social interactions and communities on experience co-creation by influencing the attendees’ meaning-making and the interpretation processes of the festival’s ‘intended’ messages/values. Hence, the dialectic and networking properties of SM expand festivals from isolated events in a specific venue, to a ‘time and space boundless networked gathering’ facilitating value co-creation through meaning-making mechanisms. Consequently, to better manage the festival’s intended messages/meanings, organisers also need to manage, monitor and moderate these online interactions.

The co-creation paradigm also emphasises that festival organisers have to migrate from a mindset of creating value for festivalgoers to co-creating value with them by seeing them as an empowered partner rather than a passive attendee (Gyimóthy & Jensen 2014). Gyimóthy and Larson (2015, p. 346) described three SM practices for engaging attendees into value co-creation: customer insourcing (i.e. recruiting lead users to distribute information, communicating for the purpose of service recovery, and posting and boosting positive user-generated content), crowdsourcing (i.e. fostering involvement to generate innovative suggestions, identify problems and suggest solutions/ideas) and community consolidation (i.e. facilitating the tribal community dynamics and contributing to the collective experience by posting and sharing UGC).

Based on Grönroos’s (2008) framework, it is proposed that SM support and enrich value co-creation in festival at three spheres:

- The supplier sphere: festival organisers integrating SM into their festival operations.
- The customer sphere: attendees integrating SM into their festival journey stages.
- The encounter sphere: any interaction between attendees and organisers at any touchpoint (offline/online, mobile), allowing value co-creation through resource exchange and integration (e.g. knowledge, monetary, cultural and social resources); SM provide the engagement platforms (i.e. blogs, communities, social networks) whereby the festivalgoers and operators can meet, network and interact.

**Social media and attendees**

Attendees are transformed from passive value takers to active value makers, and the SM revolution is further empowering them to become co-marketers, co-designers, co-producers and co-creators of festival experiences. By using SM, attendees can better satisfy their motivations for attending festivals (e.g. to learn, network, contribute and share common experiences, have fun, experience thrill and novelty, belong and be in a community).

**SM and attendee decision-making**

Hudson and Hudson (2013) analysed the impact of SM on the decision-making of attendees by demonstrating a heightened engagement in the pre-purchase search and the post-purchase evaluation stages. Instead of the traditional sequential purchase funnel, there is an extended evaluation stage comparing offers with multiple information sources; moreover, after the purchase, attendees build and maintain an open-ended relationship with brands by sharing experiences and joining brand communities. Indeed, attendees seek and use festival information from a variety of online sources rather than a single SM to compare and supplement information at different times during their festival journey (Becker, Iter, Naaman & Gravano 2012). Attendees also use multiple SM at different purchase stages (MacKay et al. 2017).
because SM possess different features and live period of updated content, e.g. most trends on Twitter last for one week. Research needs to examine whether and how attendees use and place different importance and credibility on various SM (not just Facebook and Twitter but also other SM, such as Snapchat or Instagram) at different stages of their purchase process.

**SM and festival experiences**

*The positive impact of SM on festival experiences: a value co-creation approach*

Many (Gyimóthy 2013; Lee et al. 2012; Morey et al. 2016) focus on the attendees’ use of SM as an interactive space for sharing and co-creating experiences, interacting and communicating with others, creating and participating in festival communities. These online ‘tribes’ of attendees (in which the presence and contributions of artists play a major role) also help attendees to build a group around the festival and then nurture social connections and a sense of community with likeminded peers located across geographic or temporal divides (Gyimóthy 2013).

SM significantly influence the festival experiences. Attendees use Twitter as a platform of self-expression, discussion and co-creation of meanings and values (Duguay 2016). According to Hoksbergen et al. (2016), the use of Facebook in a music festival enhanced the music experience (seeing favourite bands/performers, new band/performers and being inspired by the music), the festival experience (festival atmosphere and being in a stimulating, peaceful and/or different environment), the social experience (being with friends/family, meeting new people, being around people with similar interests and getting to know friends on a deeper level) and the separation experience (trying new/adventurous things, food, activities and staying overnight). Thus, attendees reported gaining five types of value (Hoksbergen et al. 2016): functional value (obtaining and providing festival information, purchasing tickets online), social value (identifying and networking with others, achieving self-impression by sharing selfies/content), emotional value (triggering memories and sensations of the festival atmosphere, creating excitement), interactive value (communication and collaboration) and aesthetic value (viewing and enjoying photos/videos).

Motivations for sharing and discussing electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) include memorable festival experiences (Semrad & Rivera 2016), and the combination of positive event image and participant satisfaction (Prado-Gascó, Calabuig, Añó Sanz, Núñez-Pomar & Crespo Hervás 2017). As eWOM can significantly influence festival demand, organisers need to assure the memorability of their experiences and monitor the online festival image. Attendees use SM at all festival stages to anticipate, co-produce and (re-)consume their festival experiences, and to expand the time horizon and location of the co-creation of their festival experiences beyond the festival site and timing (Gyimóthy & Larson 2015). Thus, using SM to support and monitor attendee interactions after the festival is also equally important for festival organisers.

Similar to tourism studies (e.g. Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier 2016), festival research (van Winkle et al. 2017) has also revealed that attendee use of SM can be attributed to habit theory and the spillover of technology use from daily life to unique leisure/tourism contexts. Hence, ‘addicted’ SM users and the millennials seem to be both early and heavy users of SM at festivals. However, further research is required to unravel the specific technographic profile of attendees (e.g. festival motivations, needs and expectations of attendees using SM for various reasons, e.g. content creation, sharing, networking) and their use of different SM tools (MacKay et al. 2017). As attendee participation in festivals also differs temporally...
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(Gyimóthy & Larson 2015), organisers need to adopt different tactics in various SM in order to stimulate full customer engagement across all SM and during the whole festival journey.

The negative impact of SM on festival experiences: a value co-destruction approach

The dark side of SM use at festivals also needs to be recognised, but research has failed to examine so far its negative impacts on festival co-creation processes and experiences. This is a major gap as research in tourism has already revealed that the pathological or addicted use of SM while traveling can have detrimental effects on tourism experiences (Sigala 2017). Value co-creation processes do not always lead to positive value creation for all the actors, and this is because value co-creation and co-destruction can simultaneously take place (Sigala 2018a). Posting a selfie with an artist or a video of a festival performance can enhance attendee ego and festival experiences, as this increases their online identity and impression. Favourable online festival content may also positively influence the festival image and online promotion. However, these online practices can negatively affect artists (e.g. image making, copyright concerns of content distribution).

Research is urgently required to unravel these contradictory effects of SM use on festival experiences. On the one hand, sharing of festival content manifests the experiences and reactions of the users; creates a feeling of camaraderie; fosters community bonding; and triggers collective excitement, togetherness and emotions generated by attendees experiencing together. On the other hand, instead of connecting, mobile use of SM can cut people off from each other and from their social context, distract attention of the user and diminish the emotional purchase of live events (Hutchins 2016). Mobile phone usage can strengthen social ties within the circle of friends and family, but at the expense of interaction with those who are physically present, which in turn creates ‘bounded solidarity’ (Ling 2008). As the power of live performances is built on the heightened emotions and sensory engagement generated by the collective focus of a crowd, this ‘bounded solidarity’ and disregard of what is going around felt by people who experience live festivals through their phone cameras can have detrimental effects on the festival atmosphere, the individual and the collective festival experiences. Constant use of SM can also erode the quality of attendees’ focus and festival experience by distracting them and disturbing others wishing to stay offline.

Mindful SM use is required so that it does not negatively affect users’ mental, physical, social and psychological well-being (Sigala 2018a). Technology suppliers and festival organisers also suggest that temporary forced disengagement from SM may be beneficial. Apple has registered a patent (Ghosal 2016) that prohibits phone cameras from recording footage in designated areas. Yondr (www.overyondr.com) provides a technological solution to festival venues wishing to have a phone-free space, showing people how they experience more powerful moments by staying away from habitual online checking and sharing. Nevertheless, creating and sharing content online has also become part of the festival experience, and some attendees demand it otherwise they are dissatisfied by not being connected. Future research needs to answer how much content people can afford to record and share before they get disconnected from their immediate environment/companions and fail to experience and share live performances with the ones next to them. Such findings can help festival organisers and attendees alike in designing their festivalscapes, experiences, SM applications and strategies.

Duguay (2016) also found a contradictory SM experience impact: Twitter software simultaneously constrained and enabled the attendees to pursue different co-creation processes that, in turn, resulted in conflicting value outcomes. Twitter’s features of visibility, connections, messages and #tags empowered the attendees of WorldPride to self-express and
promote the festival's values. This helped the attendees to develop collective connections, nurture an online festival community and achieve the festival aims, i.e. form counterpublics and challenges to the assumed heterosexuality of public space. However, Twitter’s algorithm and platform constrained the attendees’ expressions and online posts through standardised and datafiable tweets, while it also allowed other actors (i.e. politicians, celebrities and advertisers) to post tweets of self-promotional and banal content. Because the Tweeter algorithm gives more visibility to the latter actors due to their huge online network, this meant that the visibility of attendees’ posts was significantly ‘hidden’. Overall, the WorldPride Twitter community did not lead online discourses or form counterpublics challenging heteronormativity. Hence, to better understand the SM experience impact, research needs to examine how SM algorithms/functionalities influence actor interactions, co-creation processes and outcomes.

**Social media and festival marketing**

By using SM for digitising business operations, festival organisers can increase the Return on Investment (ROI) of all their festival marketing functions. However, the business benefits of SM are not confined to their instrumental and functionalistic roles. The social and the networking capabilities of SM also enable the organisers to transform their operations to more ‘social’ functions by empowering their attendees to actively participate in festival operations. In doing this, organisers increase their effectiveness and address demand expectations (Sigala 2018b).

There are four major ways to exploit SM for digitising and socialising festival marketing practices. First, organisers can embed SM functionality and applications into the festival website: e.g. include SM share buttons, create guest books, blogs and discussion boards enabling users to create, discuss and share festival content, thus nurturing a festival community. Second, organisers can create SM profiles of the festival for promotion and community building using existing popular SM platforms and SM platforms specialising in festivals (e.g. www.conferize.com/the-chocolate-festival). A third option is to use the new festival intermediaries that provide online and SM web services/software such as online sales, SM marketing and CRM software (e.g. www.eventbrite.com/au/ and http://losangeles.eventful.com/events/spring-festival-gala/-E0-001-107642979-4). Finally, organisers can develop a mobile SM application. There are numerous festival mobile app developers (e.g. www.a2zinc.net/, https://evenium.com and www.core-apps.com/).

These four practices should be complimentary and used synergistically rather than exclusively. This is because the ‘always connected’ attendees use multiple sources of platforms, devices and information to identify a festival, share festival information and engage with its community. The proliferation of online channels and the customers’ expectations to access ‘services on the go’ at any place, time and device require the adoption of a multi-distribution strategy that provides multiple touchpoints and ways of accessing information and services, and engaging with and interacting with the festival stakeholders/community. However, studies have only examined the mainstream SM (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) overlooking both the features, benefits and the use of other SM platforms and the need to develop an orchestrated multiple SM channel strategy.

The aforementioned SM channels are called owned media, as firms can ‘own’ and control them. Festival organisers should also be aware of, monitor and manage what is called earned media, referring to SM networks and/or content created and owned by other actors (e.g. artists, attendees, journalists, critics, communities), but which can promote the festival (e.g. YouTube channels, artists’ blogs or attendee-created communities). These earned media are equally important because of their significant influence on various factors such as
attendee behaviour and decision-making, brand reputation, relationship management and sales. However, research has not yet investigated how festival organisers should monitor, participate and direct conversations and content in earned media (e.g. customer listening, reputation monitoring, and communication and public relation strategies).

Arguably, too much research attention has examined organisers’ SM use for marketing and customer engagement practices, with fewer studies looking at the use/benefits of SM for other operations such as New Product Development (NPD), market research, crisis management and community building. Numerous studies (e.g. Gyimóthy 2013; Hede & Kellett 2012; Hudson & Hudson 2013; Lee et al. 2012; Semrad & Rivera 2016; Zanger 2014) examine the SM use for a range of marketing practices, including event promotion and brand awareness; attracting, communicating and engaging with attendees; sales; building a festival community; and nurturing/maintaining relations. Several studies (Lee et al. 2012; Zanger 2014) emphasise the use of SM for providing services before, during and after the festival. However, findings (MacKay et al. 2017) reveal that the organisers use SM more before, less during and only in a limited way after the festival, which represents lost opportunities. SM marketing can also satisfy the festival ‘sponsors’ and build better sponsorship relations, as sponsors get more promotion for their sponsorship.

To date, no studies have examined SM use for festival sponsorship, crowdfunding, volunteering and impacts management. Despite the widely recognised SM use for involving tourists in NPD (e.g. Sigala 2012), fewer studies investigate this in events (Zanger 2014) and only one study (Pasanen & Konu 2016) examines SM use for festival innovation. Devine, Boluk and Devine (2017) discuss the use of Twitter for festival brand reputation management during and after a crisis, and De Lira et al. (2017) are one of the first to use big data for conducting market research in festivals. Hence, more diverse and advanced research is required to better inform the use of SM in festival operations. Research needs to progress from descriptive studies to more explanatory research investigating the effectiveness and the factors influencing the success and benefits of SM strategies. Research should also adopt new research methodologies (e.g. big data), approaches and disciplines, and make use of the huge amount of online market intelligence and customer data.

A SM marketing strategy should also aim at the different festival stages (Hede & Kellett 2012). Before the festival, SM use should focus on promotion, awareness and customer attraction. During the festival, the aims focus on information sharing and enhancement of attendee experience, while after the festival the major aim is on sustaining loyalty and maintaining presence. Organisers should also think about differentiating the type of SM used across the festival stages, and the type (e.g. conversational, promotional, informational, community building) and purpose (e.g. information provision, relationship building, customer service) of content communicated (MacKay et al. 2017; Semrad & Rivera 2016).

Overall, festival organisers need to adopt a multifunctional, a multichannel and a more strategic approach to SM exploitation that adopts practices, business aims and content to the various festival stages and SM. The SM strategy should match the 5 Ws (audience (who), time/festival stage (when), content/service (what), SM platform (where) and purpose/business aim (why)). The SM strategy should:

- provide the right information and the right service to the right person at the right time and place and for the right reason/purpose;
- attract, engage, retain, learn from and relate with customers (i.e. social CRM, Sigala 2018b);
active engagement of attendees as value co-creators;

- promote, brands, and collect attendee feedback and user-generated content about the festival and its impacts;
- use big data for better understanding and satisfying attendees and markets.

Conclusions

SM are fundamentally changing the way festivals are created, promoted, implemented, and managed. At a basic level, SM have been instrumental in addressing the information search, communication, promotional, and other functional needs of the attendees and organizers. However, SM is also having a transformational impact on the festival industry by changing the roles, practices, and functions of its stakeholders. SM facilitate, empower, and support attendees and organizers to become value and experience co-creators with more ‘social’ business functions. Festival management and marketing is also being transformed from being static and utilitarian (whereby technologies are tools) to a transformative conceptualization whereby festival markets and actors both shape and are shaped by the technology (Sigala 2018a).

Research shows that the industry is lagging behind in adopting sophisticated practices for fully exploiting SM. Research investigating SM in festivals is also still in its infancy. Advanced research needs to inform industry strategies and understand attendee behaviour to co-create festival value and eliminate value co-destruction. Research should move from descriptive studies explaining the current use of SM to more explanatory, prescriptive, and predictive research that can provide useful guidelines on how SM should be more effectively exploited by festival organizers, attendees, destination managers, and policymakers alike.

References


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