



The effects of social media on emotions, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth: An empirical study of music festival attendees



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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study examines the influence of social media on customer relationships.
- A conceptual model was developed and tested using structural equation modeling.
- The use of social media of attendees with music festivals was examined.
- Results show social media usage has a significant influence on festival engagement.
- Social media-based relationships also lead to positive word of mouth recommendations.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 November 2013

Accepted 5 September 2014

Available online 30 September 2014

Keywords:

Music festivals

Marketing

Social media

Brand relationship quality

Emotions

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two under-researched areas of tourism management – the management of music festivals, and the influence of social media on customer relationships. In the new digital era of marketing communications little is known about how social media interactions with tourism brands affect how consumers think and feel about those brands, and consequently how those interactions affect desired marketing outcomes such as word of mouth. Based on the literature, a conceptual model was developed and was tested using structural equation modeling. The results show that social media does indeed have a significant influence on emotions and attachments to festival brands, and that social media-based relationships lead to desired outcomes such as positive word of mouth.

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1. Introduction

Music tourism is a significant and growing sector of tourism (Gibson & Connell, 2007). In the U.S. alone, music based tourism constitutes approximately 17 percent of the tourism industry (Connell & Gibson, 2003), and music festivals in particular are more popular than ever, attracting millions of fans (Schwartz, 2013). However, despite its significance, music tourism is still not perceived as a defined segment within the tourism market, and

research exploring the dynamics of this burgeoning field is lacking (UK Music, 2011).

Likewise, while social media platforms have emerged as a dominant digital communications channel (Chappuis, Gaffey, & Parvizi, 2011), with 67 percent of all internet users using social media (Pew Research Center, 2012), little is known about how social media influences emotions and attachments to brands, and whether social media-based relationships lead to desired outcomes such as positive word of mouth. In the tourism sector in particular, tourism practitioners have received very little guidance for incorporating social media into their communications strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The purpose of this paper therefore was to examine how social media interactions with tourism brands, and specifically music festival brands, affect how consumers think and feel about those brands, and consequently how those interactions affect desired marketing outcomes. More specifically, the researchers sought to

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answer the following questions about brand–customer relationships: to what extent does social media interaction affect consumers' emotional attachment with festival brands?; and do stronger brand relationships, cultivated through social media interaction, enhance the willingness to recommend the brand? Thus the research makes a number of theoretical contributions. First, it explores whether existing customers who engage in brand-related social media have more favorable brand perceptions and behaviors than those who do not. Second, a conceptual model captures the relationships between social media use, emotions, brand perceptions, and word of mouth. Third, the study examines the roles that emotional attachment and brand relationship quality play in the context of social media use.

Although there are only a few studies on brand ownership and brand control related to festivals, [Mossberg and Getz \(2006\)](#) argue that “brand thinking” can be applied to festivals, as it can be applied to products, services, an organization, a person, a team or a symbol (p. 308). Based on a case study of 14 festivals and events, they concluded that festivals can be managed as brands. [d'Astous, Colbert, and d'Astous \(2006\)](#) concur, although they do propose that festival brands have distinctive characteristics, in that consumption is mainly social, and occurs within a limited period of time. In fact, [Addis and Holbrook \(2001\)](#) suggest that the hedonic nature of music festivals make them an ideal context to empirically test the influence of emotions on brand relationship quality, since the value of the experience hinges on the ability of the festival to engage one's subjectivity to arouse feelings or to provoke emotional reactions.

2. Music tourism

Music tourism involves individuals traveling to a place where they do not reside to either listen to live performances or to experience history related to the creation of or performance of music ([Campbell, 2011](#)). In the U.K. alone, music tourism generates approximately \$2 billion in spending and provides the equivalent of 19,700 full-time jobs. They include people like David Nye, of the Great British Sausage Company, who sells around 41 miles worth of sausages at music festivals around Britain each year and employs 20 students who host sausage-eating competitions to keep waiting customers happy ([Topping, 2011](#)).

Music festivals themselves are a key component of music tourism ([Haslam, 2009](#)), and have been around for hundreds of years. Most historians believe that they date back to Ancient Egypt in 4500 BC, consisting of religious ceremonies and political feasts with music and dancing ([Mintel, 2013](#)). Ancient Greece hosted its first known music festival, the Pythian Games, during the sixth century BC as a precursor to the Olympic Games, as well as holding competitions for music and poetry. In more modern musical history, the Monterey Pop Festival in the summer of 1967 is considered one of the most important landmarks for music festivals ([Campbell, 2011](#)). Occurring in June during the “Summer of Love”, this iconic moment in music history shaped a generation and influenced countless future artists. It was the coming out party for stars like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Otis Redding. A few years later, probably the most famous music festival of all time was staged – Woodstock in 1969 – which prompted a crowd of over 400,000 people to travel by any means necessary to a small town in New York for the festival.

The music festival sector has since grown to be a sizeable industry, and is one of the few sectors to have fared well in the economic downturn. Worldwide, there are more than 800 music festivals of various types in 57 countries ([Schwartz, 2013](#)). The industry is generally made up of independent operators and

entrepreneurs, but bigger umbrella groups like Live Nation, Music Festivals and Festival Republic are emerging.

Research examining the music festival sector tends to be dominated by economic impact studies. UK Music for example, commissioned a major study of the contribution of music festivals and major concerts to tourism in the UK ([UK Music, 2011](#)), and the Northern Ireland Tourism Board conducted a similar study in Northern Ireland in 2010 ([Northern Ireland Tourism Board, 2010](#)). But some researchers have looked beyond the immediate economic impacts. [Haslam \(2009\)](#) for example, comments that music festivals offer potential as vehicles for branding cities, towns and villages, as they can enhance a destination's image and identity, improving perceptions of the place and the people that live there. Others have studied the motivations of festival attendees. [Campbell \(2011\)](#) for instance, found a distinct connection between humans and music in the context of human development, religion, politics and sporting events, as well as the sense of place created by music festivals.

Few researchers have examined the promotion or marketing of music events, although [Rivero \(2009\)](#) found that organizers of music festivals in Spain do not aggressively promote their festivals from a touristic point of view – instead relying on positive word of mouth to build a loyal following. But we do know that social networks are key delivery channels for festivals and organizers owing to the large amount of information that can be provided through them, such as artist information and schedules, and general festival information, much of which is delivered for many months leading up to the event ([Mintel, 2013](#)). In a recent case study analysis of music festivals, [Hudson and Hudson \(2013\)](#) confirmed this, finding a relatively high degree of sophistication in the implementation of social media by music festival marketers. For example, the Bonnaroo festival in the U.S. used radio frequency identification (R.F.I.D.) technology to foster engagement with visitors, creating nearly 1.5 million impressions. They also successfully employed geo-location software, using Foursquare to reward fans with a unique festival experience. When the festival ended they encouraged visitors to continue the conversation, asking them to tag themselves in the picture where they camped.

But despite this relatively high level of sophistication in the employment of social media marketing by festivals, and a high adoption of social networks by music festival tourists ([Mintel, 2013](#)), the influence of social media on customer relationships and actual behavioral outcomes has not been explored. It has been suggested that a positive music festival experience combined with proactive social networking could help festival brands build long-term relationships with music fans ([Mintel, 2013](#)). But this hypothesis requires further investigation. The conceptual model presented in [Fig. 1](#) proposes a relationship between social media use, emotions, brand relationship quality and the behavioral outcome of customer willingness to recommend. Each component of the model will be discussed in turn, followed by specific hypotheses.

3. Social media interactions

Companies have generally embraced social media because of its potential for engagement and collaboration with consumers. Through social media, marketers can gain rich, unmediated consumer insights, faster than ever before, and can foster loyalty through networking. According to Facebook, the average user has 130 friends on the social network, and when people hear about a product or service from a friend, they become a customer at a 15 percent higher rate than when they find out about it through other means ([comScore, 2011](#)). The growth of social networking has been

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