Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLoK)

Title	From headliners to hangovers: Digital media communication in the British rock music festival experience
Type	Article
URL	https://clok.uclan.ac.uk/30655/
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797619885954
Date	2020
Citation	Brown, Alyssa E, Donne, Keith, Fallon, Paul and Sharpley, Richard Anthony john (2020) From headliners to hangovers: Digital media communication in the British rock music festival experience. Tourist Studies, 20 (1). pp. 75-95. ISSN 1468-7976
Creators	Brown, Alyssa E, Donne, Keith, Fallon, Paul and Sharpley, Richard Anthony john

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797619885954

For information about Research at UCLan please go to http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/

From Headliners to Hangovers: Digital Media Communication in the British Rock Music Festival Experience

Alyssa Brown, Keith Donne, Paul Fallon and Richard Sharpley

Abstract

Extant tourist experience literature focuses on 'live' space and time activity, whilst pre- and post-components are often neglected despite the opportunities offered by increasing use of digital media communication [DMC]. Focusing especially on the pre-festival experience but also addressing peri- and post- phases, this study examines the role of DMC in tourists' experiences at British rock music festivals. Interviews with festivalgoers revealed three core and inter-related themes: information, emotional response and communitas. Initial engagement with DMC enabled planning, generated feelings of anticipatory excitement and created a sense of communitas. Online activity reduced peri-festival but continued to enhance the live event experience, whilst the virtual communitas was extended at the post-festival phase.

Introduction

The creation of memorable experiences is a priority for many tourism organisations, especially those offering leisure experiences such as events and festivals in which participation is optional and more personal, and for which there is increasing competition (Gyimóthy and Larson, 2015. Hence, significant management interest exists as to how satisfying and memorable experiences are created, the factors involved in their creation and the implications of these for future consumer behaviour. This is very much the case with music festivals, a tourism sector which has blossomed recently (Hudson et al., 2015), along with other offers such as short-breaks and 'staycations'. Though a relatively new phenomenon, with many festivals originating in the 1960s and 1970s (Stone, 2009), music festivals now represent one of the best performing sectors of the leisure industry (Mintel, 2018). In the UK, where this study takes place, the economic value of the live music industry is currently estimated to be worth almost £2.5 million, and its value is growing (Mintel, 2018). According to UK Music (2017) there were 12.5 million music tourists in 2016, with 24% of UK adults having attended a music festival between 2016-2017 (Mintel, 2018). There is a similar story elsewhere. For example, in the USA it is estimated that 52% of the population attends a live music event every year (The Nielson Company, 2019).

Significant academic attention has also been paid to understanding the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of experiences. Whilst earlier studies explored, for example, distinctions between the 'technical' environment created by the service producer and the 'psychological' environment or 'the subjective personal reactions and feelings experienced by consumers when they consume a service' (Otto and Ritchie, 1996: 165), more recent work has considered tourist experiences within paradigms related to both 'co-creation' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) and 'journeys' (Lane, 2007). The latter is especially relevant in a world now dominated by digital media communication [DMC], as this has created platforms outside of the bounds of time and geography via which large numbers of people are able to express themselves (Langmia, Tyree and O'Brien, 2013). Social media is the commonly used term to describe collectively the numerous and diverse channels – including social sites (such as Facebook) and apps (for mobile devices) – which enable millions of users to create and share digital content or participate in social networking (Kingsnorth, 2019). These channels of DMC enable users to connect both in reciprocal (e.g. friend to friend) as well as parasocial, or one-sided (e.g. organisation to customer), interactions (Yuksel and Lacrecque, 2016).

Given the social, sensuous and hedonic nature of music festivals, the transcendent power of DMC represents a significant opportunity for the enhancement of festival experiences, especially for festival tourists [festivalgoers] (Yeoman, Robertson and Wheatley, 2015; Robertson et al., 2015). Specifically, Van Winkle, Mackay and Halfpenny (2018: 259) argue that 'ICT [information and communication technology] plays a key role in the festival experience through all stages from the pre-festival anticipation and planning through the return home and reflection' whilst recently, Mintel (2018) found that over half of UK adults shared content from a music event on social media. Yet although the role and influence of social media and DMC has been considered in the context of tourist experiences in general (e.g. Wang, Park and Fesenmaier, 2012; Wang, 2017), related research in the music festival context is more limited (Mackay et al., 2017). Therefore, using British rock music festivals as a case study, this paper addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring the influence of DMC on music tourists' experiences.

The music festivalgoers' experience: an overview

Given the multi-dimensional nature of experiences in general (Otto and Ritchie, 1996) and of music festivals in particular (Hudson et al., 2015, Cashman, 2017; Van Winkle et al., 2018), a clear framework is valuable for 'unpacking' the essence of the music festival experience. For the purposes of this paper, de Geus et al. (2016: 276) provide a useful contemporary conceptualisation of the event experience as:

> *an interaction between an individual and the event environment (both physical and social), modified by the level of engagement or involvement, involving multiple experiential elements and outputs (such as satisfaction, emotions, behaviours, cognition, memories and learning) that can happen at any point in the event journey.*

This highlights key elements of the experience, namely: the focus on the individual tourist; co-creation between stakeholders and servicescapes; open-endedness and multi-dimensionality; acknowledgement of 'soft' and 'hard' factors; and, recognition of components beyond 'time and space'. Furthermore, it suggests that music festivals offer high-involvement experiences where the intensity of these factors may differ to other events, since they offer opportunities for music tourists to 'feel part of the performance, more than mere spectators' (Packer and Ballantyne, 2011: 178). Though interrelated, these aspects of the festival experience are now reviewed separately in more detail.

Festival 'communitas'

Music festivals involve a range of stakeholders including performers, venue staff and managers, equipment suppliers, volunteers, promoters and sponsors. Hence, event experiences can be considered from numerous perspectives (Cashman, 2017). However, whilst the experiences of festival tourists in particular are pivotal to the success of music festivals, it is important to acknowledge that many engage with festivals as members of groups rather than alone. As Bowen and Daniels (2005: 161) argue, 'creating a fun and festive atmosphere that offers ample opportunity to socialize and have new and non-musical experiences' is equally as important as the music to attendees. Therefore, socialisation represents a major motivating factor and antecedent to satisfaction for individual and collective music festival tourists (Gelder and Robinson, 2009). Festivals foster collective social networks through the sharing and reinforcing of beliefs, values, identities, events, experiences and traditions (Quinn, 2006). Moreover, meaningful social connections can be developed, creating a temporary community (Picard and Robinson, 2009) or sense of 'communitas' (Turner, 1982) at festivals. 'Communitas' essentially represents a sense of camaraderie which develops between people from various walks of life who share a common experience (Turner, 1982), and is a phenomenon that occurs not only at music festivals. For example, Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2016)'s study identifies it at other performing arts festival contexts, noting in particular the development of 'festival friends', or friendships which exist solely within the festival space and time. However, festivals in particular offer the potential for the development of 'spontaneous, immediate, non-rational and shared experiences of unity' (Stone, 2009: 215). Laing and Mair (2015) attribute the sense of 'communitas' to the celebratory dimension of festivals, though acknowledge that not every festivalgoer may experience a festival at the same hedonic level.

The multi-dimensional nature of the music festival experience

de Geus et al. (2016) acknowledge the dynamic nature of the music festival that reflects the interactions between its components and its attendees. Consequently, related research typically seeks to identify specific components, often referred to as dimensions, factors and environments, of experiences. In an early study of tourism experiences, Otto and Ritchie (1996) identified four factors, namely 'hedonics' (relating to enjoyment and freshness); 'peace of mind' (comfort and safety); 'involvement' (engagement and participation); and

'recognition' (being treated respectfully). They found that the significance of these factors varied depending on the tourism context. For example, 'hedonics' was most important for tours/attractions whilst 'peace of mind' represented the most important for airlines and hotels. Packer and Ballantyne (2011: 178) identified four dimensions of the music festival experience: 'music'; 'festival' (celebration and fun); 'social' (connection and communitas); and 'separation' (disconnection from normality), noting that the music dimension is pivotal, providing the 'common ground upon which the other experiences were built'. In another study, Cashman (2017) gathered the views of music tourists during music festivals aboard cruise ships, identifying three dimensions which he categorised as 'live performances', 'interaction with fellow festivalgoers and musicians' and 'interaction with the constructed space of the cruise ship'. He summarises these as music, social and touristic environment factors, his findings overlapping with those of both Otto and Ritchie (1996) in terms of the technical and the physical dimensions, and Packer and Ballantyne (2011) in terms of the social dimension. Ballantyne, Ballantyne and Packer (2014) found that the social dimension was the best predictor of the psychological benefits gained by festival attendees. Collectively, these studies suggest that investigation of these broadly similar and context specific dimensions is fundamental to understanding experiences.

Both 'soft' and 'hard' elements of the experience are also acknowledged by de Geus et al. (2016), mirroring Otto and Ritchie's (1996) 'technical' and 'psychological' delineation. 'Hard' elements refer to, for example, festival content and programming, the use of technology and provision of facilities and information services. In contrast, soft elements include emotions such as the anticipation of attending (Packer and Ballantyne, 2011), the excitement of seeing a favourite performer, the joy of sharing time and space with like-minded but unfamiliar others (Stone, 2009; Gorman-Murray, 2009) and the sadness of going home after the festival has finished. In addition, music festivals also provide a voice and space in which people can express their collective and individual identity. For example, music tourists often identify themselves as 'outsiders' who either feel marginalised by society's dominant ideology or reject it in order to explore their own identity through music and socialising with their peers (Stone, 2009; Gorman-Murray, 2009). Indeed, Picard and Robinson (2009) believe the popularity of festivals reflects the desire of communities to re-assert their identities following 'cultural dislocation'; festivals have come to represent a place where people can 'find themselves' again in a fast-paced, media-driven society. Yet, while Packer and Ballantyne (2011) found that festivals have a positive effect on attendees' feelings about themselves, others and life in general, others point to negative experiences (Packer and

Ballantyne, 2011; Van Winkle et al., 2018) emanating from, possibly, poor performances or cancellations by artists, the behaviour of other attendees, technology and – especially in the UK - the weather. Interestingly, Packer and Ballantyne (2011) also suggest that attending too many festivals (i.e. 'festival overload') may detract from festival experience.

The music festival journey

Finally, de Geus et al.'s (2016) conceptualisation recognises that a festival represents a longer 'experience journey' than the 'fixed' time and space of the festival itself. This is a wider perspective than that proposed by others such as Johannson and Kociatkiewicz (2011: 11), who suggest that a festival is 'perceived as an easily marketable, aesthetic experience which is contained in time and space'. This wider conceptualisation of experience is also acknowledged in other contexts, from general consumer behaviour theory acknowledging pre-, peri- and post-consumption stages to Gretzel, Fesenmaier and O'Leary's (2006) 3-stage conceptualisation (anticipation, experience and reflection) of the travel process and Lane's (2007) even more detailed delineation of the visitor journey. The pre-, peri- and post-consumption stages are acknowledged by Packer and Ballantyne (2011: 178):

> *People come to a music festival with a sense of anticipation. They engage actively, and feel part of the performance …. Sharing the experience with others provides a sense of belonging and social integration, which can continue beyond the event itself. The end of the event then becomes the beginning of a new cycle of anticipation for the next event.*

The digital experience

A noticeable explicit omission from de Geus et al.'s (2016) conceptualisation is acknowledgement of the digital environment. Yeoman et al. (2015: 306) predict that the 'future of technology in events and festivals is an immensely exciting one', representing one of the three key areas for future industry discourses, whilst user-generated content (UGC) in particular epitomises the human desire to engage in both technology and communication (van Dijck, 2009: 41). Festival organisers employ a range of digital and mobile technology to inform and to engage and develop relationships with potential and actual festival tourists, yet typically for functional purposes, such as ticket purchasing or providing schedules and maps (Van Winkle et al., 2016), reflecting Schneider and Bowen's (1995) 'information gatekeeping' role of a service provider. Conversely, festivalgoers use technology to enhance

their experience, their mobile devices enabling them to perform the tasks they need and want to undertake; whilst habits can be formed in 'everyday' activities, festivals may provide more intense contexts for such activity (Van Winkle et al., 2018).

Mackay et al. (2017) emphasise the need to acknowledge the wider event journey to understand the festivalgoer digital experience. In their study, they investigate the nature, purpose and degree of social media tweets and posts on Twitter and Facebook before, during and after four festivals, identifying differential usage of platforms, content and engagement across the three timeframes. Specifically, posting activity for both platforms was highest during the festival and lowest post-festival. They found that Twitter was used most for promotional and organisational purposes prior to the festival, but once the festival had started photographs were dominant, indicating that the platform then became integral to actual experiences and activities. Mackay et al. (2017) suggest that the development of links together with hashtags reflect the forming of the festival community. Morey et al. (2016) note that some Glastonbury attendees upload photographs of festival flags they have created prior to the festival, indicating that photograph-based links can develop earlier in the pre-festival stage. Interestingly, whereas Laing and Mair (2015: 257) point to the 'somewhat fleeting' nature of the community and social inclusion that is developed at festivals, Marletta (2009) considers that it can be extended beyond the physical space and time of the music festival, possibly reflecting the increasing usage of social media which has encouraged more engagement and socialisation online. Consequently, music festival communities may continue to exist for longer periods, potentially creating, as Morey et al. (2016: 257) suggest, the 'year-round festivalgoer'.

Despite the significance of digital technology for tourists to both the gathering / sharing of information and the enrichment and to the construction of innovative hedonic experiences (Hudson et al., 2015; Van Winkle et al., 2016), there remains a paucity in research into this 'digital experience' within festival contexts (Van Winkle et al., 2018), although some studies have begun to explore the digital dimension. For example, Hudson et al. (2015) found that social media interaction develops a significant emotional bond between festivalgoers with the festival, whilst Van Winkle et al. (2016) explored mobile device use by attendees at six public community festivals in Canada across a three-year period. Applying Korn and Pine's (2011) Typology of Human Capability (or THC) to understand attendees' mobile device use at these festivals, their study confirmed the four THC experiences – sensing, performing, linking and organizing – based on individuals' usage of technology for connecting and/or doing individually or collectively as a group within the festival context.

Linking was identified as the most common experience. Linking enables interaction and connection with others, who may be known or previously unknown to the attendee, through speech, text or visuals, and can be in-person, immediate or delayed. Their study again emphasises the value in understanding the 'digital journey' of festivals. However, it excludes the post-festival phase and was not undertaken at music festivals, where the dynamics may be different, for example, the purchasing of tickets is not purely a functional activity but may include a sense of joy (and relief) when securing of ticket for a less accessible or more exclusive performance.

In short, for music festivals, the development of mobile technology clearly provides a potentially highly effective utility for product, experience and connectivity enhancement (Van Winkle et al., 2016). Equally, there may also be some unwelcome 'side effects', particularly at festivals designed to audiences seeking to escape from connectivity. As Van Winkle et al. (2018: 257) suggest, mobile technology can make it difficult to escape from the 'everyday':

> *when the habit of using a device triggers festival related (mobile device) use, then the experience will be enhanced, whereas the when the habit triggers non-festival-related use, the festival experience will suffer.*

Either way, there remains an evident gap in knowledge with regards to the influence of digital technology on the music festival tourist experience, a gap which this research seeks to address.

Methodology

Getz (2010) recommends the use of experiential methods to provide a deeper understanding of festival experiences. Given that the aim of this research was to explore how festival tourists use DMC during the visitor journey and what effect it has on their experience, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate 'to tease out some of the more subterranean beliefs and motivations' (Stewart, Smith and Nicholson, 2003: 214). As part of a larger and more comprehensive study, 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 124 festivalgoers on-site at three UK music festivals during 2015. It would have been valuable to include other tools – for example, Van Winkle and Bueddefeld (2016) combined interviews and personal meaning maps within a service dominant logic approach in their study of co-created festival experiences. However, given the nature of the rock music festival

context, including the threat of bad weather (rain), and of the audience, a more straightforward interview strategy was considered most expedient. The music festivals were all multi-day events and offered accommodation:

- HRH (Hard Rock Hell) United,12th -15th March 2015 at Haven Hafan y Mor Holiday Park, Wales.
- Download Festival,12th-14th June 2015 at Donnington Park, England.
- Leeds Festival, 28th-30th August 2015 at Bramham Park, England.

Conducting the interviews on-site at the music festivals allowed for conversations to flow, building up a connection between the interviewee and interviewer and allowing for probing for more information and further clarification in the exploration of the use of DMC during the experience. As such, the interviews were more 'active'. The festivals were selected through convenience sampling, the festival organisers having provided access and permission to conduct the research on site. Whilst only three festivals were used in this study, many of the research participants had previously attended a variety of other festivals which were acknowledged and utilised at the data analysis stage. Potential interviewees were approached on a convenience basis, particularly while they were relaxing away from any of the main stages so as not to interrupt their enjoyment of the music, and so the dialogue could be heard and recorded. The interviewer approached festivalgoers of all ages, gender and backgrounds, and only a small number refused to participate in the study. As the interviews were conducted as part of a larger study beyond the scope of this article, respondents were generally asked to discuss various aspects of their entire music festival experience, and then more specifically they were questioned about the role of DMC.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded and analysed. This included open and predetermined coding, specifically emerging and axial coding and content analysis. The qualitative data analysis software 'NVIVO' was used initially to import and code the data by one of the researchers but, for the purpose of this study, further analysis was then conducted manually by three of the researchers. The trustworthiness of the research was determined through this approach as it reduced researcher bias which established confirmability as findings were consistent amongst all researchers. The findings were also consistent at each festival, demonstrating transferability.

Presentation and discussion of results

The sample comprised slightly more male participants (55.6%) than females, and were between 18-59 years old, with the majority between the ages of 18-29 (58.1%). In analysing the data, three main themes emerged: the informational role played by DMC; how DMC stimulated emotional responses of anticipation and excitement; and the sense of communitas that was developed through DMC engagement. In addition, these three themes were most prevalent at the pre-festival phase, with DMC having little impact on the experience during the peri-festival and mainly contributing to the experience of communitas at the post-festival phase. The following discussion embraces all three phases but focuses primarily on the pre-festival phase.

Information

When interviewing festivalgoers about their wants and needs at the pre-festival stage of their experience, their responses primarily referred to the organisation and planning of their visit. Most frequently, they discussed the importance of receiving key information about what to expect at the festival, including the size and layout of the festival site, line-up announcements, updates and the programming and scheduling of music and other activities. This reflects Otto and Ritchie's (1996) technical environment of the service experience. Van Winkle et al. (2016) argue for the importance of such functional information from the festival organiser as information gatekeeper (Schneider and Bowen, 1995) and many respondents acknowledged the importance of accessing this information early on, to help start their own planning and preparation:

> *It more affects my planning… I like to check out the new bands so I like to be quite organised with what bands I want to see I like to do a bit of research and see what's going on.*

Some festivalgoers also highlighted that they liked to learn new information about bands and artists:

> *I think between booking your tickets and then the line-up, there's more festivals doing this thing, communication with people that have bought the tickets, where there is an educational thing on social media. They post more news about the acts that are playing, and it can be more educational, facts that you don't know.*

Although generally there was no discrepancy between respondents' attitudes in terms of the timing of receiving information, there was some difference in opinion of 'surprises'; some expected (Voss, 2003) and welcomed surprise information as an important aspect of the experience, whilst others reacted negatively to the uncertainty of the festival programme and sought peace of mind (Otto and Ritchie, 1996) for planning their festival experience:

> *Personally, I would rather just get all of the information at once in one go instead of being hassled throughout the year. And I like it a good few months before to prepare everything. I don't want any spam, like, go and check out this band and see what they're like. I just want to know is the map this, where everything is, this is the information. But that's just me.*

Some respondents also revealed concerns over insufficient information and inadequate timing or access to what they wanted to find out, the lack of information inducing feelings of frustration and annoyance. Leeds festival participants, for example, complained about having to pay in advance for lanyards which they could only access upon arrival at the festival to find out the stage times. This was a key concern, with many expressing a sense of unfairness in having to pay extra to find out information that they believed should be included within the cost of their ticket. Therefore, the absence of this key information had a negative impact on the festivalgoers' experience as it prevented them from preparing and organising their visit.

> *I find it really annoying that you have to pay for the schedule, why can't they just give you that. You have to pay a tenner for it!*

> *Years ago, you would get a printout before you go into the festival knowing what's going on when at what time. And you've already paid £100, and then you've got to pay another £5-£10 to find out what time someone's on, it's like, come on!*

It is clear, therefore, that information, updates, image and efficient delivery established festivalgoers' trust and faith in the festival, reassuring them and reducing any uncertainty or frustration they may have had about the festival (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Packer and Ballantyne, 2014; van Winkle et al., 2018). Some respondents elaborated further on the

different media through which they liked to receive information. Email was noted by only one person and three people identified the festival app as being helpful:

> *If they've got an app that shows what time things are on it helps, it helps planning the day.*

Using the festival's chat forum was also seen to be an important information resource by respondents, especially for seeking advice from other festivalgoers, which is similar to Wang et al's (2012) acknowledgement of problem-solving in tourism contexts:

> *...and the forum is helpful, you always get the answer you need. I appreciate what people say on the forum because there's a lot of people there with a lot more experience from coming to these festivals.*

Overall, the most popular method for garnering information was through social media, as many respondents indicated. For example:

> *...good social media is important. Talking about the things that are going to be there, announcing things that are going to happen; say if they said this is going to be the entertainment, just announcing them so you know when it's going to happen.*

> *So, it's really important for the organisers to be reachable through social media so you can contact them, and they can answer your questions. That's the most important thing for me.*

> *... the organisers are attached to a lot of the Facebook groups and if there is a question that is raised that people don't know the answer to they do jump in.*

> *...makes it feel more personal because of their social media presence.*

Yet, one respondent stated that there is an expectation of a social media presence, and that a lack of such presence is a dissatisfier:

> *...it's so common now and it's really annoying when you go to an event that doesn't have a social media presence.*

Discussions of what festivalgoers' value during the post-festival experience elicited similar findings to the pre-festival phase. In particular, finding out more details about the next festival, such as upcoming dates for line-up announcements or ticket prices, were important:

> *Emails leading up to the next festival to let you know about the line-up announcements. Emails now are so much easier because you can just read them on your phone.*

There was mixed opinion regarding giving feedback to the organiser. Although most people appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback, they were unlikely to bother to fill in a survey. Nevertheless, most agreed that requests for feedback from festival organisers led to a feeling that the festival cared about them:

> *The last one we went to sent me an email afterwards saying, we realise we made mistakes with this and this, sorry about that, if there's anything else you can suggest, you have the chance to give feedback. I quite like that. Even if they don't listen to it, it's the valuing, it makes me feel like they care.*

This reflects Otto and Ritchie's (1996) 'involvement' and 'recognition' factors. However, some respondents appreciated organisers inviting their ideas for next year's content, which would seem to represent an extension of these factors:

> *...because we talk about what we want in it for next year and it would be great if you knew that they were there looking at it so you've got a bit of a bit of security that you can do the things next year*

Finally, some respondents said they did not want any more contact with the festival after they had left the site, reflecting Laing and Mair's (2015) argument that tourists have heterogenous needs. This also contradicts Cashman's (2017) assertion that interacting with the constructed

space informs the festival experience (although Cashman's work was based on a cruise ship, a space which may have other important attributes):

> *I don't want to hear anything for a year, just leave us till next year.*
>
> *Just leave you with your own memories, don't pester you afterwards.*

Thus, as was found at the pre-festival stage, festivalgoers chose their own level of informational engagement with the festival. However, it is clear that, as Morey et al. (2016) suggest, social media engagement should still be available to festivalgoers. Therefore, it is recommended that festival organisers provide the available platforms but allow individual music tourists to manage their engagement themselves.

Emotional response

Digital media communication played an important pre-festival role in building an emotional response of anticipation and excitement in festivalgoers' psychological environment (Otto and Ritchie, 1996), or even being 'part of the performance' (Packer and Ballantyne, 2011). It also had some impact on maintaining those feelings during the event and continued post-festival, when festivalgoers reflected on the experience just past with others. The importance of the pre-festival phase was encapsulated well by one respondent:

> *I like to start getting involved before I get here.*

In the pre- phase, the organisers announcing acts online in advance of the event was important in building excitement (Stone, 2009):

> *I've got my ticket before the bands are announced, so my first stage of excitement is waiting until the first band's announced and then every announcement after that ... after that it's when they start to organise where the bands are going to play, what stages, etc.*

> *They put playlists up and things like that, gets you in the mood. I quite like that.*

This was extended by others to being excited about new acts, resonating with Korn and Pine's (2011) 'sensing' experience which is enhanced here by digital technology. For example:

> *I like it, the hype of the small bands. I like to discover new music that makes me excited and happy… so I like the discovery of the new artists beforehand.*

> *There could be a band that you haven't heard of perhaps that get announced later on… so it adds to the excitement really, I liked it this year when they've released bands later.*

A further important aspect for creating excitement was that these announcements were made over time, rather than all at once:

> *But for me as well a lot of the excitement comes from the fact that most festivals don't announce the line-up in one big go. I like, and I expect them to leak bands like drip feed them through… when they release bands every couple of months it builds your excitement… that's one of the most important parts in the build-up for me.*

A daily countdown announcement was typically made closer to the festival start date, adding even more excitement:

> *What I look forward to more every day is the actual countdown timer that they do where they say 'it's so many minutes, so many hours until the first bands that play' type of thing. …it's the countdown to actually being there that excites me the most.*

In addition, at the Download festival live footage of venue preparation was streamed to add to festivalgoers' anticipation as their first tangible interaction with the event (de Geus et al., 2016), such that they already become part of the performance (Packer and Ballantyne, 2011):

> *I quite like seeing random pictures of them setting it up, it gets me in the mood, stuff like that really…gets you in the mood.*

This extension of the festival experience before it has even begun contradicts Johannson and Kociatkiewicz's (2011) argument that such an event is an experience bounded in space and time; DMC clearly extends the space and time virtually. However, two festivalgoers noted that using DMC during the event was difficult primarily because of the poor mobile 'phone signal;

> *...and a lot of festivals have got apps at the moment, but they are all shitty, either it is just a JPEG of a Word document or you can only use this online and we are in a field in the middle of nowhere where the...[connection]...is rubbish...*

or battery technology:

> *...you always run out of battery halfway through the first day!*

These findings challenge Mackay et al.'s (2017) conclusion that social media is used continually throughout a music festival; in fact, difficulties with DMC can even enrage (Packer and Ballantyne, 2011; van Winkle et al., 2018). Alternatively, they may even make a subliminally positive contribution to the festival experience, as festivalgoers actually escape from connectivity to interact only with the physical environment (van Winkle et al., 2016).

Finally, the importance of building a sense of anticipation and excitement experienced through DMC was summarised well by one festivalgoer:

> *Building up that blows so it's not just flat until you get here, but like, builds up.*

It is clear, then, that using social media to generate anticipation and excitement at the pre-festival stage should be an important aspect of a festival organiser's planning as an impresario (Schneider and Bowen, 1995). However, it was evident too from the data that the pre-festival phase is inherently intangible with very little physical content and has the potential to create uncertainty and anxiety in the festivalgoer. One participant stated:

> *...sometimes we're a bit worried that we've actually got the ticket until you get that email saying confirmation of your booking, so that's very important.*

As a specific example of creating concerns, the Download festival announced the introduction of a cashless system only few weeks before the festival. Whilst there was a mixed response to the system itself, most participants commented that introducing this at a late stage created some anxiety for them:

> *The trust in the festival has been a little bit dented with the cashless system being introduced after they distributed the tickets. That is a little trust issue with me because that was a bit naughty, because it caused a lot of anxiety and it raised a lot of questions as well.*

Therefore, organisers must ensure that they also provide reassurance during this Pre-festival phase so that in addition to being excited, festivalgoers are confident they will 'perform' (Korn and Pine, 2011) at the event, rather than being anxious or uncertain.

Communitas

The third theme to emerge regarding the online music festival tourist experience was that of deep and meaningful parasocial interactions (Yuksel and Labrecque, 2016), networks (Quinn, 2006), linking (Korn and Pine, 2011) and communitas (Turner, 1982; Laing and Mair, 2015). Examining the festivalgoers' online experience across the pre-, peri- and post- phases highlighted how building an online community developed and its importance to the overall festival experience.

In the pre-festival phase, communitas was co-created (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) in a potentially tripartite network of engagement between a festivalgoer, other festivalgoers and the organiser, in any combination. This was typically initiated through seeking information but then developed as an on-going dialogue between any member of the online community. Linking the informational dimension, many attendees highlighted the social importance of discussing their impending festival experience with other festivalgoers, supporting van Dijck's (2009) argument of the importance of user-generated content (UGC) to communicate through technology. Download festivalgoers, for example, referred frequently to the support and usefulness of the fan forum and Facebook groups that enabled them to engage with other festivalgoers and to be members of the online community. Alternatively, Leeds festivalgoers discussed joining small online groups or requesting and wanting more access to communicate and engage with others before the festival:

It could be quite good if they did something where you could do advice for new people from people that have been the year before, for people that haven't been before or, if it's abroad or something like that, the best ways to get there, best places to stay and things like that, that you could just ask people that had already done it before.

The co-creation of experience was clearly expressed as an important aspect from the very beginning of the festivalgoers' journey; that is, the exchange of information between the festival organiser and festivalgoer, and between festivalgoers, building excitement and anticipation before travelling to the festival, is of paramount importance. A virtual, co-created festival space prior to arriving at the physical venue was a key element of the experience, reflecting Marletta's (2009) assertion of the festival extending beyond its temporally defined physical space.

The use of social media was an experiential element that appeared to have the most influence on the festivalgoer; providing information, creating an emotional response and building communitas. It was not just the importance of medium use, but also the general feel and nature of engagement that added value and increased online engagement (Hudson et al., 2015). Download festivalgoers, in particular, noted the light-hearted nature of the Download Twitter account, in that they used the Download Dog 'mascot' as a character or influencer to engage with attendees on a less formal platform whilst the 'official' festival Twitter account was accessible, available and interactive all-year-round. Respondents identified the importance of social media platforms being kept 'up to date' all year round, and also the reassurance they felt by having this accessibility to communicate directly with festival organisers. For example:

Yes, I love Download Twitter. I love the fact that they are on there and available all year just tweeting about various stuff and it's quite light-hearted whereas I think for example what they do with Comicon when they tweet it's very serious like 'this is what's going to happen here'. It's all information, it's all very serious, whereas Download try to make it a bit more uplifting and exciting in the language they use.

The Download dog has its own twitter…they're quite humorous and you can interact with them and the Download dog takes selfies with a policeman.

The language and image communicated through social media emerged from the interviews as something that festivalgoers valued in relation to their social identity, especially for those attending Download festival. Specifically, respondents indicated that they felt the tweets, posts and content was reflective of their own values, interests and self-perceptions, in line with Quinn (2006). The festival image was something festivalgoers felt that they could relate to closely and enhanced a connection between themselves and the festival. This connectivity and familiarity promoted a higher level of engagement between brand and tourist. This concurs with work by Anderton (2011) and Gelder and Robinson (2009), in which reference is made to the importance of 'similar mindsets' and 'likeminded' nature of the collective festivalgoer community, particularly at rock and metal festivals. Further, the findings reflect Leender's (2010) assertion that the use of language and brand image is an important aspect which festival organisers should invest in and manage to enhance tourist experiences. This is, therefore, an important aspect of the pre-festival experience which contributes to building festivalgoers' expectations and interest in the festival and preparing them to the next phase of their experience when they arrive on site.

Consistent with previous studies by Rihova et al. (2015) and Van Winkle et al. (2016), these results demonstrate the importance of shared experiences and co-creation in the festival experience, albeit in the pre-festival phase. In addition, it draws on Bowen and Daniels (2005) and Hudson et al.'s (2015) argument that festivalgoers like to socialise and seek new, non-musical experiences.

The research revealed that the online experience occurred least during the festival itself, probably as festivalgoers immersed themselves into the reality of the festival. However, it remains an element that can enhance the experiences. They could, for example, go online (if their devices are charged and they access to the internet) to message and find their friends; they could tweet and engage with the festival using hashtags, posting photos that have been used to share on big screens around the festival stages. Whilst evidence of online communitas during the festival was, perhaps inevitably less prevalent in the peri-festival stage, as communitas was experienced 'offline', it did continue to occur online during the festival.

Most respondents commented on the importance of re-living their experience by reminiscing through videos, photos and telling stories with friends for a nostalgic experience (Tynan and McKechnie, 2008). One Leeds festival participant actually complained about the lack of access to photos on social media after the festival and wished to be able to see more of these, indicating that they were looking to develop or maintain links after the festival

(MacKay et al., 2017). This also reflects a negative aspect of de Geus' et al. (2016) dynamic relationship between an event and attendees:

> *…it would be good if they just stuck up a full page of official photos that people have taken, they have a Facebook page but last time I checked it there was nothing on it.*

Contrary to this, not all festivalgoers re-lived their experiences through all available platforms. Some preferred watching highlights on TV, whilst others preferred watching their own recorded videos. Many enjoyed looking at official photos released on the Festival website, whilst others liked to check the festival's hashtags on social media to look at other people's photos. Generally, festivalgoers enjoyed listening to the songs that they had heard at the festival, whether the original recording or the festival recorded version. Overall, it was clear that most festivalgoers valued their memories and continued their festival experience all year-round (Morey et al., 2016) by extending the 'journey' (Lane, 2007), as Yeoman et al. (2015), Robertson et al. (2015) and van Winkle et al. (2018) recommend:

> *I like, especially on social media, the fact that… and I expect the festival to post videos and put pictures up so that you can relive it, because you do have a post-Festival hangover. I always get that, and I just wish I was back there and it's great looking back and seeing pictures and be able to watch my favourite bands.*

However, when asked directly about re-living their experience, some believed that this was unachievable. Instead, it was suggested by some respondents that engagement with photos, videos, social media and music after the festival was not 're-living' the experience:

> *I don't think that you can though, it's never the same.*

This respondent continued by saying that they enjoyed seeing 'behind the scenes' recordings and interviews with the artists following the festival, and that these were 'new' experiences as these were not accessed during the festival, supporting Korn and Pine's (2011) sensing dimension, and in this case after the event. Therefore, the post-festival experience should be recognised as an opportunity for festivalgoers to continue their experience (Morey et al., 2016), adding more value.

Respondents also discussed the importance of continuing to communicate with other festivalgoers online after the festival, reflecting Yuksel and Labrecque's (2016) parasocial interactions:

It's good to go on Facebook and then see other people that you might not have met, but you like the photos and comments and then have things that you can talk about together.

Finally, reflecting the results from the pre-festival phase, it can be concluded that festivalgoers continue to co-create their community experience outside of the physical festival site. This research, therefore, reveals that festival tourist experiences continue through the post-festival phase in which importance is placed on re-living and enhancing the festival experience. Whether this was achieved through other people, online platforms or engagement with the festival did not matter, as festivalgoers managed their individual preferences themselves.

Further discussion

Overall, the findings of this research support Yeoman et al.'s (2015) claim that the future of technology at festivals is exciting, and demonstrate that DMC contributed three important elements to the music festival tourist experience.

First, DMC was informational. As part of festivalgoers' participation in the pre-festival phase, sourcing information from DMC was fundamental to the attendees' organisation, planning and preparation, relating to the festival site and layout (map), entertainment and line-up, programming and scheduling, and other festival updates. Festivalgoers expected this information to be provided for free, in plenty of time before the festival, to avoid uncertainty and anxiety over their impending experience. Generally, festival information was sought most often from social media and chat forums, where the interactive, two-way communication with the festival organisers and other festivalgoers was preferred. Only a few people mentioned using email or festival mobile applications.

Second, DMC stimulated festival tourists' emotional responses of anticipation and excitement, or indeed, anxiety and frustration if information was lacking. Engaging with the festival online, specifically before the event, resulted in strong emotional responses from interviewees, as they 'participated' before the festival began. Thus, their experience started some time before their arrival at the festival site. Anticipation and excitement primarily

resulted from the announcement of bands and artists that would be playing at the festival, watching the physical creation of the festival site, and through unexpected features and 'surprises'. The 'build up' to the festival was often noted through a 'countdown' to the event, and 'drip-feeding' information. Post-festival use of DMC also enabled festivalgoers to source new information and extend their experiences, or reminisce.

Third, a sense of virtual communitas was created. The online pre-festival experience was co-created through UGC between festivalgoers themselves and with festival organisers and other stakeholders. Social media and chat forums were the main platforms for creating relationships and communicating with others about the festival and was suggested to influence participants' social identity. This typically occurred when seeking key information and recommendations about the upcoming festival. Where online festival communitas began during the pre-festival phase, it appeared that this also continued offline during the festival when festivalgoers were immersed in the actual, lived festival experience. However, after the festival, communitas continued through sharing images, videos and content from the event with others on social media. For some, this allowed them to re-live their festival experience whilst for others, it was source of new information from reading other people's stories. Thus, in the post-festival phase, DMC is used to extend the festival experience online, with potentially significant future impact on festivalgoers' extended experience. It extends Cashman's (2017) importance dimension to both the constructed and virtual space.

These three experiential elements resulting from DMC engagement are illustrated in Figure 1, where each inter-relates and contributes to tourists' extended music festival experience beyond its physical incarnation, potentially year-round until the next festival occurs.

Figure 1: Rock festivals' unsung experiential nodes of Digital Media Communication

Information

The DMC Experience at UK
Rock Music Festivals

Communitas

Emotional Response
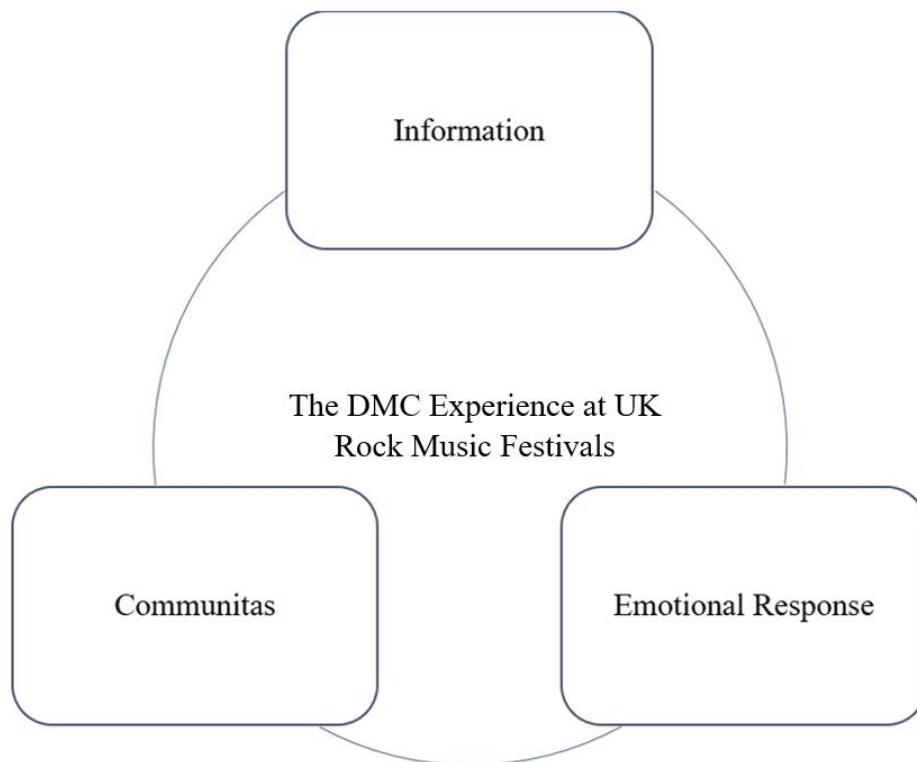
In addition to the three attributes, engagement with DMC was more prevalent in the pre-festival phase of the music festival tourists' journey, and least during the event based on findings here, contradicting Morey et al. (2016) study. This research found that using DMC during the festival was challenging due to battery life and internet access, and as such was not utilised. Post-festival, there was a division of respondents' preference/opinion to continue their festival experience online after the event. However, DMC is still important during and after the festival, as previous studies have acknowledged it still has an impact on the festival experience (whether positively or negatively) (Morey et al., 2016; Van Winkle et al., 2016; Van Winkle et al., 2018). The model in Figure 1 is therefore applicable at each of the pre-, peri- and post-festival phases, but with different emphases on the elements in the different phases.

Conclusions

This paper set out to explore the use of DMC at UK rock festivals. Specifically, it aimed to identify how music festival tourists use 'digital media communication' during the tourist journey and what effect it has on their experience. Through qualitative research it was

revealed that DMC has an initial, functional use for information-gathering and planning, which is linked to emotional responses of anticipation and excitement that build the festival experience, or anxiety and frustration if information was lacking. Also, a virtual festival community develops through DMC engagement, creating an experience of communitas for all who engage in this way. Adding a temporal dimension, it was found that most DMC activity occurs pre-festival, and least during the event. The outcome from this research is a conceptual model to illustrate the relationship between these three experiential aspects of DMC usage.

This work provides a theoretical and practical contribution to the current and potential role of DMC in music festival tourists' experiences. Within the extant literature, conceptualising the festivalgoer experience is often limited to the live event and neglects the pre- and post- experience (Voorhees et al., 2017). There is also a failure to acknowledge any virtual attributes, such as the impact of DMC on the attendee; therefore, insights into the pre-festival phase of the experience are developed and inform music festival tourism marketing. The use of social media and online platforms has been shown to have a critical impact on festivalgoers – both in positive and negative ways – and, as such, the outcomes of this research may provide marketing professionals with valuable insights towards branding and communication strategies, together with a need to actively curate, or react regularly, to the festival's digital community, in addition to managing the live festival experience. This impact should also be noted by marketers of other leisure experiences such as tourism and hospitality. However the significance of the three dimensions may not be the same. For example, Wang et al's (2012) study suggests that more informational content plays a greater role in tourism contexts, and therefore the 'communitas' dimension may not be as significant given the more individual and less compact nature of many travel experiences.

As the research was conducted on-site at the festivals, it is acknowledged that the timing of data collection may have affected the results. At the same time, this research is limited to three rock festivals in the UK. Hence, further research should be undertaken on the role of DMC at other types of music festivals in the pre-, peri- and post-festival phases, not only in the UK but also in other countries. More research is also recommended on the types of DMC (after Wang et al, 2012) used in each phase, to provide a deeper understanding of the festival tourist experience, and provide insights for festival organisers to improve the strategic management of their music festival, in both the real and virtual medium.

References

Anderton C (2011) Music festival sponsorship: between commerce and carnival. *Arts Marketing: An International Journal* 1(2): 145-158.

Ballantyne J, Ballantyne R and Packer J (2014) Designing and managing music festival experiences to enhance attendees' psychological and social benefits. *Musicae Scientiae* 18(1), 65–83.

Bowen HE and Daniels MJ (2005) Does the music matter? Motivations for attending a music festival. *Event Management* 9(3): 155-164.

Cashman D (2017) 'The most atypical experience of my life': The experience of popular music festivals. *Tourist Studies* 17(3): 245-262.

De Geus SD, Richards G and Toepoel V (2016) Conceptualisation and operationalisation of event and festival experiences: creation of an event experience scale. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 16(3): 274-296.

Gelder G and Robinson P (2009) A critical comparative study of visitor motivations for attending music festivals: a case study of Glastonbury and V Festival. *Event Management* 13(3): 181-196.

Getz D (2010) The nature and scope of festival studies. *International Journal of Event Management Research* 5(1): 1-47.

Gorman-Murray A (2009) Intimate mobilities: Emotional embodiment and queer migration. *Social and Cultural Geography* 10(4): 441-460.

Gretzel U, Fesenmaier DR and O'Leary JT (2006) The Transformation of Consumer Behavior. In: Buhalis D and Costa C (eds) *Tourism Business Frontier*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier, pp. 9-18.

Van Winkle CM, MacKay K and Halpenny E (2018) Information and communication technology and the festival experience. In: Mair J (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals.* New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 254-262.

Gyimóthy S and Larson M (2015) Social media cocreation strategies: the 3Cs. *Event Management* 19(3): 331-348.

Hudson S, Roth MS, Madden TJ and Hudson R (2015) The effects of social media on emotions, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth: An empirical study of music festival attendees. *Tourism Management* 47: 68-76.

Kingsnorth S (2019) *Digital Marketing Strategy – An Integrated Approach to On-line Marketing*. London, UK: Kogan Page Ltd.

Korn KC and Pine BJ (2011) The Typology of Human Capability: a new guide to rethinking the potential for digital experience offerings. *Strategy & Leadership* 39(4): 35-40.

Laing J and Mair J (2015) Music festivals and social inclusion–the festival organizers' perspective. *Leisure Sciences* 37(3): 252-268.

Lane M (2007) The Visitor Journey: the new road to success. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 19(3): 248-254.

Langmia K, Tyree T and O'Brien P (2013) *Social Media: Pedagogy and Practice*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Leenders MA (2010) The relative importance of the brand of music festivals: a customer equity perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 18(4): 291-301.

Mackay K, Barbe D, Van Winkle CM and Halpenny E (2017) Social media activity in a festival context: temporal and content analysis. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 29 (2): 669-689.

Marletta D (2009) Hybrid communities to digital arts festivals: From online discussions to offline gatherings. In: Riha D and Maj A (eds) *The Real and the Virtual: Critical Issues in Cybercultures*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, pp. 25-34.

Mintel (2018) Music Concerts and Festivals - UK - August 2018 [online]. Available from: http://academic.mintel.com [Accessed: 30/05/2019].

Morey Y, Bengry-Howell A, Griffin C, Szmigin I and Riley S (2016) Festivals 2.0: Consuming, Producing and Participating in the Extended Festival Experience. In: Taylor J (eds) *The Festivalization of Culture*. Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 251-268.

Otto JE and Ritchie JB (1996) The service experience in tourism. *Tourism Management* 17(3): 165-174.

Packer J and Ballantyne J (2011) The impact of music festival attendance on young people's psychological and social well-being. *Psychology of Music* 39(2) :164–181.

Picard D and Robinson M (2006) *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds*. London: Channel view publications.

Prahalad CK and Ramaswamy V (2004) Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 18(3): 5-14.

Quinn B (2006) Problematising 'festival tourism': Arts festivals and sustainable development in Ireland. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 14(3): 288-306.

Rihova I, Buhalis D, Moital M and Gouthro M (2015) Conceptualising customer- to- customer value co- creation in tourism. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 17(4): 356-363.

Robertson M, Yeoman I, Smith KA and McMahon-Beattie U (2015) Technology, society, and visioning the future of music festivals. *Event Management* 19(4): 567-587.

Schneider B and Bowen DE (1995) *Winning the Service Game.* Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press.

Stewart B, Smith A and Nicholson M (2003) Sport consumer typologies: A critical review. *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 12(4): 206-216.

Stone C (2009) The British pop music festival phenomenon. In: Ali-Knight J, Fyall A, Robertson M and Ladkin A (eds) *International Perspectives of Festivals and Events.* London: Elsevier, pp. 205-224.

The Nielson Company (2019) US Music Mid-Year Report 2019 [online]. Available at https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2019/u-s-music-mid-year-report-2019/ [Accessed: 14/08/2019].

Turner V (1982) *Celebration, Studies in Festivity and Ritual*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Tynan C and McKechnie S (2008) Experience Marketing: A Review and Reassessment. *Journal of Marketing Management* 25(5/6): 501-517.

UK Music (2017) Measuring Music 2017 Report [online]. Available from: https://www.ukmusic.org/research/measuring-music-2017/ [Accessed: 30/05/2019].

Van Dijck J (2009) Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society* 31(1): 41–58.

Van Winkle CM and Bueddefeld J (2016) Service dominant logic and the festival experience. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 7(3): 237-254.

Van Winkle CM, Cairns A, MacKay K and Halpenny E (2016) Mobile device use at festivals: opportunities for value creation. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* 7(3): 201-218.

Van Winkle CM, MacKay K and Halpenny E (2018) Information and communication technology and the festival experience. In: Mair J (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals.* New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 254-262.

Voorhees C, Fombelle P, Gregoire Y, Bone S, Gustafsson A, Sousa R and Walkowiak T (2017) Service encounters, experiences and the customer journey: Defining the field and a call to expand our lens. *Journal of Business Research* 79(October): 269-280.

Voss C (2003) *The Experience Profit Cycle A Research Report.* Report, Centre for Operations and Technology Management, London Business School.

Wang L (2017) Co-construction of the tourist experience in social networking sites: Two forms of authenticity intertwined. *Tourist Studies* 17(4): 388-405.

Wang D, Park S and Fesenmaier D (2012) The role of smartphones in mediating the touristic experience. *Journal of Travel Research* 51(4): 371-387.

Yeoman I, Robertson M and Wheatley C (2015) Cognitive map(s) of event and festival futures. In: Yeoman I, Robertson M, McMahon-Beattie, U, Backer E and Smith KA (eds.) *The future of events and festivals.* Oxon, UK: Routledge, pp.271–313.

Yuksel M and Labrecque LI (2016) 'Digital buddies': parasocial interactions in social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* 10(4): 305-320.