# Social media and Festival Experience

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# Abstract

In the past two years we have done research on the visitor experience of music festivals. We conducted several surveys asking festival visitors for demographic variables, taste in music, their motivation for visiting festivals, mentalities and the evaluation of the festival. We also asked for the use of social media before, after and during the festival. Results show that visitors using social media have a significantly different festival experience from user that do not use social media before, during or after the festival. Results on difference in festival satisfaction are mixed.

# Introduction

The study of festivals and their visitors is interesting for several reasons. One is that due to the increase in the number of festivals there is severe competition among festivals for visitors, which increases the relevance of insight into the motivation, experience and satisfaction of festival visitors. These insights help festival organizers adapt their festival to the intended audience and subgroups, hopefully leading to better service and increasing visitor loyalty.

A second reason for studying festivals is that their increasing use of new media to promote the festival and to communicate with their visitors. Some festivals use a refined cross media strategy, not only for marketing upfront but also to broadcast the festival proceedings on a variety of platforms aimed at motivating the audience to participate. Apart from many kinds of print media (posters, flyers), festivals use websites to interact with the audience, radio, television, or online channels, to broadcast live performances, and mobile applications to inform the public about upcoming activities or for routing to a specific place. Social media like Twitter, Facebook and Foursquare add interesting new components to this already complex mix of communication, marketing and media. An important part of public relations for a festival is mouth-to-mouth where social media might have a significant influence on the target audience. Moreover, apart from usage as a communication channel from festival organizer to its visitors, social media are also used as a communication channel among visitors themselves. Since communication changes perception, social media might well be changing the experience of the festival itself.

We did a survey at several festivals asking festival visitors for demographic variables, taste in music, motivations to visit festivals, psychological factors corresponding to the “big five” personality traits, and the evaluation of the festival. We also asked for the use of social media before, after and during the festival, and can thus compare differences in social media use with experience and satisfaction of the festival.

The organization of this paper is as follows: in section 1 we discuss related work in particular with respect to the motivations of festival visits. In section 2 we describe the two festivals reported on in this paper. In section 3 we describe our research methods and analysis. The results are presented in section 4, which we discuss in section 5. We end with a conclusion.

# Related work

The term festival can be widely interpreted and applied to many events. Although a shared definition is hard to come by, almost everyone agrees that recurring characteristics of festivals are as follows: festivals are bound to a specific location and limited timespan, are organized with a specific goal in mind, and are offering an unique experience (“you had to be there”), and/or are comprising activities ‘out of the ordinary’ like dancing, dressing up and staged performances that *suspend* daily reality in some way. This definition is in line with the one from Falassi (Giorgi, Sassatelli & Delanty (2011, p. 108) see also Gertz (2007)):

“A periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, people participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview. Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognizes as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festival celebrates.”

We consider music festivals as a specific subset of festivals covered by this definition in which musical performances are prominent.

People’s motivation to visit festivals has been researched in some depth, often in connection to tourism where questions such as why people go on holiday, or how they decide on a holiday destination are prominent. In this setting, festivals are seen as a way to make a holiday destination more attractive. See Van Vliet (2011) for an overview of studies and motivational factors found in these studies One earlier study on festival motivations is the study of Crompton & McKay (1977). They come with seven basic motivations for festival visits: *Novelty*, the desire to have new experiences that are exciting, adventurous and unexpected, and lift boredom; *Socialization*, the desire to interact with people in a group; *Prestige/Status*, the desire to gain status; *Rest & Relaxation*, the desire to mentally and physically get rid of the stress of daily life and recharge the battery; *Educational value / Intellectual enrichment*, the desire to acquire knowledge and widen the intellectual horizon; *Enhancing kinship and Relations / Family togetherness*, the desire to be together with family and friends and strengthen relationships, and *Regression*, the desire to behave in the unrestricted way of youth and children.

Crompton & McKay (1997) developed a questionnaire for these different types of motivations and did a survey at the festival Fiesta in San Antonio, Texas. This is a large ten-day festival where all sorts of events take place. Analyzing almost 1500 questionnaires, they finally distinguished six different factors on the basis of 26 items, to wit: *Novelty/regression* *to youth,* the possibility to have experiences out of the bounds of cultural convention; *cultural exploration*, educational value and intellectual enrichment; *recovering equilibrium* the possibility to relax and rest from daily stress; *known group interaction,* socialization with friends and family, *external interaction / socialization*, socialization with unknown people, and *gregariousness*, the desire to not visit a festival alone. Two factors that had earlier been found by Crompton, *Prestige/Status* and *Enhancing kinship and relations* were not found, possibly because they apply more to holiday motivations. Other research does mention the importance of a factor *Family togetherness.*  In a further review of more than 20 specific studies on festival motivations, the motivations found in the study of Crompton & McKay are confirmed again and again, although sometimes using different wording (e.g. *Escape* instead of *Recover Equilibrium*) (cf. Van Vliet (2011) and Van Vliet et al. (2012)).

Motivations for social media use are discussed in Shao (2009). He finds that people use social media for information, entertainment and mood management. According to a study by Ten Tije (2008) this also applies to the use of social media around festivals. This study shows that visitors are positive towards the use of social media and appreciate both information and entertainment. Furthermore the audience seems to be positive on personalization of information but does not see much benefits in interaction before or after the festival occurs.

Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) did a study on the relation between personality traits and music preferences. Their study uses fourteen different styles of music each of which can be scored on a 5 point scale. To the 14 scores they then apply apply factor analysis, and they identify the leading four factors as Reflective & Complex, Intense & Rebellious, Upbeat & Conventional and Energetic & Rhythmic. They claim these correspond to personality types and allow to characterize an audience psychologically. The music styles in the original study are strongly rooted in the American popular music tradition.

# Description of the festivals

We interviewed visitors for their festival experience, attitude and social media use at the Dutch festivals “Appelpop” and “de Beschaving”. The festivals differ significantly in character and the audience they attract.

* Appelpop in Tiel is one of the largest free festivals in the Netherlands attracting about 150.000 visitors over 2 days, mostly from the Betuwe and Utrecht Region with a significant minority from Brabant. It aims to be a accessible and enjoyable event for the wider region. It has wide variety in the line-up: from Dutch pop artists, to mainstream pop music and new bands from the region. Apart from the music performances there is a festival market and a corner for children.
* De Beschaving in Utrecht is a midsize festival aimed at a cosmopolitan, higher educated audience from all over the country, attracting 5000 to 7000 visitors. It aims to be a mixture of higher and lower culture and a platform for science education in a popular setting. It combines alternative pop, rock, dance and a side program with theatre, street performances, art and lectures on scientific findings and insights. The festival is located at the Botanical Gardens in the Utrecht University campus, a park-like and fragile environment.

# Survey

We developed a questionnaire for surveying the experience of attending a festival that we used repeatedly with only minor changes that were related to wording and small changes that asked for particular elements of the festival that we put in as a courtesy to the festival organizers. At “Appelpop” we interviewed 282 visitors while at “de Beschaving” we interviewed 339 visitors, of which 153 were interviewed at the entrance and 186 at the festival terrain.

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on a questionnaire by Crompton and McKay (1997). The questionnaire is build up from different modules to interview on the demographics and motivations of the visitor, how he or she perceived the festival, his or her satisfaction and media use. We further asked for preferences in music styles following the classification of music styles by Rentfrow and Gosling (2003). We somewhat adapted these music styles to the Dutch situation e.g. the category Dutch Rock is not contained in their classification for obvious reasons. We further used a collection of questions developed for research in “mentality”, which we never validated but which we later realized are much the same as questions for the “Big Five”personality traits, e.g. following the short 10 item list of Gosling Rentfrow Swann Jr. (2003). In more detail the questionnaire is partitioned in the following modules.

1. sex, year of birth, first 4 numbers of the zip-code, educational background, frequency of festival attendance, and frequency of visits of previous versions of the festival.
2. Motivations on a five point Likert scale: 11 items referring to possible motivations of escape, socialization/family togetherness and novelty/learning.
3. Social media use, before, during and after the event and usage of twitter, profile sites (Facebook, Hyves, etc.), photo sharing sites (Flickr, Picasa etc.) and video sites (You Tube, Vimeo etc.)
4. Awareness of festival presence in media, flyers, newspapers, magazines, posters, radio, television, other events, mouth to mouth, and Internet (specific questions varies slightly between festivals).
5. Music preference on a 5 point rating scale asking for classical music, blues, evergreens, dance/electronics, folk, rap/hip hop, soul funk, Dutch language music, alternative, Jazz, Rock, Pop, and Heavy Metal (specific styles vary slightly between festivals)
6. “Mentality” on a five point Likert scale, asking for the importance of feeling of safety, considerateness towards others, being a pioneer, sticking to rules, having friends.
7. Satisfaction with the festival on 10 point rating scale asking for the social atmosphere, personal enjoyment, quality of sound, catering and decoration, festival program, and overall rating of the festival.

Each of the modules were layed-out to so as to make it easy to fill in the questionnaires and to make it clear that the questions belonged together.

## Surveying

At the festivals, researchers of the Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and instructed students selected respondents on an ad hoc basis. This may have caused a bias for easily approachable respondents, in particular students. Interviewers walked around with pens, asking visitors to fill in the paper questionnaire. Respondents filled in the questionnaire themselves, getting explanation from interviewers when asked for help. A small number of people preferred not to fill in the questionnaire. At each festival the researchers indicated the importance of the research, how much time it would take to fill in the questionnaire and thanked the respondents for their effort afterwards.

At “de Beschaving” a total of 339 visitors were interviewed in two batches. A first batch of 153 was interviewed at the entrance before they had visited the festival, while 186 were interviewed at the festival terrain itself. Researchers and students were dressed in white lab coats as a playful indication of scientific rather than market research being carried out, and to indicate that the research was part of the science track of the festival itself. Most questionnaires were filled in between six and eight ‘o clock in the evening to make sure most visitors had experienced enough of the festival. The majority of questionnaires were filled out at the food spots because it t was easier to make people fill in the questionnaires when people sat down and eat.

At Appelpop we interviewed 282 visitors, mostly using the food spots and the rest and relaxation areas in between the two main stages. Interviews were taken both the first and the second day of the festival. The first day interviews were taken from eight o’ clock till ten o’clock in the evening, one hour after the start of the first act. On the second day interviews were taken from three o’clock till seven o’clock, starting two hours after the first act on the program.

# Methods

To test whether a distinction can be observed between the motivational factors of festival visitor, we divided the respondents in two groups: social media users and non users. We then tested the null hypothesis that the groups of social media users and non social-media users were indistinguishable on their score for motivational factors by using a two-sided t-test for differences in the mean of the scores for the different questions. We tested both under the assumption that there is a difference and that there is no difference in variance, but in practice this made very little difference for the significance of the statements and no difference for the conclusion. Since we asked for social media use before, after and during the festival and we had asked for four different social media usage this gave us 12 variations of the same setup. Here we only report on the differences between the groups that have used any form of social media at before during or after the festival. We likewise tested the null hypothesis that user satisfaction is indistinguisable between social media users and non users.

# Results

and summarize the results on the demographic data of the visitors separating the two groups in social media and social media non-users. In the group vocational education we have combined primary education only and vocational education proper (Dutch “lager onderwijs and MBO” ) and separated Bachelor (Dutch “HBO”) and Master education (Dutch “WO”). The male female ratio adds up to 100% at two-digit precision although a handful of questionnaires came back without sex because of oversight. The mean group size refers to the size of the group with which they were visiting the festival and respondents reported the group size selves. We filtered out obvious (deliberate?) misunderstandings like a group size of 5000.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | N | Mean Age | Vocat.  (%). | Bach.  (%) | Master  (%) | M/F (%) | Mean  grpsz |
| SM before | 100 | 21 | 74 | 21 | 5 | 36/64 | 6,52 |
| No SM before | 181 | 25 | 52 | 31 | 17 | 47/53 | 6,14 |
| SM  During | 61 | 22 | 58 | 31 | 11 | 44/56 | 6,46 |
| No SM  During | 220 | 24 | 60 | 27 | 13 | 43/57 | 6,54 |
| SM  after | 124 | 22 | 69 | 22 | 9 | 37/63 | 6,92 |
| No SM  After | 157 | 25 | 52 | 32 | 16 | 48/52 | 6,2 |
| SM  Some  time | 152 | 22 | 67 | 22 | 9 | 38/62 | 6,91 |
| No SM  at all | 129 | 25 | 47 | 33 | 17 | 49/51 | 6,01 |
| Total | 281 | 23 | 60 | 27 | 12 | 43/57 | 6.5 |

Table Demographic data of the “Appelpop” visitors

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | N | Mean Age | Vocat.  (%). | Bach.  (%) | Master  (%) | M/F (%) | Mean  grpsz |
| SM before | 163 | 27 | 16 | 41 | 43 | 36/64 | 5,17 |
| No SM before | 173 | 33 | 14 | 44 | 40 | 46/54 | 4,09 |
| SM  During | 107 | 28 | 22 | 42 | 36 | 42/58 | 5,61 |
| No SM  During | 229 | 31 | 12 | 42 | 44 | 41/59 | 4,13 |
| SM  After | 139 | 27 | 21 | 44 | 34 | 33/67 | 4,91 |
| No SM  After | 197 | 32 | 11 | 41 | 46 | 47/53 | 4,40 |
| SM  Some  time | 196 | 27 | 18 | 41 | 40 | 36/64 | 5,05 |
| No SM  at all | 140 | 34 | 11 | 44 | 43 | 49/51 | 3,97 |
| Total | 336 | 30 | 16 | 42 | 41 | 41/59 | 4,67 |

Table Demographic data of the “de Beschaving” visitors

and only give the motivational items for which we could measure a significant difference in the results. All significances are with respect to a two sided t-test. The differences of the means are differences of values on a 5 point scale and the standard deviations are standard deviations of the group means. Since we assume that the standard deviations do not differ between the groups the individual standard deviations are higher by a factor of or 18 for “Appelpop” respectively “de Beschaving”. Two-star values are significant on the level, whereas the one starred elements are only significant on the level.

Note that the factor “blow my mind” is the one factor that is consistently different between festivals and pops up in the analysis before during and after the festival.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Before** | | | | **During** | | | | **After** | | | |
|  | T | Sig. | Mdiff | Sd | t | Sig. | Mdiff | Sd | t | Sig. | Mdiff | Sd |
| something exciting | -3.004 | .003\*\* | -.304 | .101 | -2.506 | .013\*\* | -.296 | .118 | -1.940 | .053\* | -.191 | .098 |
| Blow my mind | -3.718 | .000\*\* | -.427 | .115 |  |  |  |  | -2.431 | .016\*\* | -.273 | .112 |
| Gain knowledge |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Explore new things | -1.998 | .047\*\* | -.224 | .112 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meet new people | -3.083 | .002\*\* | -.381 | .124 | -2.211 | .028\*\* | -.320 | .145 |  |  |  |  |
| Be with others similar to me |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Be with friends, family and colleagues |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Be with others from my social environment |  |  |  |  | -3.101 | .002\*\* | -.453 | .146 |  |  |  |  |
| Escape daily routine | -2.124 | .035\*\* | -.294 | .138 | -2.124 | .035\*\* | -.294 | .138 |  |  |  |  |
| Relax |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Table Significantly different motivational items for "Appelpop"

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Before** | | | | **During** | | | | **After** | | | |
|  | T | Sig. | Md | Sd | t | Sig. | Md | Sd | t | Sig. | Md | Sd |
| Something exciting |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Blow my mind | -2.412 | .016\*\* | -.261 | .108 | -2.585 | .010\*\* | -.300 | .116 | -2.533 | .012\*\* | -.278 | .110 |
| Gain knowledge |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Explore new things |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meet new people |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Be with others similar to me | -2.059 | .040\*\* | -.236 | .115 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Be with friends, family and colleagues |  |  |  |  | -2.573 | .011\*\* | -.273 | .106 | -2.877 | .004\*\* | -.287 | .100 |
| Be with others from my social environment | -3.160 | .002\*\* | -.382 | .121 | -3.240 | .001\*\* | -.420 | .130 | -3.204 | .001\*\* | -.393 | .123 |
| Escape daily routine |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | -2.936 | .004\*\* | -.491 | .167 |
| Relax |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | -2.430 | .016\*\* | -.211 | .087 |

Table Significantly different motivational items for "de Beschaving"

# Discussion & Conclusion

Visitors attending festival events frequently use social media. Profile based platforms like Facebook and Hyves are especially widely used among visitors. The use of social media is not limited to before or after the actual event; visitors also use social media during a festival.

All results show that social media users score lower on the motivational items then non social media users. As social media, establishes permanent connections to the world outside of the festival terrain, its use seems to conflicts with the sense of *‘here and now’* of the festival space. One can speculate that these connections bring in new sets of ideas, views, opinions, rules and emotions that are not part of the festival design or environment. We find this effect not only for social media use during, but also before and after the festival. We were a little surprised by this dampening effect: it seems reasonable to assume that social media has the opposite effect if a visitors peer group values excessive or extravagant behavior. However, since festival visits become visible and recognizable to many more peers than those present at the festival, including uncomfortable “peers” like parents, classmates or employers, having to deal with the opinions of others not present, is possibly breaking the pact to behave far outside normal with the peer group at the festival.

Our research indicates that the effect of social media is not limited to the marketing of an event, but also has a relation with the actual experience of the event itself. We found that active social media users are less concerned with the presence of friends, family and their social environment at the festival terrain. We also found, that the use of social media has a significant effect on the attender’s personal enjoyment. In both studies we found visitors using social media before, during or after the event were less concerned with getting into the festival flow. We argued that social networks interfere with the detachment of the festival space and assume these visitors were taking a more distant position towards fully participating in the festival. This, however, does not necessarily result in a lower satisfaction of visitors. Results of both studies show no negative effect on satisfaction, in fact, in one case the use of social media resulted in a higher satisfaction while the other study shows no significant effect of social media usage on visitor’s satisfaction at all. This seems evidence that the relations between concepts as experience, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty is a complex one (see further Van Vliet et al., 2012).

Social media has been interpreted as a marketing opportunity for festivals or an evaluation tool for reporting the event’s success, often discussed as part of Festival Management studies. Festivals may also provide a rich ground for social media studies. While festivals may not be as controllable a setting as a laboratory environment it could be a setting that allows insights into some key elements and their relationships and thereby be an intriguing domain for research into social media.

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# Biographies

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Harry van Vliet is a cognitive psychologist of origin. In 1991 he got his PhD at the University of Utrecht on a study regarding emotional experiences of film and television. In 1999 he joined the Telematica Instituut, mainly doing research and project management on content engineering issues. In February 2007 he became a part-time professor on cross media at Utrecht University of Applied Sciences.