

Music Festivals from a Tourism Perspective: The Experience Economy and Sustainability

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Abstract

This study is a review that examines, with a holistic approach, the economic, cultural–social, and image dimensions of music festivals in the context of tourism. Literature findings indicate that music festivals generate short-term income growth and employment through expenditures on accommodation, food and beverage, and transportation, and that they create long-term value via multiplier effects and contributions to the socio-economic well-being of local communities. From a destination marketing standpoint, festivals contribute strategically to the formation and branding of destination image by shaping cognitive and affective perceptions, and they strengthen international recognition through media and social media visibility. On the cultural–social plane, festivals produce a meaningful “collective celebration atmosphere” that carries the tourist experience beyond individual entertainment by making local identity visible, reinforcing a sense of belonging, and facilitating intercultural interaction. In recent years, online/hybrid formats accelerated by digitalization and small-scale festivals focused on niche genres have emerged as trends that help destinations differentiate. However, environmental impacts—such as waste management, energy use, and carbon footprint—necessitate integrating sustainable festival management principles (recycling, renewable energy, local sourcing, etc.) into planning. The findings suggest, from an experience-economy perspective, that music festivals will continue to play a strategic role in the economic and socio-cultural sustainability of tourism.

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1. Introduction

Music festivals are considered a rapidly growing tourism type in contemporary tourism literature. Especially since the 1990s, festival tourism has increasingly become the focus of research on local development, cultural interaction, and destination image. Janeczko, Mules, and Dwyer (2002) emphasize that festivals are one of the fastest-growing subtypes of tourism, stating that these events contribute both economically and socioculturally to destinations.

Festivals also play a significant role in destination marketing and brand identity. An OECD (2008) report states that “events are a dynamic and rapidly growing sector with clear synergies with tourism”. This approach demonstrates that festivals are more than just entertainment or cultural activities; they are strategic tools for increasing destination awareness and appeal.

When looking at music festivals specifically, the power of these events to shape the tourist experience is noteworthy. Li and Vogelsong (2006) note that while the impact of festivals on destination image has been examined in a limited number of studies, existing findings suggest that these events play a significant role in image creation. Similarly, Al-Dweik (2020) states that music festivals contribute to the formation of a destination’s image and profile.

Finally, the UNESCO (2024) report highlights the power of music to make destinations globally visible and offer innovative experiences through a creative cities network. In this context, the rise of music festivals in tourism should be addressed holistically, not only from an economic perspective but also from a cultural, social, and image perspective.

2. Music Festivals in the Context of Event Economy

Music festivals are not only cultural events but also significant sources of income for destination economies. Getz (2008) states that festivals have become “a sector that provides direct economic contributions in addition to tourism.” Indeed, festival tourism invigorates the regional economy in the short term through expenditures on accommodation, food and beverage, and transportation, while also generating employment and boosting brand value in the long term.

Furthermore, research shows that festivals are not limited to economic returns but also provide a platform for the development of local communities. In their study of the economic evaluation of events, Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis,

and Mules (2000) emphasize that music festivals serve as a tool for increasing the socio-economic well-being of local communities.

The economic impact of festivals has also been evaluated in terms of the multiplier effect. Crompton and McKay (1994) argue that the additional spending by visitors attending events directly contributes to regional development, and this impact often extends far beyond the festival budget.

Recent studies have also addressed the role of music festivals in the tourism industry within the context of sustainability, discussing the concept of the “event economy.” For example, Quinn (2006) emphasizes the importance of festivals in establishing social belonging and destination identity, as well as their economic impact, arguing that events are not only revenue-generating activities but also a part of sustainable tourism.

All these findings show that music festivals are multidimensional events that create economic value, generate employment and contribute to the sustainable development of destinations in today’s tourism.

3. Destination Image and Music

Destination image is one of the most debated concepts in tourism marketing and is among the primary factors influencing tourists’ travel decisions. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) define destination image as “the combination of tourists’ cognitive and emotional impressions of a destination” and emphasize that this image directly influences tourists’ preferences.

Music festivals play a significant role in the process of establishing a destination’s image. Music-themed events, in particular, are said to distinguish destinations as a distinguishing factor. Getz (2010) states that music festivals have become “an integral part of a destination’s brand identity” and strengthen its tourist appeal.

Hudson, Ritchie, and Timur (2004), one of the studies examining the relationship between destination image and music, demonstrated that festivals and music events are a differentiating factor in destination marketing strategies and add an emotional dimension to tourists’ experiences. Similarly, Gibson and Connell (2012) examine the relationship between music and tourism within a cultural and spatial context, demonstrating that music festivals contribute to cities becoming “musically associated destinations”.

Furthermore, the widespread visibility of festivals through media and social media contributes to the strengthening of destination image on a global scale. Richards (2017) states that festival tourism is “one of the most

effective tools for increasing the visibility of destinations in the social media age”.

As a result, music festivals are seen not only as cultural events but also as powerful tools for creating, developing and marketing the destination image at an international level.

4. Cultural and Social Dimensions

Music festivals hold a significant place in tourism literature not only for their economic benefits but also for their cultural and social impact. Culturally, festivals are defined as events that reflect local identity and contribute to the survival of intangible cultural heritage. Quinn (2005) argues that festivals play a critical role in making local culture visible and strengthening community identity. In this context, music transforms the tourist experience from mere entertainment into a tool for cultural interaction.

At the same time, the social impact of festivals cannot be ignored. Derrett (2003) emphasizes that festivals are social events that strengthen community ties, increase a sense of belonging, and bring individuals together on a common cultural level. From this perspective, music festivals have the potential to establish not only temporary social connections among participants but also lasting social bonds.

Music festivals also serve as catalysts for cultural interaction between locals and tourists. Picard and Robinson (2006) argue that festivals bring together people from different cultures, fostering mutual learning and fostering intercultural dialogue. This characteristic also makes music festivals an important tool in the context of cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, the social atmosphere that music festivals create in the tourist experience is also noteworthy. Getz (2010) states that festivals offer a “collective celebratory atmosphere” within the tourist experience, and that this experience plays a significant role in individuals’ personal meaning-making processes. In this respect, music festivals strengthen the social dimension of tourism by offering not only an individual but also a community-based experience.

Consequently, music festivals are crucial for preserving cultural heritage, strengthening social belonging, fostering intercultural interaction, and providing meaningful experiences for tourists. Thanks to this multifaceted function, music festivals have become a key component of tourism’s sustainability, not only economically but also culturally and socially.

5. Discussion and Future Perspectives

New Trends: Hybrid/Online Festivals and Niche Music Genres

In recent years, digitalization has radically transformed the landscape of music festivals. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, online and hybrid festival formats have flourished, expanding festival reach globally. Webster, McKay, and Smith (2021) emphasize that digital music festivals have reshaped cultural production and consumption during the pandemic. Furthermore, the rise of small-scale festivals focusing on niche music genres stands out as a trend that reinforces the unique identities of destinations. Gibson and Connell (2012) argue that such festivals make local cultural diversity visible and respond to the demand for alternative tourism.

6. Sustainability and Environmental Impacts

Today, music festivals are evaluated not only in terms of their economic and cultural impacts but also their environmental impacts. Collins and Cooper (2017) emphasize that festivals can lead to environmental problems such as waste management, energy consumption, and carbon footprint, and therefore, sustainability principles should be prioritized in festival planning. In this context, “green festival” practices (such as recycling, renewable energy use, and collaboration with local producers) are becoming increasingly common. Laing and Frost (2010) argue that sustainable festival management should address not only environmental but also social and economic dimensions.

7. The Role of Music Festivals in Tourism in the Future

From a future perspective, music festivals will continue to play a central role in the experience-driven nature of tourism. The “experience economy” approach put forward by Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggests that festivals are not simply events but also places of experience where tourists form unique memories and emotional bonds (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Furthermore, the role of music festivals in cultural diplomacy and international image is increasingly growing. Richards (2017) argues that festivals will become even more important in the future as “creative platforms” connecting local communities to global networks.

Ultimately, the future of music festivals appears to be shaped by digitalization, nicheization, and sustainability. With this multifaceted function, music festivals will continue to hold a strategic position in both the economic and sociocultural development of the tourism industry.

8. Conclusion

This study examines the role of music festivals in the tourism context from various perspectives. The literature review reveals that music festivals are not only cultural events but also multidimensional structures that contribute to the economic development of destinations, their image building, and the strengthening of social ties. As Getz (2008) argues, festivals have become an integral part of the tourism industry, encompassing both economic and sociocultural dimensions.

The findings highlight three key points. First, music festivals generate significant economic returns. Crompton and McKay (1994) argue that festivals are powerful economic tools that contribute to regional development, while Dwyer et al. (2000) argue that these events contribute to local community well-being by generating both tangible and intangible values.

Second, festivals play a critical role in strengthening destination image. Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) image formation model demonstrates that music festivals directly influence tourists' perceptions and preferences. Hudson, Ritchie, and Timur (2004) emphasize the use of festivals as a differentiating factor in marketing strategies.

Thirdly, the cultural and social impacts of festivals are significant. Quinn (2005) argues that festivals make local identity visible and strengthen community belonging, while Picard and Robinson (2006) demonstrate that these events play important roles in intercultural interaction and cultural diplomacy.

Finally, it is anticipated that music festivals will continue to evolve along the axes of digitalization, sustainability, and nicheization in the future. Webster, McKay, and Smith (2021) argue that online and hybrid festival formats are transforming cultural production processes, while Collins and Cooper (2017) emphasize that sustainability principles are becoming increasingly important in festival planning.

Therefore, when the findings in the literature are evaluated holistically, it is concluded that music festivals are a multidimensional phenomenon that contributes not only to the economic dimension of tourism but also to its social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

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