

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

FESTIVAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA. CASE STUDY: THE UNTOLD FESTIVAL

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Introduction

Over time, festivals have developed in terms of organization, atmosphere and importance, becoming a global phenomenon. They are aimed d to promote destinations and to attract increasing numbers of visitors. Music festivals mobilize increasing numbers of visitors, both residents and tourists, attracted by the common desire to escape everyday life and share together unique experiences. This explains the growing academic interest for festival experiences and festival management. Social Media has had a strong and increasing impact on the promotion of festivals and in the development of festival experiences. It enhances communication and value co-creation between organizers and attendees (Gyimóthy and Larson, 2015). Facebook is one of the most popular social media tool used to promote and share music festival experiences (Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016). Online reviews posted on Facebook allow people to share opinions, photos and videos of their festival experiences . These have a strong impact on other people's perceptions, influencing their decision to attend future editions.

Existing studies on the topic of festival experiences have highlighted different dimensions or facets of festival experiences, such as: Activities, Authenticity and Commodification, Concessions, Environment, Escape, Social Interactions and the development of Communitas (Davis, 2017; Getz, 2010; Jackson, 2014; Tanford & Jung, 2017).

UNTOLD is the most important international music festival organized in Romania, in the city of Cluj Napoca. It gathered about 355.000 attendees in 2018. Since the first edition (in 2015), the organizers have continuously developed visitors' experiences and online communication has been a key part of the UNTOLD promotion strategy. Online communication is a key part of the UNTOLD promotion strategy.

The aim of this research was to analyze tourist experiences of Untold festival communicated through Facebook, and to identify the main dimensions of visitor' experiences.

Methodology

Research data in this study was represented by 802 visitor reviews posted online on the official Facebook page of the festival during the period 2015-2017, corresponding to three festival editions. The Facebook reviews of Untold were submitted to a computed content analysis. This highlighted the main concepts used by reviewers and the links among them. The content analysis identified recurrent single words (i.e. concept seeds) that are starting points for the definition of concepts. Concepts then clustered into higher-level themes, represented as circles below .



Results and discussion of results

The content analysis has highlighted 12 main themes illustrated with circles and corresponding grey labels. These are: Untold, Festival, Year, People, Event, People, Organization, Event, Experience, Super, Edition, Atmosphere, Hope, and Words.

dominant theme in the visitor reviews is Untold. It indicates a strong The association between the festival name and the city of Cluj, Romania's country image and the famous Dj Armin van Buren. According to many reviews, the festival has a strong impact on the promotion of Romania and of the city of Cluj. The People theme indicates the role of Untold in facilitating social interactions and the role of the festival audience in building satisfying visitor experiences. Festival organization is also very important in people's narratives. It is highlighted by several themes such as: Organisation, Super, Event, Edition, Year and Hope. The frequency of words such as amazing, thank, best, or congratulation shows positive overall perceptions regarding the festival organization and experiences. The most discussed organizational aspects in people's reviews were the line-up (artists), sound quality, prices and food. The central role of the People theme underlines the role of social interactions in the construction of festival experiences and atmosphere. Festivals are known for building temporary communitas (Davis, 2017), a fact visible also in this case. The Year, Edition and Hope themes are associated with visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Many reviews include recommendations and intentions to attend future festival editions. The most discussed visitor activities at Untold are music - related. This indicates the need for further development of this aspect, in order to improve and diversify visitor experiences. As regards the festival concessions, Untold visitors talk about food and drinks, especially about their increasing prices. Safety and comfort are aspects underrepresented in the concept map.

Conclusions

The main novelty of this study is the research theme, given the increasing academic and practitioners 'interest in delivering satisfying visitor experiences through various events. Te study contributes to a developing leisure and tourist literature regarding the experiential dimension of music festivals.

Another contribution of this study is the methodological approach. The focus on Facebook visitor reviews adds value to the research results. Internet and social networks have had a growing impact on travel decisions and behavior, as well as on destination image. The results can help festival managers, marketers and tour operators in adapting to these new trends, by becoming more active and strategic on Facebook. Visitor experiences can be fast improved based on the live feedback from online reviews.

The main research limitation is the low generalizability of the findings. These cannot be extended to other festivals or social media platforms.

Future researches can apply the same methodology to other events analysis, to the evolution of an event or to comparisons between different events.

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