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# Active vs Passive Social Media Use, Attendee Engagement, and Festival Loyalty

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## **Active vs Passive Social Media Use, Attendee Engagement, and Festival Loyalty**

### **INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND**

Today there are almost 5 billion mobile device users worldwide (Statista 2018). This explosion of mobile information communication technology devices, namely smart phones, is propelling anytime, anywhere social media (SM) activity (Pearce & Gretzel, 2012). Tourism organizations and destinations are increasingly using social media to interact with their clients and visitors with the goal of engagement and ultimately loyalty with its associated economic gains through purchases and visitations. Tourism and event managers need to remain current to capitalize on SM as a customer relationship platform and effective marketing tool (Devine & Devine, 2012; Kruger, Rootenberg, & Ellis, 2013), hence research on SM use needs to go beyond use/nonuse of various platforms to examine the type of use behavior in order to determine how best to leverage it. The purpose of this paper is to explore active versus passive SM activity with festival organizations, attendee engagement, and festival loyalty.

Loyalty in tourism is most frequently operationalized as intention to return and intention to recommend to others, which is broadly considered an attitudinal measure of conative loyalty (Kim, Vogt, & Knutson, 2015). While intention to return or revisit has been criticized in tourism based on the destination novelty motivation (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000), in a festival context this may be less problematic given the mix of attendees from the festival location region and the distinct leisure motives associated with festival and event attendance (Crompton & McKay, YEAR, Halpenny, Kulczycki, & Moghimehfar, 2016). Consequently, festivals provide a suitable context for understanding SM activity and loyalty.

Customer or consumer engagement has been explored across industries including tourism and leisure. There is general agreement that it is considered to be multidimensional and context specific with five dimensions consistently present in the literature – identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction (So, King, & Sparks, 2014). Tourism and marketing literature has long supported a customer engagement orientation to build relationships beyond the transactional (Jayachandran, et al, 2005; Sashi, 2012). Of particular salience to this festival

based study is the role of SM as a customer relationship platform to build engagement and engender loyalty.

Recent research addressing SM in festival and event settings has promoted its ability to stimulate value for both attendees and organizers (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Robertson et al., 2015).

Higher intensity SM use by consumers has been found to be positively related to organizational reputation and engagement (Dijkmans et al., 2015). While consumers can use SM to interact and communicate with festival organizations and other attendees, for example through writing posts and posting pictures and comments, they can also be more passive in their use by just following, reading, or viewing. 'Sharing' and 'liking', while deliberate interactions, require less initiative by the user, but have still been found to show multi-relational involvement of festival attendees as a means to build community before, during, and after a festival occurs (MacKay et al., 2017). The exploratory research objective for this paper begins to address the nature of SM interaction (active or passive) with a festival and its potential relationship(s) to attendee engagement and loyalty.

## **METHOD**

Three Canadian multi-day music festivals which represented small, medium, and large attractions provided the field settings for this study. As festival attendees passed through the main gates of the festivals, invitation cards to an online survey were distributed. At the small festival site, all entrants received an invitation, at the other two festival sites a systematic sampling of every "nth" person" was employed. The invitation cards were inserted in a mobile device card jacket to provide a small gift and provided details of the website with instructions to complete the survey within one week of the festival attended. A prize incentive of a \$500 airline gift card was offered to respondents who completed the questionnaire within the stated time line. A series of preliminary analyses, including descriptive statistics, dimension reduction, and correlations, were undertaken using SPSS 25 to explore potential patterns regarding type of SM use related to the festival and relationship to festival loyalty.

Fifteen customer engagement and five loyalty items using 7-point agreement scales (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) were adopted from existing literature and modified for

the festival context (Lee et al. 2008; Li & Petrick, 2008; So, King, & Sparks, 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). Based on a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation the original 15 item customer engagement scale produced three factors. Subsequently, the number of scale items was reduced to 11 items to omit items that did not load clearly on a single factor. This resulted in a three factor solution once again with variance explained increased from 71.7% to 74.1%. The underlying dimensions of the factors illustrated affective, cognitive, and normative components of customer engagement. The affective dimension reflected items: 'I am passionate about the Festival', 'I am heavily into the Festival', 'my days would not be the same without the Festival', 'I try to fit the Festival into my schedule', 'I spend discretionary time of activities related to the Festival', 'I enjoy being at the Festival.'. The cognitive dimension centered on items: 'I want to learn more about the Festival', 'I want to know more about the Festival', 'I like events that are related to the Festival'. The normative dimension highlighted social aspects – 'I enjoy the Festival more when I am with others', and 'the Festival is more fun when other people around me go too'.

SM festival related use was questioned for one week before, during, one week after, and throughout the year after and measured using the scale: 1 = never; 2 = once in a while; 3 = regularly; and 4 = continuously. A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the social media activity types to discriminate between active and passive. This resulted in the confirmation of two dimensions (variance explained 75.6%) with active SM represented by write post, post photos, comment, and share; and passive SM represented by read, follow, view, and like.

## **FINDINGS**

Data collection achieved N=345/1444; a 24% response rate. Almost all respondents used social media (92%). A profile of respondents shows they ranged in age from 18 to 86, with an average age of 42, had attended the festival for an average of 6.5 years, with 27% attending for the first time. The resident - tourist split was 62% and 38%. The majority of respondents (73%) identified as female. Table 1 displays the relationships between passive and active SM activity and festival

engagement. Table 2 displays the relationships between passive and active SM activity and festival loyalty.

**Table 1**  
**SM Activity and Festival Engagement**

		<b>Affective Engagement</b>	<b>Cognitive Engagement</b>	<b>Normative Engagement</b>
<b>SM use 1 week before</b>	Active	.284**	.265**	.052
	Passive	.440**	.296**	.206**
<b>SM use during festival</b>	Active	.156	.173	.052
	Passive	.418*	.222*	.138
<b>SM use 1 week after</b>	Active	.184*	.236**	-.066
	Passive	.322**	.216*	.191*
<b>SM use during year after</b>	Active	.235*	.422**	-.003
	Passive	.344**	.338**	.138

Note: Spearman correlation coefficients significant at \* .05, \*\*, .00.

**Table 2**  
**SM Activity and Festival Loyalty**

		<b>Return to festival in a year</b>	<b>Repeat same activities</b>	<b>Recommend the festival</b>	<b>Spread positive WOM</b>	<b>Keep attending festival</b>
<b>SM use 1 week before</b>	Active	.178*	.062	.080	.098	.147
	Passive	.247*	.157*	.184*	.154	.238*
<b>SM use during festival</b>	Active	.095	.007	.116	.136	.131
	Passive	.212*	-.007	.111	.177*	.176*
<b>SM use 1 week after</b>	Active	.115	.093	.172	.141	.168
	Passive	.180	.102	.147	.160	.172
<b>SM use year after</b>	Active	-.013	.150	.032	.066	.003
	Passive	.224*	.336**	.209*	.216*	.229*

Note: Spearman correlation coefficients significant at \* .05, \*\*, .00.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Results show relationships between both active and passive SM use, particularly with affective and cognitive engagement, with the exception of active SM during the festival. This makes sense as active SM use during the festival has the potential to detract from immersion in the festival experience more so than passive SM use, alternatively this type of SM use becomes ubiquitous

during a festival event and therefore, does not differentiate these aspects of engagement. Passive SM use (read, follow, view, and like) before and after the festival correlated with social engagement, might reflect the salience of passive SM use to the planning/anticipation and reflection phases of tourist/leisure experience (van Raaij & Francken 1984), particularly as involved with other people.

With respect to the key loyalty measure of return to festival next year, active and passive SM before the festival, passive SM during the festival, and passive SM throughout the year after the festival were significantly correlated. SM use within the week after the festival was not significant for returning next year or any other loyalty measure, suggesting that immediate post festival SM use is less relevant than at other stages. Furthermore, the more long term passive SM use was correlated to all five loyalty items. Passive SM use before the festival was significant to all loyalty items except positive WOM.

These preliminary findings are somewhat surprising as it might be expected that active SM use is the more likely contributor to engagement and loyalty. These results highlight patterns of similarity and difference in active and passive SM use across the festival experience and suggest consistent passive SM use over time is important to fostering engagement and loyalty. This initial work provides a foundation for model development and testing to advance conceptual understanding of SM as a relationship management platform and refine SM strategies by festival organizers to achieve engaged and loyal audiences.

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