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## Going Mobile: Outcomes of Device Use During a Festival Experience

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# Going Mobile: Outcomes of device use during a festival experience

## Introduction

Mobile devices have changed communication across the world (Poushter, 2016). Today there are more than 4.93 billion mobile device users worldwide (Statista, 2018). With such ubiquitous use it is important to understand the opportunities that mobile devices offer consumers and gain insight into how the technology is used in different contexts. At festivals, mobile device use has been facilitated by offering on-festival-site internet access, developing mobile applications, and creating social networking profiles. Festivals use these opportunities to facilitate festival administration, attract new audiences, satisfy existing patrons and develop innovative programming (Van Winkle, Cairns, MacKay, & Halpenny, 2016). While research has demonstrated the various ways in which mobile device use has been integrated into festivals, we know little about the implications of mobile device use on the attendees' experiences.

## Literature

Within a tourism context, the implications of mobile device use have been examined and reveal that adoption has changed travel activities (easier planning, more flexibility), interpretation, and sensations (more connected, informed, sense of security, etc.) (Kim & Law, 2015; Wang et al., 2012). Visitors make more spontaneous decisions mid-trip with the assistance of devices and tourism researchers have found evidence of spillover of daily life into travel facilitated by mobile devices (Wang et al., 2012; MacKay and Vogt, 2012). While devices are integrated into the festival experience in a myriad of ways, we know little about the implications of their use during the festival experience, as research is just beginning to surface (Van Winkle et al., 2016). For example, Luxford and Dickinson (2015) asked festival attendees to reflect on how mobile apps might affect their experience. Benefits and drawbacks were examined and the authors concluded that festival organizers should ensure apps do not interfere with *communitas* or liminal experiences sought by many visitors.

Overall festival satisfaction is important to festival loyalty and the long-term success of festivals (Yoon et al., 2010). Satisfaction has often been conceptualized in terms of the cognitive match between need and experience while dissatisfaction occurs when a gap exists (Ryan, 1997). Within festival settings overall satisfaction, based on the customers' experience of quality attributes and information, has typically focused on the complete festival experience (Crompton & Love, 1995). Satisfied attendees have been shown to be loyal to a festival organization (Yoon et al, 2010). Loyalty is important to festival administrators as retaining attendees affects the sustainability of the organization.

Positive on-site event experiences are key to long-term success of an event as these experiences can affect overall satisfaction and loyalty (Van Winkle & Backman, 2008). The purpose of this research is to understand how on-site mobile device use affects visitors' satisfaction with their festival experience and loyalty to the festival. This abstract addresses the following research question: How does the way in which a mobile device is used during a festival experience affect satisfaction and loyalty?

## Methods

During summer 2017 survey invitation cards were issued to adult festival attendees at three Canadian festivals. The Winnipeg Folk Festival in Manitoba, Pelee Island Unplugged in Ontario and Symphony Under the Sky in Alberta. As attendees

passed by the main gates of each festival they were offered an invitation card and were asked visit a web link to complete an on-line survey within 48 hours of their festival experience. This resulted in 292 completed questionnaires with a response rate of 20%. Despite a prize incentive (draw to win a \$500 WestJet gift card), the response rate was lower than anticipated. The results therefore should be interpreted with caution.

### Results

Almost all survey participants reported that they own a mobile device (99%). Out of those who had a mobile device, 95% brought it to the festival. Most of those who brought a device to the festival had a smartphone (71%). On average, attendees have had a device for 11 years. When asked about using their mobile devices in relation to the festival ‘never’ the most frequent response to how often respondents talk (55.7%), view (43.8%), or post (55.4%). ‘Once in a while’ was the most frequent response to how often respondents text (42.9%) and capture photo/video (45.9%). When asked about using their mobile devices for activities not related to the festival, ‘never’ was the most frequent response to how often respondents talk (59.5%), post (84.2%), or capture photo/video (84.9%). The most frequent response to how often respondents text (49.0%) and view information (47.0%) not related to the festival was ‘once in a while’.

Satisfaction was based on three items (7-point Likert scales) used in previous literature (Crompton & Love, 1995; Yoon et al., 2010). Overall satisfaction was quite high with a median of 6 for all three items: ‘Overall, I am satisfied with the festival’, ‘As a whole, I am happy with the festival’, and ‘I believe I did the right thing in attending the festival’. Loyalty was also based on three items (7-point Likert scales) used in the previous literature (Yoon et al., 2010). In general attendees feel loyal to the festival organization. Respondents report intending to return to the festival in a year (Med = 5), repeat the same festival activities in a year (Med = 4) and recommend the festival to others (Med = 5).

Sums of device use (festival related and not festival related) were calculated for subsequent analysis. Device use included talk, text, capturing photo/video, viewing and posting. Grand means were calculated for both satisfaction and loyalty. Spearman rho correlations reveal that mobile device use related to the festival was not significantly related to loyalty or satisfaction ( $r_s = .041$ ,  $p = .523$  and  $r_s = -.056$ ,  $p = .385$ ). Mobile device use not related to the festival was significantly and negatively related to both loyalty and satisfaction ( $r_s = -.198$ ,  $p = .002$  and  $r_s = -.242$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Discussion / Conclusion

Results from this study provide insight about mobile device use at festivals that can be used by administrators to enhance visitors’ experiences. While there are limitation to the generalizability of the findings due to low response rate and possible differences between attendees at the different festivals, the findings provide preliminary insights into issues that should be studied in future research. As festivals strive to enhance their attendees’ experience through mobile technology apps and social media, these findings suggest devices may serve to detract rather than enhance an experience due to non-festival related usage; therefore, an alternative strategy may be to find ways to discourage non-festival related use. Future research will examine the mechanisms that affect the relationship between device use and loyalty and satisfaction. Recent research has suggested that memorable tourism experiences on-site affect satisfaction. It is possible

that mobile device use unrelated to the festival affects the memorability of the experience, which in turn impacts attendees' satisfaction.

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