

Unfolding visitor experiences at music festivals through online reviews

 Oana Mihaela Stoleriu^a,  Bogdan-Constantin Ibanescu^{*a}, Marina Madalina Caciula^a

^aUniversity Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iasi, Romania

Abstract

Music festivals represent one of the most dynamic tourism sectors of the last decades, their impact extending beyond the initial music-based nucleus. Festivals are subjectively interiorized by visitors through their own experiences which, in time, can influence the overall levels of satisfaction and loyalty. This paper uses the computed analysis of online visitor reviews in order to offer valuable insights into the main components of visitors' subjective experiences. The overall results are in line with the classical models. However, new connections, dependencies, and even new components related to music festivals are emphasized through the analysis digital reviews of, such as 'appraisal' and 'anticipation', emerged. Furthermore, our results indicated that 'authenticity', a major concept in festival studies during the '90s, failed to emerge as significant thus supporting the idea of an ongoing trend focused on standardisation. The findings have both theoretical and direct managerial implications, underlining the core structure of visitor experiences, as well as providing a series of suggestions for festival organisers in order to enhance visitors' satisfaction.

Keywords: music festival, visitor experience, user-generated content, text analysis, event management

Introduction

A growing and competitive tourism-based industry has been developing worldwide during the last decades around music festivals (Getz & Page, 2016), products which have become a popular tool for destination promotion, while also contributing to local economic development (Cudny, 2019; Getz, 2010). Music festivals mobilize increasing numbers of visitors, while sustaining the development of specialized market segments, such as festival tourism. The success of festival tourism has been mainly supported by two complementary factors: on one hand, mediatization and investments provided by organisers, and on the other hand, an increasing demand from visitors for unique experiences (Getz, 2010; Getz & Page, 2016). While the

*✉ Bogdan-Constantin Ibanescu, researcher, Centre for European Studies, Faculty of Law, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania; e-mail: ibanescu.bogdan@uaic.ro.

first factor has received a great amount of interest since the beginning of the festival-based tourism industry, the latter has only recently captured the academia's interest.

Music festivals can be defined as experiential products that combine tourism and leisure (Manthiou et al., 2014). They are planned to facilitate unique and memorable experiences (Getz, 2012), as well as self-expression and socialization (Little et al., 2018). Given their strong impact on visitor's behaviour, festival experiences require better understanding and more empirical-based evidence, especially from new and developing markets, where this type of event is still blooming.

One of the most recent approaches in examining festival experiences is based on the strong connection between social media (SM) and music festivals. SM has enriched and transformed the festival experience, enhancing communication and value co-creation between organizers and attendees (Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016). Attendees use SM to share, evaluate or relive their experiences (Lee et al., 2012), whilst managers and organizers get fast customer feedback, a valuable guidance in their quest for increasing visitors' numbers and strengthening their loyalty (Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016; Llopis-Amorós et al., 2019).

While SM and its extensive role as a marketing tool for festivals received a respectable amount of interest from researchers, there has been far fewer academic investigations regarding the relation between user-generated content on SM and experiences from music festivals, underlining, in consequence, the importance of further research on this topic. The paper aims to fill this gap by scrutinizing the most significant components of visitors' experiences at one of the largest electronic music festivals in Europe (Untold) and by putting them in relation with previously identified dimensions. We consider 'visitor experiences' the result from participants' subjective interactions with various festival attributes as defined by Morgan (2006). Therefore, we analysed the online visitor reviews (OVR) from the first three editions of Untold in order to answer the following research question: What are the most prominent components of subjective visitor experiences shared through social media OVR?

This study is important for several reasons. Firstly, the paper updates the existing experiential approach adopted in tourism studies by providing a new methodological approach for the analysis of visitors' experiences at music festivals. Using data from social media OVR, instead of traditional surveys, it provides a more exhaustive and detailed perspective. Secondly, the paper brings evidence from a rather unscrutinised territory (Central and Eastern Europe), where the music festival industry is relatively recent, and puts in relation the tourism phenomena with its counterparts from Western Europe. Thirdly, the study provides practical insights for the event and destination managers, which could help improve customer experiences. Moreover, this study has a tremendous utility in the post-pandemic reality. The impact of music festivals, as well as the attention given to visitors' experience have received a tremendous amount of attention, especially in relation

with the resilience performance of destinations (Cehan and Iatu, 2023; Ibanescu et al., 2023; Oklevik et al., 2022; Pascariu et al., 2021).

1. Conceptual framework

1.1. Conceptualization of music festival experiences

Music festivals are defined as public events that gather people with similar lifestyles, providing a temporary escape from everyday life and a shared sense of freedom and community (Matheson & Tinsley, 2016). Situated at the intersection of leisure and tourism (Manthiou et al., 2014), they are designed to attract increasing numbers of local and external visitors (Getz, 2012). A considerable amount of literature has been published on the direct impact of festivals on destination image, economic development, or tourist frequentation (Getz, 2010; Manthiou et al., 2014; Semrad & Rivera, 2018), highlighting the overall positive impact of those events. Additional studies have emphasized the festivals' contribution to community identity-building, personal growth, and social integration (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Davis, 2016; De Bres & Davis, 2001; Little et al., 2018).

Music festivals are events designed to facilitate unique, liminal and transformative visitor experiences (Getz, 2012; Quinn & Wilks, 2017; Morgan, 2008), as well as temporary escape from everyday life and regulations, enhancing self-expression and social interactions (Davis, 2017; Getz & Page, 2016). They are known to generate temporary collective identities known as 'communitas' based on comradeship, social equality, similar preferences and the desire to fit in (Davis, 2017; Quinn & Wilks, 2017); (Tanford & Jung, 2017). The existent literature on music festival experiences has followed two main directions: a managerial one, focused on the co-creation of customer experiences (Getz, 2010, 2012), and an experiential one (consumer perspective), focused on visitors' experience (Birenboim, 2016; Jackson, 2014; Little et al., 2017; Morgan, 2006, 2008). According to Morgan (2006, 2008), festival experiences result from the interaction between management and visitors, based on the push (expected personal benefits, communitas, escapism) and pull factors (destination image, festivals' personality, services).

This paper focuses on the consumer perspective's dimension of music festivals and uses the existing research as framework for the interpretation of results. Until now there have been several attempts at identifying the dimensions of visitor experiences, with different perspectives regarding the number and the interpretation of those dimensions.

1.2. The dimensions of visitor experiences

A key reference for experiential visitor studies is Pine and Gilmore's (1998) 4 E's model: 'education', 'entertainment', 'escapism', and 'aesthetics'. Their model, which stands at the core of the 'Experience Economy' concept, claims the importance of events in forging memorable experiences. Recent studies (Rivera et al., 2015; Semrad & Rivera, 2018) have added a fifth dimension - 'economic' - demonstrating that all five were critical in facilitating memorable festival experiences, with positive effects on visitor loyalty.

While the four and five E's models are broadly accepted, other studies suggested alternative dimensions for interpreting visitor experiences. Packer and Ballantyne (2011) identified four components of quality visitor experiences: music experience, festival experience, social interactions, and separation experience. A more complex model was developed by Akyildiz and Argan (2010), who used a 26 scale items to identify three main experiential factors - 'feeling and think experience', 'act and relate experience' and 'sense experience', the last factor being the most influential on visitor satisfaction. Regarding visitors' subjective narratives, Jackson (2014) identified three pairs of dichotomous experiential components: 'freedom and constraint', 'camaraderie and hostility', 'euphoria and despair', whilst Little et al. (2018) found three main themes associated: 'escape', 'communitas' and 'self-reported changes'.

In a large-scale review of the festival literature until 2009, Getz (2010) also highlighted several recurrent themes: 'social change', 'authenticity', 'place identity and attachment', 'communitas', 'festivity', 'rites and rituals', 'pilgrimage', 'myths and symbols', and 'spectacle'. A few years later, the same author resumed them in a three-dimensional model based on the affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions of event experiences (Getz, 2012). His model was later completed with a fourth dimension based on the visitors' interaction with the festival environment (affective engagement, cognitive engagement, physical engagement and experiencing novelty) (De Geus et al., 2015). More recently, Tanford and Jung's (2017) review of the studies published between 2000 and 2016 highlighted six major common components of festival experiences: 'activities', 'authenticity or uniqueness', 'concessions', 'environment', 'escape or enjoyment', and 'socialization'. The main experiential dimensions identified in the literature are synthesized in Table 1.

Table 1. Main experiential dimensions identified in the literature

Reference	No. and name of dimensions
Pine and Gilmore (1998)	4 'education', 'entertainment', 'escapism', 'aesthetics'
Getz (2010)	9 'social change', 'authenticity', 'place identity and attachment', 'communitas', 'festivity', 'rites and rituals', 'pilgrimage', 'myths and symbols', 'spectacle'

Akyildiz and Argan (2010)	3	'feeling and think experience', 'act and relate experience', 'sense experience'
Packer and Ballantyne (2011)	4	music experience, festival experience, social interactions, separation experience
Getz (2012)	3	affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions
Jackson (2014)	6	'freedom and constraint', 'camaraderie and hostility', 'euphoria and despair'
De Geus et al., 2015	4	affective engagement, cognitive engagement, physical engagement, experiencing novelty
Rivera et al., 2015; Semrad and Rivera, 2018	5	'education', 'entertainment', 'escapism', 'aesthetics', 'economic'
Tanford and Jung (2017)	6	'activities', 'authenticity or uniqueness', 'concessions', 'environment', 'escape or enjoyment', 'socialization'
Little et al., (2018)	3	'escape', 'communitas', 'self-reported changes'

Source: authors' representation

For this study, we chose to highlight all the experiential components revealed by content analysis of OVR, either identified or not in previous models, and interpreting the findings in light of the existing literature. The aim was to highlight new connections and even new dimensions of visitor experiences unidentified in previous studies.

1.3. Social media, online reviews and e-WOM in tourism and festival contexts

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in the SM impact on tourist experiences, especially related to festivals. SM has a major role in guest communication, or the identification of visitors' expectations, becoming a pivotal actor in festival-related tourism, engaging people as co-creators of festival experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005; Hoksberg & Insch, 2016). Therefore, visitors' feedback from SM has become a popular tool for managers to build emotional attachment and generate electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Hudson et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2013). EWOM is a key indicator of festival experiences with many managerial benefits (Semrad & Rivera, 2018) due to its increasing impact on people's decisions and its significant relationship with customer loyalty and satisfaction (Cheung & Lee, 2012). User engagement through SM goes beyond the classical interaction, requiring constant implication from organisers in order to build the festival brand (Garay Tamajón & Morales Pérez, 2020). Visitors often consider eWOM more trustworthy because of its anchor in real and relevant experiences (Kim et al., 2016).

Among the diverse SM platforms currently available, Facebook is considered the most popular platform for festivals (Hudson et al., 2015). In fact, Facebook was used by 92 % of the European music festivals' attendees in 2013, followed by

YouTube (71%) and Twitter (33%) (EFA & CGA, 2014). Tourism destinations are using extensively the services provided by Facebook for broader promotion, brand building, or awareness enhancement (Hayes et al., 2013; Mariani et al., 2016), taking advantage of the diversity of tools for engaging visitors (Mariani et al., 2018). Facebook OVR influence visitors' expectations and decisions, increasing their emotional attachment and boosting eWOM (Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016), often considered more credible than traditional advertising (Zhang et al., 2010). Facebook also offers several practical advantages for festival researches. Firstly, it is the most popular SM platform used to promote and share music festival experiences (Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016). Secondly, a Facebook event page has functional, social, emotional and economic values (Hoksberg & Insch, 2016; Lee et al., 2012). Thirdly, Facebook offers a different type of data than traditional survey techniques, ensuring a less restricted coverage (Mariani et al., 2018).

2. Methodology

Our study focused on Untold, the largest music festival in Romania and one of the largest in Central and Eastern Europe (over 330.000 attendees yearly, in average). It is one of the most promoted and awarded European festivals ('Best Major European Festival' and 'Brand of The Year' in 2015). The festival is located in the city of Cluj, Transylvania region, and it generates 23 million euro in annual revenues. Untold represents a typical case-study for the recent development of music festival industry, as despite its popularity and positive critical response, it did not fully capture the interest of research community. Online communication is a major part of its promotion strategy. As of September 2023, the Facebook page of Untold has over 520.000 followers.

The research data is represented by all the OVR with text posted on the official Facebook page of Untold between July 2015 and December 2017, covering the first three editions (a total of 802 reviews). The choice of only the first three editions is motivated by the fact that these reviews provided the initial "vibe" of the festival that guided the organisation of the following editions. A supplementary post-pandemic study will be undertaken for the following three editions to compare the transformations.

The analysis of OVR was considered the best suited approach for this investigation given its particularities: a) OVR provide detailed time and cost-efficient information from attendees; b) apart the overall rating, OVR reveal multiple dimensions of subjective visitor experiences (Brochado et al., 2018; Brochado et al., 2021; Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016; Panagiotakopoulos et al., 2022); c) they represent individual reviews and not parts of group conversations; d) OVR enable people to share, relive, and anticipate festival experiences (Hoksberg & Insch, 2016), being motivated by strong emotions or a sense of belonging (Cheung & Lee, 2012); e) compared to traditional survey methods, OVR present the advantage of expressing

subjective and non-directed opinions; f) OVR reflect what people considered most memorable and intense impressions (Singh et al., 2017). While some critiques could be addressed regarding OVR-based approaches, like their briefness and people's concerns about their online reputation (Kozinets, 2002), they still manage to tackle some limitations previously reported, especially the low number of participants (Akyildiz & Argan, 2010), and are unaffected by the review length (Singh et al., 2017).

In order to respect data contextualization, we collected the reviewer's origin, gender, and overall rating (from 1 to 5). As regards research ethics, we followed similar studies that consider online posts as public discourse, hence not requiring informed consent (Brochado et al., 2018). The Untold Facebook page is public, the topic is not of a sensitive matter, therefore, making our research intentions public was not compulsory. However, we maintained the reviewers' anonymity. The automated content analysis highlighted only the most relevant themes, which were objectively and respectfully interpreted. The study sample includes 37.53% women and 62.47% men. Ratings are dominantly high: 95.5% of reviewers gave a maximum 5 stars, 3.1 % 4 stars, 1.1% 3 stars and 2 persons gave 1 star. However, several reviews included both positive and negative aspects of visitor experiences, the high rating being usually granted to the overall impression. Approximately 89.5% of the reviews were from Romania, with the remaining 10.5% primarily from United Kingdom, Germany, USA, Hungary and Bulgaria.

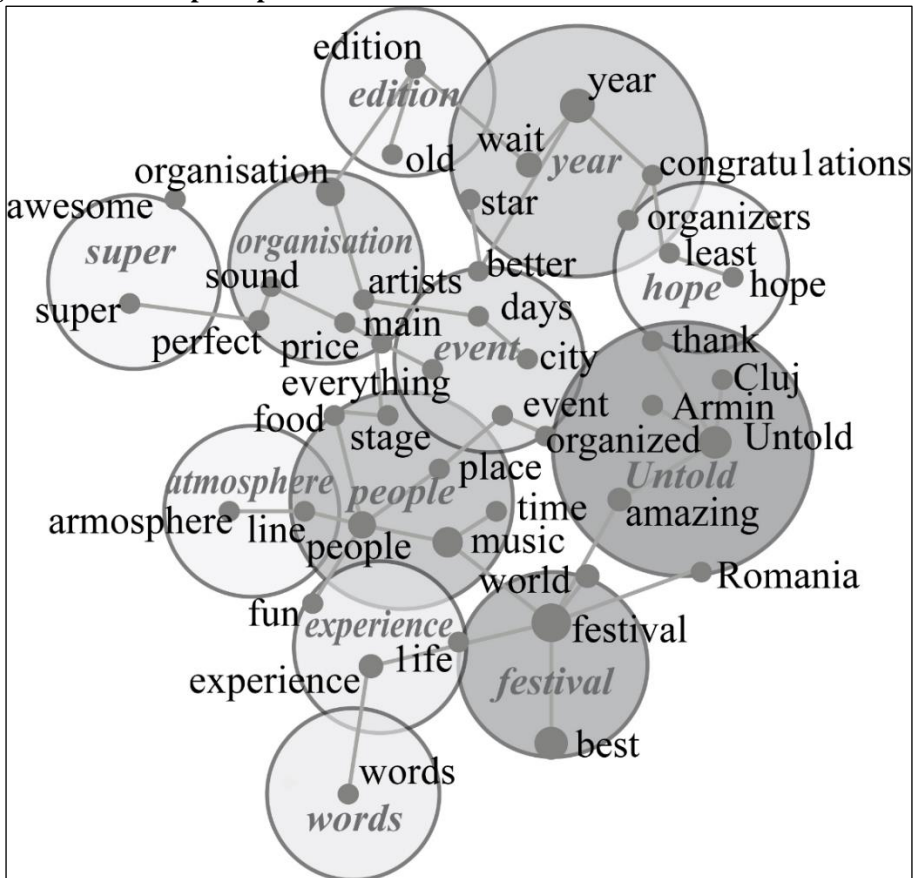
The reviews were translated in English, then submitted to a computed content analysis with the Leximancer software. Similar analyses were used in previous tourism studies and have produced valuable results regarding visitor experiences (Jackson, 2014; Lee, 2020; Little et al., 2018). Leximancer is a text mining software efficient in exploration of internet data, facilitating an objective identification of key concepts (Wilk et al., 2019). It analyses the content of textual materials and displays visual representations of the extracted information. The representation is featured in a conceptual map containing the main concepts and themes identified. While currently there is a considerable amount of methodological approaches and software for studying user generated content in tourism, the choice of Leximancer was based on previous studies successfully using Leximancer for their research questions regarding visitor experiences (Brochado et al., 2017; Brochado et al., 2021; Lee, 2020). Leximancer first identifies recurrent single words named 'concept seeds' that represent starting points for the definition of concepts; then, based on concepts' co-occurrences in text, forms themes distributed in a concept map.

3. Results

The concept map (Figure 1) illustrates the main concepts extracted from OVR, labelled in black colour. The main concepts are clustered into themes represented by circles and labelled in grey colour. The size of a concept's dot reflects its connectivity in the concept map (the sum of all the co-occurrences with every other

concept), while the proximity of two concepts shows how often they appear in similar conceptual contexts. Overlapping circles indicate that the themes are semantically related to each other. We separated the themes into primary, secondary and tertiary, according to their importance (the darker the colour, the higher the rank of the respective theme). The lines indicate direct connections among concepts.

Figure 1. The concept map for Untold music festival



Source: authors' representation

The content analysis identified 12 themes (see Table 2 and Figure 1): 'Untold' (392 hits), 'Festival' (361), 'Year' (348), 'People' (231), 'Organization' (174), 'Event' (163), 'Experience' (155), 'Super' (67), 'Edition' (67), 'Atmosphere' (65), 'Hope' (45), and 'Words' (23). With their associated concepts, these themes highlight the main components of subjective visitors' experiences communicated through OVR. Regarding their hierarchical importance, the concept map emphasizes four primary themes, two secondary themes and six tertiary themes.

Table 2. The themes and associated concepts identified through content analysis

Themes	Concepts	OVR example
Primary themes	UNTOLD	‘Untold is the most amazing festival! The best DJs in the world! Armin van Buren was amazing! Congratulations to the organizers! Well done, Cluj!’ (male, Romanian, 2017, 5*)
	festival	‘It was the Best Festival! See you next year!!’ (male, Hungarian, 2016, 5*).
	year	‘Congratulations to the organizers, to Cluj Napoca City Hall and the DJs. There were four sensational nights that I wish to repeat every 3 months, but unfortunately we have to wait one year to relive those magic moments!’ (male, Romanian, 2017, 5*).
	people	‘Awesome people, food and energy. [...] Great place, to relax, feel free and enjoy time with friends.’ (male, Romanian, 2017, 5*).
Secondary themes	organization	‘An exemplary festival! Impeccable organization, excellent sound, one-of-a-kind artists!’ (male, Romanian, 2015, 5*)
	event	‘What an amazing event! It was my first festival ever and I am so glad it was with UNTOLD!!!!’ (female, Irish, 2017, 5*)
Tertiary themes	experience	‘It was a great life experience and we had a lot of fun.’ (female, Romanian, 2015, 5*).
	super	‘Awesome, these guys make a super show, and it’s really good that it lasts several days.’ (male, Romanian, 2015, 5*)
	edition	‘I love this festival, I’ve been to every edition. The organization is increasingly good. However, too many under-age kids, as if it’s a festival for people under 18 years old, honestly!’ (female, Romanian, 2017, 4*)
	atmosphere	‘Wonderful atmosphere, relaxed and positive people, very good organisation.’ (female, Romanian, 2016, 5*)
	hope	‘I hope that future editions will be at least as good!’ (male, Romanian, 2017, 5*)
	words	‘No words, only beats and memories.’ (male, German, 5*, 2016).

Source: authors’ representation

We focused our analysis on the primary themes that dominate the eWOM discourse and share the largest amount of hits and connectivity: ‘Untold’, ‘Festival’, ‘Year’, and ‘People’.

3.1. The festival identity (Untold theme)

The prominence of this theme reveals the strong impact of the festival’s perceived identity on people’s reviews. The concepts directly connected with festival’s identity are ‘amazing’, ‘Romania’, ‘Cluj’, ‘thank’ and ‘Armin’, representing key attributes for the perceived identity. The ‘Untold’ theme is overlapping with the ‘Hope’ theme, which reinforces the findings of Davies (2016) claiming that identity is built on visitors’ expectations, while the proximity to the ‘Event’ theme underlines the role of organization in building the festival brand.

The theme is closely related to experiential dimensions found in literature, like festival experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), environment (Tanford & Jung, 2017), or affective dimension (Getz, 2012). Untold is strongly associated with its location, both the city (Cluj) and the country names being mentioned. Surprisingly, even if the Untold promotion has strongly capitalized on the myth of Dracula, this aspect is not prominent in OVR. The dominance of Romanian reviewers could be a possible explanation, as Dracula is still unpopular among Romanians (Stoleriu & Ibanescu, 2014, 2015). Similar to findings from other festival studies (Davis, 2016; De Bres & Davis, 2001), Untold seems to foster emotional involvement, in the form of place attachment and national pride. This strong connection to the city could be a result of meaningful visitor experiences, efficient event branding (Morgan, 2008), and continuity of location (Davis, 2016).

The concepts ‘amazing’ and ‘thank’ indicate the dominance of positive perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. Another distinctive component of the festival’s identity is the star artist of each Untold edition - Armin van Buren, this connection reinforcing the efficiency of a celebrity figure in festival branding and creating visitor loyalty (Kim et al., 2018).

3.2. The visitors’ assessment (festival theme)

The festival theme (361 hits) includes the concepts ‘festival’, ‘best’ and ‘world’. It has direct connections to ‘life’, ‘music’ and ‘Untold’ concepts and it is closer semantically to the ‘Experience’ theme. While the previous theme was an expression of festival’s identity, this theme seems linked to visitors’ evaluation and satisfaction. Satisfying consumer experiences is a popular topic in tourism and leisure research (Teixeira et al., 2019) and a common goal of music festivals. The prominence of this theme indicates the efficiency of event organizers in stimulating spontaneous reviews.

The theme is the expression of several experiential dimensions, for example festival experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), affective dimension (Getz, 2012), entertainment (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), and festivity (Getz, 2010). Festival experience is a key attribute in people's impressions, and, as found by Rivera et al. (2015), visitor evaluation is built on the subjective experimentation of the festival attributes. The concepts 'world' and 'best' indicate that Untold is often compared with similar events, which could indicate that Untold is perceived as a renowned international festival.

3.3. The appraisal and anticipation (Year theme) appraisal and anticipation

The 'Year' theme (348 hits) includes the concepts 'year', 'congratulations', 'wait', 'organizers', and 'stars'. This theme is strongly linked to people's evaluations (e.g., congratulations, number of stars given to Untold), with the particularity that this time the evaluations introduce the element of anticipation for future editions (in conjunction with the concept 'year' and the theme 'hope'). The concepts 'congratulations' and 'better' indicate overall high visitor satisfaction, especially in relation to the organization and expectations built by previous editions.

While it is related to the experiential dimension of festival experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), the theme reveals new connections between visitors and festival organisers, previously unknown. The 'Year' theme is strongly linked to two secondary themes, 'Edition' and 'Hope' and together they offer an overview of visitor loyalty. Many reviewers share their previous experiences and expectations, making frequent recommendations to the organizers, expressing eagerness to come back and hoping to have at least similar experiences. The connections between 'Year', 'Edition' and 'Hope' reinforce the role of OVR in illustrating various stages of leisure experiences: lived experiences, the recollection of previous editions, and anticipation of future ones. The concept map underlines the key role of the festival organization in shaping the visitors' subjective evaluations, as well as their anticipations and return intentions (Davis, 2016).

3.4. The social interactions and communitas (People theme)

The 'People' theme (231 hits) includes the concepts 'people', 'music', 'time', 'food', 'stage' and 'place'. This theme evaluates the social interactions of people forming the Untold community, including visitors, staff, and artists. The theme has solid connections with: communitas (Getz, 2010; Little et al., 2018), music experience and social interactions (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), camaraderie (Jackson, 2014), affective engagement and physical engagement (De Geus et al., 2015), and socialization (Tanford & Jung, 2017). Festivals are known as places of socialization (Morgan, 2008; Rihova et al., 2018), social interactions motivating people to attend festivals (Quinn & Wilks, 2017). The weight and connectivity of

this theme confirm the essential role of 'People' in shaping Untold experiences. The direct links and semantical overlapping with 'Organization', 'Event', and 'Festival' underline the importance of social interactions in building overall perceptions of music festivals. It should be mentioned that 'People' is also directly linked to 'music', 'fun', 'place' and 'food', indicating the environments where social interactions occur.

3.5. Connections between the primary and the secondary themes

The content analysis highlighted two secondary ('Organization', 'Event') and six tertiary themes ('Experience', 'Super', 'Edition', 'Atmosphere', 'Hope', 'Words'). While they have only a minor weight within the concept map, their interactions with the primary themes spotlighted thought-provoking connections. For example, 'Music', usually known as a key attribute of music festival experiences (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Gibson & Connell, 2007; Tanford & Jung, 2017), it is not a main theme for Untold, but an underlying concept connecting several themes. The OVR emphasize the importance of the artists' selection and the sound quality of the festival, while the role of the music is linked to shaping social interactions. The concept 'music' is best connected to the 'People' theme, emphasizing the role of music in engaging people physically and emotionally, facilitating social bonding (Quinn & Wilks, 2017; Tanford & Jung, 2017) and building temporary *communitas* (Davis, 2017; Little et al., 2018).

The concept map also indicates the essential role of the community and social interactions (represented by the theme 'People') in building the festival experience (represented by the homonym theme). In the Untold OVR, 'atmosphere' is a less prominent experiential concept compared to other festival studies (Davis, 2017). However, the atmosphere seems to enhance social interactions. The theme 'Experience' is connected to 'People' through the concept 'fun', highlighting the role of social bonding in facilitating escape. Fun is the main reference to escapism, a key component of festival experiences (Tanford & Jung, 2017), associated with freedom and fantasy (Jakson, 2014; Quin & Wilks, 2017).

Festival environment, another key component of festival experiences (Tanford & Jung, 2017), is reflected by the secondary theme 'Organization', formed by key-concepts 'artists', 'sound', 'prices', and well connected with the themes 'Super', 'People', and 'Event' (indicating mostly positive reactions towards festival organization). Moreover, the link between 'People' and 'Organization' emphasizes the role of festival staff in enhancing positive social interactions. Surprisingly, social interactions and community seem to be a central element of the Untold environment, unlike other festivals (Tanford & Jung, 2017). The multiple concepts referring to festival organization indicate a general appreciation for rigorous planning and management of festival experiences. People seemsto search rather for a fantasy of freedom and escape, in a novel but safe environment (De Geus et al., 2016), thus

explaining the increasing regularization and standardization of festival experiences (Matheson & Tinsley, 2016). This could also explain the absence of ‘Authenticity’, a key experiential festival dimension (Getz, 2010; Lee et al., 2015; Tanford & Jung, 2017) known for influencing visitors’ motivations, satisfaction, and the festival identity (Getz & Page, 2016). The economic dimension of festival experiences is underrepresented in the concept map, with ‘Prices’ being the only related mention. Other popular festival attributes from literature underrepresented in Untold OVR are camping facilities and accessibility (Jackson, 2014; Morgan, 2006, 2008), indicating their lower impact on visitors’ memories.

4. Discussions and implications

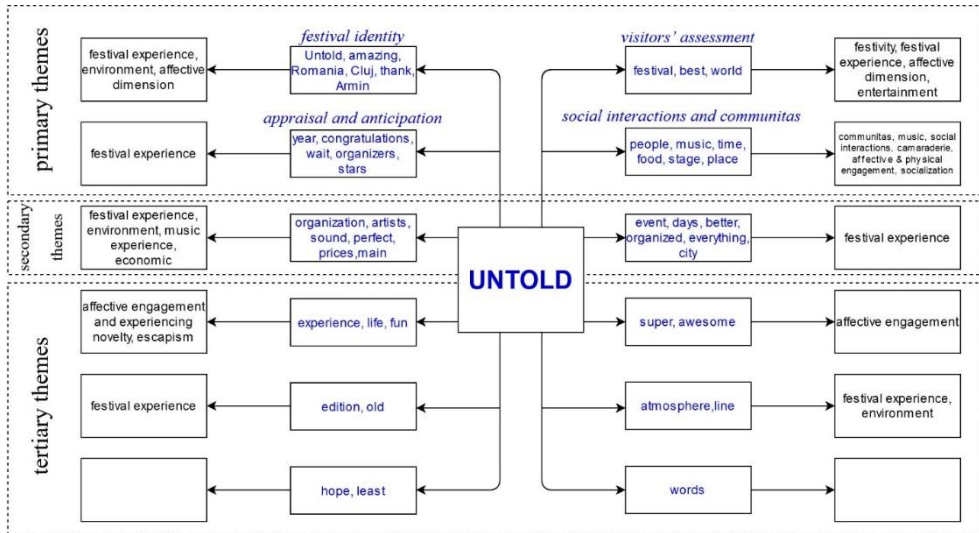
4.1. Theoretical implications - the associations between OVR themes and the experiential dimensions previously found in literature

This paper aimed to identify the main components of visitors’ experiences revealed by content analysis of OVR in relation with the existing literature. It contributes to a still developing leisure and tourism literature regarding the experiential dimension of music festivals. The main novelty of this paper is the methodological approach through computed analysis of OVR, which complements classical survey methods.

Overall, the main components revealed by content analysis are in line with previous models (Figure 2), however, our method revealed new connections, dependencies and new concepts related to music festivals unmentioned in previous studies.

For example, the important role of organization in the attendees’ evaluations and anticipations suggests a preference for controlled and safe escapist experiences, rather than a real transgression of social norms usually associated with outdoor festivals (Little et al., 2017). Regarding the connection with the four E’s model of Pine and Gilmore (1998), the entertainment is mostly limited to the music experience, the escapism is associated with only a tertiary theme (experience), whilst the concepts associated with education and aesthetics dimensions are completely missing. Other previously identified dimensions strongly represented are: festival experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011), environment (Tanford & Jung, 2017), affective dimension (Getz, 2012), festivity (Getz, 2010), *communitas* (Getz, 2010; Little et al., 2018), or affective engagement (De Geus, Richards & Toepoel, 2015), while escapism (Rivera et al., 2015; Tanford & Jung, 2017; Semrad & Rivera, 2018) and music experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011) are rather underrepresented. Furthermore, this is the first time that we can identify how the experiential dimension of *communitas* (Getz, 2010; Little et al., 2018) is connected to the musical identity of a festival.

Figure 2. The connections between Untold user-generated themes (blue) and experiential dimensions found in literature (black)



Source: authors' representation

An important aspect for tourism and festival studies is the absence of dimensions like 'authenticity', a key experiential dimension (Getz, 2010; Lee et al., 2015; Tanford & Jung, 2017) or cognitive engagement (Getz, 2012; De Geus, Richards & Toepoel, 2015), which underlines the standardization trend of music festival experiences. Not only that authenticity does not emerge as a significant aspect, but the reproduction of successful management practices from other editions or festivals is expected and appreciated.

OVR-based studies could help developing the literature on festival experiences, this paper reinforcing the importance of SM for a better understanding and planning of visitor experiences. The on-line interaction is more complex than the traditional one, it facilitates outside group communication, and offers a broader vision of people's experiences and expectations.

4.2. Implications for festival managers

The OVR provide an accessible and 'live' database, with valuable insights into the visitors' subjective experiences. They are a cost and time-efficient tool for monitoring the event's success and contribute to a better understanding and planning for both visitors and organisers. Well managed, the event page can become part of everyday leisure activities and contribute to brand or destination attachment, as well as festival's economy.

The results suggest that festival managers should continue to reinforce the brand by developing the event design, and by using social media platforms and applications providing valuable feedback and visibility. A permanently updated and interactive page fosters continuous visitor engagement in the co-creation of festival experiences (Getz & Page, 2016; Hoksbergen & Insch, 2016; Rihova et al., 2018), before, during, and after the event. It creates more eWOM and encourages social interactions. This supports the recommendation to maintain and develop an active visitor community outside the festival premises, continuing the bonding effect of live music shows.

Our study is one of the first to identify that the newly created music festivals are progressing from the first stage of interaction between organisers and visitors (customer satisfaction) to the second stage (customer loyalty) (Cheung & Lee, 2012). In fact, the results are indicating the anticipation in visitors experience, therefore the introduction of the customer loyalty. Aspects linked to festival management and marketing have a strong influence on people's satisfaction, even stronger than the musical or social experiences (Ballantyne & Packer, 2014; O'Neill & Egermann, 2022). In this regard, OVR underlines the key role of recurring celebrity figures in building the event brand and in generating strong emotions and positive eWOM. Managers should continue to reinforce the festival brand through the association with famous recurring artists (which appeared as key elements of the festival identity). However, since customer loyalty appears to be growing in importance, the organisers should include in their strategy people's expectations and feedback.

Furthermore, the lack of local heritage and symbols, corroborated with the lack of the authenticity from the concept-map denotes the inability to build local roots for the event. The promotion of local heritage and products within the festival premises (food, commerce, entertainment themes) could help developing the festival's authenticity, and reinforce an attractive destination image, capable of generating long-term customer loyalty. The promotion would imply a better collaboration among festival organizers and regional businesses towards a powerful festival brand, better anchored in the territorial culture and economy (Pike & Page, 2014).

Conclusions

Overall, most of the components revealed by content analysis are in line with previous studies, however, our method revealed new connections and dependencies. The most prominent themes were festival's identity, visitors' assessment, anticipation, and social interactions. The different weight of these key aspects could be a specific feature of online communication; however, it seems that the central positioning of festival management in visitors' evaluations indicates a preference for controlled and safe escapist experiences, rather than a real transgression of social norms as previously associated with festivals. In opposition, the authenticity (a key

concept in festival studies in the '90s and 2000's) was not found to be significant, reinforcing the idea that current festivals follow the trend of standardization.

Our method revealed additional connections consolidating the role of festival experience, host-guest interactions, and *communitas*. The uncovered themes and concepts related to music festivals indicate the usefulness of OVR as an alternative or complementary database to classical approaches. The OVR-based analysis could help develop the literature, this paper reinforcing the importance of SM for a better understanding of visitor experiences.

The main research limitations are linked to the nature of online data such as the low share of foreign visitors' OVR (given the lack of official data regarding the visitors' structure, we cannot conclude if the sub-representation of foreign visitors in the sample reflects their real share or their lower online engagement) or the platform managers' control over people's posts and the fact that these often express what people consider most important to communicate. All these are balanced by the non-contrived nature of OVR, their anchor in real and significant experiences, their longitudinal perspective, and their impact on other travellers' decisions.

Further studies could develop computed analysis of OVR to compare festival experiences across multiple events and SM platforms, or to study the structure of group discussions, networking patterns, and the formation of online communities, as a next logical step on unfolding visitor experiences through online reviews from social media.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-1878, within PNCDI III "Institutions, digitalization and regional development in the European Union".

References

- Akyildiz, M., & Argan, M. (2010). Leisure experience dimensions: a study on participants of Ankara festival. *Pamukkale Journal of Sport Sciences*, 1(2), 25-36.
- Ballantyne, J., Ballantyne, R., & Packer, J. (2014). Designing and managing music festival experiences to enhance attendees' psychological and social benefits. *Musicae Scientiae*, 18(1), 65-83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1029864913511845>
- Birenboim, A. (2016). New approaches to the study of tourist experiences in time and space. *Tourism Geographies*, 18(1), 9-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1122078>
- Brochado, A., Stoleriu, O. M., & Lupu, C. (2018). Surf camp experiences. *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, 22(1), 21-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2018.1430609>
- Brochado, A., Stoleriu, O. M., & Lupu, C. (2021). Wine tourism: a multisensory experience. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(5), 597-615. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1649373>

- Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in tourism management: twenty years on and 10 years after the internet: the state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609-623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005>
- Buhalis, D., & O'Connor, P. (2005). Information communication technology-revolutionising tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 30(3), 7-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2005.11081482>
- Cehan, A., & Iașu, C. (2023). Government policies for tourism in Romania during the COVID-19 pandemic: a stakeholders' perspective. *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.47743/ejes-2023-0106>
- Cheung, C. M. K., & Lee, M. K. O. (2012). What drives consumers to spread electronic word of mouth in online consumer-opinion platforms. *Decision Support Systems*, 53(1), 218-225. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.01.015>
- Cudny, W. (Ed.). (2019). *Urban events, place branding and promotion: Place event marketing*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429424847>
- Davis, A. (2016). Experiential places or places of experience? Place identity and place attachment as mechanisms for creating festival environment. *Tourism Management*, 55, 49-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.01.006>
- Davis, A. (2017). It wasn't me, it was my festival me: The effect of event stimuli on attendee identity formation. *Tourism Management*, 61, 484-500. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.03.007>
- De Bres, K., & Davis, J. (2001). Celebrating group and place identity: A case study of a new regional festival. *Tourism Geographies*, 3(3), 326-337. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616680110055439>
- De Geus, S., Richards, G., & Toepoel, V. (2016). Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Event and Festival Experiences: Creation of an Event Experience Scale. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 16(3), 274-296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2015.1101933>
- European Festival Awards (EFA), & CGA strategy (2014). European Festival Market Report 2013.CGA strategy. <https://cgastrategy.com/2016pub-and-restaurant-groups-beat-2014-festive-trading-performance/>
- Garay Tamajón L., & Morales Pérez S. (2020). User Engagement in Festival Virtual Brand Communities: The Cases of Sónar and Primavera Sound (Barcelona). *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 44(2), 300-327. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1096348019897990>
- Getz, D., & Page, S. J. (2016). Progress and prospects for event tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 52, 593-631. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.03.007>
- Getz, D. (2010). The nature and scope of festival studies. *International Journal of Event Management Research*, 5, 1-47.
- Getz, D. (2012). *Event studies: Theory, research and policy for planned events*. Abingdon: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780429023002>

- Gibson, C., & Connell, J. (2007). Music, tourism and the transformation of Memphis. *Tourism Geographies*, 9(2), 160-190. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616680701278505>
- Hays, S., Page, S., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 16(3), 211-239. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.662215>
- Hoksbergen, E., & Insch, A. (2016). Facebook as a platform for co-creating music festival experiences: The case of New Zealand's Rhythm and Vines New Year's Eve festival. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 7(2), 84-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-02-2016-0012>
- Hudson, S., Roth, M., Madden, T., & Hudson R. (2015). The effects of social media on emotions, brand relationship quality, and word of mouth: an empirical study of music festival attendees. *Tourism Management*, 47, 68-76. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.09.001>
- Ibanescu, B. C., Eva, M., Gheorghiu, A., & Iatu, C. (2023). Tourism-Induced Resilience of Rural Destinations in Relation to Spatial Accessibility. *Applied Spatial Analysis and Policy*, 16(3), 1237-1254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12061-022-09439-1>
- Jackson, C. (2014). *The Lived Experience of the Popular Music Festival-Goer* (thesis). <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/42142416.pdf>
- Kim, B., Kim, S., & Heo, C. (2016). Analysis of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in online hotel reviews on social media. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(9), 1915-1936. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-04-2015-0177>
- Kim, S. (S.), Choeb, J. Y. (J.), & Petrick, J. F. (2018). The effect of celebrity on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand image, brand loyalty, and destination attachment to a literary festival. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 9, 320-329. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2018.03.006>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61-72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935>
- Lee, A. H. (2020). What does colour tell about tourist experiences?. *Tourism Geographies*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1852594>
- Lee, I., Arcodia, C., & Lee, T. J. (2012). Benefits of visiting a multicultural festival: the case of South Korea. *Tourism Management*, 33(2), 334-340. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.04.001>
- Lee, T. H., Fu, C. J., & Chang, P. S. (2015). The support of attendees for tourism development: Evidence from religious festivals, Taiwan. *Tourism Geographies*, 17(2), 223-243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.997280>
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing* 30(1-2), 3-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919>
- Little, N., Burger, B., & Croucher, S. M. (2018). EDM and ecstasy: the lived experiences of electronic music festival attendees. *Journal of New Music Research*, 47(1), 78-95. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09298215.2017.1358286>

- Llopis-Amorós, M. P., Gil-Saura, I., Ruiz-Molina, M. E., & Fuentes-Blasco, M. (2019). Social media communications and festival brand equity: Millennials vs Centennials. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 40, 134-144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.08.002>
- Manthiou, A., Lee, S., Tang, L., & Chiang, L. (2014). The experience economy approach to festival marketing: Vivid memory and attendee loyalty. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 28(1), 22-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JSM-06-2012-0105>
- Mariani M. M., Di Felice M., & Mura M. (2016). Facebook as a destination marketing tool: Evidence from Italian regional Destination Management Organizations. *Tourism Management*, 54, 321-343. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.12.008>
- Mariani, M. M., Mura, M., & Di Felice, M. (2018). The determinants of Facebook social engagement for national tourism organizations' Facebook pages: A quantitative approach. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 8, 312-325. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.06.003>
- Matheson, C. M., & Tinsley, R. (2016). The carnivalesque and event evolution: a study of the Beltane Fire Festival. *Leisure Studies*, 16(1), 1-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.962591>
- Morgan, M. (2006). Making space for experiences. *Journal of Retail and Leisure Property*, 5(4), 305-313. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.rlp.5100034>
- Morgan, M. (2008). What makes a Good Festival? Understanding the Event Experience. *Event Management*, 12(2), 81-93. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3727/152599509787992562>
- Oklevik, O., Kwiatkowski, G., Preuss, H., & Kurdyś-Kujawska, A. (2022). Contextual engagement in event visitors' experience and satisfaction. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 22(1), 58-79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2021.1927829>
- O'Neill, K., & Egermann, H. (2022). Development of the Social Experience of a Concert Scales (SECS): The Social Experience of a Live Western Art Music Concert Influences People's Overall Enjoyment of an Event but not Their Emotional Response to the Music. *Music & Science*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20592043221106478>
- Packer, J., & Ballantyne, J. (2011). The impact of music festival attendance on young people's psychological and social well-being. *Psychology of Music*, 39(2), 164-181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0305735610372611>
- Panagiotakopoulos, D., Marentakis, G., Metzidakos, R., Deliyannis, I., & Dedes, F. (2022). Digital scent technology: Toward the internet of senses and the metaverse. *IT Professional*, 24(3), 52-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/MITP.2022.3177292>
- Pascariu, G. C., Ibănescu, B. C., Nijkamp, P., Kourtit, K. (2021). Tourism and Economic Resilience: Implications for Regional Policies. In: Suzuki, S., Kourtit, K., Nijkamp, P. (eds) *Tourism and Regional Science. New Frontiers in Regional Science: Asian Perspectives*, vol 53. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3623-3_8
- Pine, B., & Gilmore, J. (1998). Welcome to the experience economy. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4), 96-105.

- Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination Marketing Organizations and destination marketing: a narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, 41, 202-227. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009>
- Quinn, B., & Wilks, L. (2017). Festival heterotopias: Spatial and temporal transformations in two small-scale settlements. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 53, 35-44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.05.006>
- Rihova, I., Buhalis, D., Gouthro, M. B., & Moital, M. (2018). Customer-to-customer co-creation practices in tourism: Lessons from Customer-Dominant logic. *Tourism Management*, 67, 362-375. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.02.010>
- Rivera, M., Semrad, K., & Croes, R. (2015). The five E's in festival experience in the context of Gen Y: Evidence from a small island destination. *Revista Española de Investigación de Marketing ESIC*, 19, 95-106. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.reimke.2015.06.001>
- Semrad, K. J., & Rivera, M. (2018). Advancing the 5E's in festival experience for the GenY framework in the context of eWOM. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 7, 58-67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.08.003>
- Singh, J. P., Irani, S., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K., Saumya, S., & Roy, P. K. (2017). Predicting the "helpfulness" of online consumer reviews. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 346-355. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.08.008>
- Stoleriu, O. M., & Ibănescu, B. C. (2014). Dracula tourism in Romania: From national to local tourism strategies. *SGEM 2014 Conference Proceedings*, 2, 225-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2014/B24/S7.029>
- Stoleriu, O. M., & Ibanescu, B. C. (2015). Romania's country image in tourism tv commercials. *SGEM 2015 Conference Proceedings*, 2, 867-874. <https://doi.org/10.5593/SGEMSOCIAL2015/B22/S7.111>
- Tanford, S., & Jung, S. (2017). Festival attributes and perceptions: A meta-analysis of relationships with satisfaction and loyalty. *Tourism Management*, 61, 209-220. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.02.005>
- Teixeira, S., Ferreira, J., Almeida, A., & Parra-Lopez, E. (2019). Tourist events and satisfaction: a product of regional tourism competitiveness. *Tourism Review*, 74(4), 943-977. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/TR-12-2018-0181>
- Wilk, V., Soutar, G. N., & Harrigan, P. (2019). Tackling social media data analysis: Comparing and contrasting QSR NVivo and Leximancer. *Qualitative Market Research*, 22(2), 94-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/QMR-01-2017-0021>
- Zhang, J. Q., Craciun, G., & Shin, D. (2010). When does electronic word-of-mouth matter? A study of consumer product reviews. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(12), 1336-1341. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.12.011>