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Festivals and digitalisation: a critique of the literature

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to a systematic literature review followed by a critical synthesis to unveil the underlying knowledge that shapes our understanding of festivals in the digital era. Findings reveal a diverse range of digital applications, such as social media, virtual technologies and event apps, used in festival contexts. Analysis also highlights the digital-influenced experiences of various stakeholders involved, particularly concerning brand, place, destination image and cocreation. The study emphasises the pressing need to investigate the role of generative artificial intelligence-based applications in festivals, pinpointing areas ripe for research such as representation and authenticity, community engagement and participation, memories and storytelling, as well as power and accessibility. By demonstrating how digital technologies intersect with festivity, this research opens new avenues for exploring the dynamic relationship between technology and cultural expression, advocating for a deeper understanding of their integration in the digital age.

Keywords Festivals, Digitalisation, Literature, Critique

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The landscape of festivals undergoes a profound transformation, propelled by the integration of digital technology into cultural practices (Mair, 2019; Ryan *et al.*, 2020; Shipman and Vogel, 2024). Festivals, once bound by physical spaces, temporal constraints and limited interactions, now transcend these boundaries, embracing the limitless possibilities of the digital age (Duffy and Mair, 2021; Laing, 2018). This shift marks a departure from conventional notions of festivity, ushering in an era where cultural celebrations extend beyond physical confines and temporal limitations.

Exploring the nuances of festivals in the digital era necessitates a deep dive into the rich tapestry of literature surrounding this phenomenon. A robust literature review serves as a guiding beacon, illuminating the intricate interplay between digitalisation and festival culture. By scrutinising existing scholarship, researchers can uncover the multifaceted impacts of digital technology on the fabric of festivity, unravelling its epistemological dimensions and societal implications.

This study embarks on a journey through the annals of academic discourse on festivals in the digital age, steering focus towards the broader implications beyond mere digitalisation. Through the literature review and a critical synthesis, the paper aims to unveil the underlying knowledge



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that shape our understanding of festivals in the digital era. This paper focuses on the following four research questions: How is digital technology applied in festive events? How do different types of festivals manifest in the digital age? How do stakeholders engage with festivals in the context of digitalisation? What concepts and theories help understand the festive experience influenced by digitalisation? By highlighting and critiquing changes in festival dynamics, this research endeavours to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the intersection between digital technology and festivity, opening new avenues for exploration and inquiry.

Conceptual underpinning

The interest in festivals and communal celebrations is not new and can be traced back to early human civilisations (Mair, 2019; Rossetti *et al.*, 2023). The study of festivals began to take shape with the development of social sciences. Early anthropologists and sociologists showed interest in festivals as a way to understand cultural practices, social norms and community structures (Frost, 2016). Émile Durkheim's examination of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995) and Victor Turner's study of communal celebration and social dramas (Turner, 1982) are examples of early scholarly work that highlighted the importance of festivals in social and cultural contexts. The latter half of the 20th century saw a significant shift in the study of festivals. This period marked the beginning of festival studies emerging as a distinct academic field, driven by the globalisation of festivals and an increased recognition of their economic and tourism-related potentials (Duffy and Mair, 2017; Mair, 2019). This era also saw the rise of interdisciplinary approaches, combining insights from anthropology, cultural studies, tourism studies, sociology and event management.

The study of festivals has evolved significantly in recent years, reflecting broader societal shifts and changing cultural practices (Duffy and Mair, 2021; Laing, 2018). Contemporary scholarship has expanded this definition to include a diverse array of cultural celebrations that may not conform to traditional notions of time and space. Scholarly exploration of festivals encompasses various dimensions, reflecting the multifaceted nature of these cultural phenomena. Researchers have investigated spatial, temporal, experiential and participatory aspects of festivals, seeking to understand how these dimensions intersect and influence the festival experience (Rossetti *et al.*, 2023).

Contemporary festival studies often categorise festivals based on their content, mode of engagement and cultural significance (Cudny, 2016; Dai, 2013). Categories such as music festivals, film festivals and art festivals remain prevalent, but scholars also consider hybrid and virtual festivals that integrate digital elements into traditional formats. The stakeholders involved in festivals extend beyond organisers and attendees to include artists, performers, sponsors and local communities (Mair, 2019). Festival studies explore the dynamics of these relationships, examining how stakeholders collaborate to create meaningful and impactful events.

Theoretical frameworks from disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology and anthropology offer insights into the dynamics of festival culture. Scholars use concepts like ritual theory, performance studies and cultural consumption to analyse the social significance of festivals and their role in identity formation and community building (Duffy and Mair, 2017, 2021; Frost, 2016). Scholars use a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods to study festivals from local, national and global perspectives (Dai, 2013; Mair, 2019). The emergence of digital technologies and social media has also introduced new dimensions to festival studies, enabling researchers to examine the virtual aspects of festival experiences and their broader social media impacts (MacKay *et al.*, 2017).

Digitalisation, as delineated by Gradillas and Thomas (2023) and Grudin (2001), revolutionises societal dynamics, enabling novel forms of expression, social interaction and global connectivity. Digital evolution can be divided into four major innovation cycles

Table 1. Comparisons of Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3.0 and Web 4.0

Parameter	Web 1.0	Web 2.0	Web 3.0	Web 4.0
Year of foundation	1994	2004	2006	2020s
Coined by	Tim Berners-Lee	Dale Dougherty	John Markoff	Collective attribution
Generation	Cognition	Communication	Co-operation	Symbiosis
Known as	“The Web” or “The Internet”	“Web of Documents”	“Web of Data”	“Web of Things” or “Symbiotic Web”
Human interaction	“Read-Only”	“Read-Write”	Personalised	AI-assisted, fully interactive
Semantics	Not applicable	Not applicable	Applied using RDFS/OWL	Advanced AI semantics
Metadata	Relational schema	XSD/DTD	Ontology	Automated semantic metadata
Query language	Simple SQL	SQL along XPath	SPARQL: Protocol and RDF query language	Natural language queries
Machine learning	Not applicable	Not applicable	Applied	Deep learning, AI
Data model	Relational	Relational hierarchical	Graph	Graph and beyond
Linking	Hyperlink	Hyperlink	URI	Advanced URI and IoT linking
Used for	To search the data	To share the data with others	To search, integrate and control data	To integrate and interact with everything
Data representation	HTML	HTML, XHTML, XML	RDF, RDFa, microformats	Semantic HTML, JSON-LD, IoT protocols

Source: Table by authors

(Choudhury, 2014; Radanliev *et al.*, 2021; Ustundag and Cevikcan, 2018). Table 1 compares the features of each cycle. The initial phase, the first generation, brought forth read-only applications, primarily for organising information in static taxonomies, as seen in Web 1.0. Following this, the advent of Web 2.0 marked the second generation, introducing interactive, participatory platforms such as social media and online learning environments. Importantly, Web 2.0 not only enhanced digital social interactions but also spurred citizen science initiatives, especially in urban areas. The third generation, featuring technologies such as robotics and virtual reality, established a semantic web that supports machine-readable data connections, enhancing inter-device communication. The fourth generation, often referred to as Web 4.0 or the Internet of Things (IoT), signifies a shift towards ubiquitous connectivity, enabling everyday objects to communicate and exchange data autonomously (Banaeian Far and Imani Rad, 2024), thus driving substantial automation and efficiency improvements.

Digitalisation signifies a profound shift in information processing and utilisation, driving fundamental societal changes. Its evolution from basic data digitisation to sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI) integration illustrates a continuous journey aimed at enhancing efficiency, connectivity and empowerment across diverse sectors (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2024; Roziqin *et al.*, 2023). The multidisciplinary literature surrounding digitalisation underscores its far-reaching impact on society.

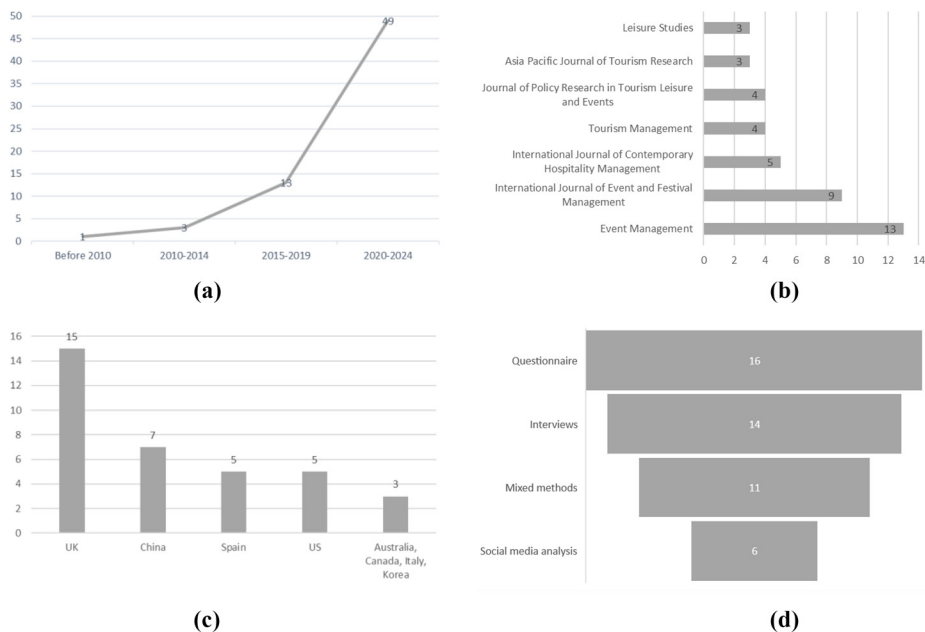
Review methods

This paper uses a systematic literature review methodology developed by Pickering and Byrne (2014) to map the research progress of festivals and digitalisation, and also to provide a critique. The search for relevant literature was conducted using the Web of Science Core Collection database. Multiple key terms were used, including “festival”, and digitisation-related terms (including “digital” or “virtual” or “technology” or “social media” or “ICT” or “ChatGPT” or “Generative Artificial Intelligence” or “AI”). The search was limited to articles in peer-reviewed academic journals within the fields of hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism, published in English as of February 2024.

A total of 90 unique records of journal articles were identified through cross-database comparisons and imported into Endnote reference management software for screening. Each record’s title, abstract and keywords were carefully examined to determine relevance to the review topic. Subsequently, 24 papers were excluded due to their limited contribution to understanding festivals in the digital era. Thus, 66 journal articles (cases) were retained for analysis.

QDA Miner was used for data analysis, allowing for assessment, categorisation and summarisation of key research findings. Initially, the first 10% of articles were coded for publication time, journal source, research methods, research context, festival type, festival participants, digitalisation and key research concepts or theories related to festival experiences. These codes were refined and revised iteratively as subsequent batches of articles were coded, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all relevant aspects. The results were aggregated and summarised, with attention given to journal sources and the approaches to data collection and analysis used by the included studies. Summarisation and visualisation techniques (e.g. cross tabulation and word cloud) were applied to key aspects such as digitalisation, festival type, participants and prominent research concepts or theories. Researchers further evaluated the views and outcomes presented in the data set by analysing whether findings were based on reliable theoretical foundations, considering different viewpoints and explanations and assessing their contribution on the research field.

The bibliographical and methodological information of the publications is presented in Figure 1. The publication trend indicates a notable increase in research output over the years, particularly in the past five years. Before 2010, there was only one publication, increasing to three



Notes: (a) Frequency by publication years; (b) Frequency of major academic journals; (c) Frequency of major research contexts; (d) Frequency of major research methods
Source: Figure by authors

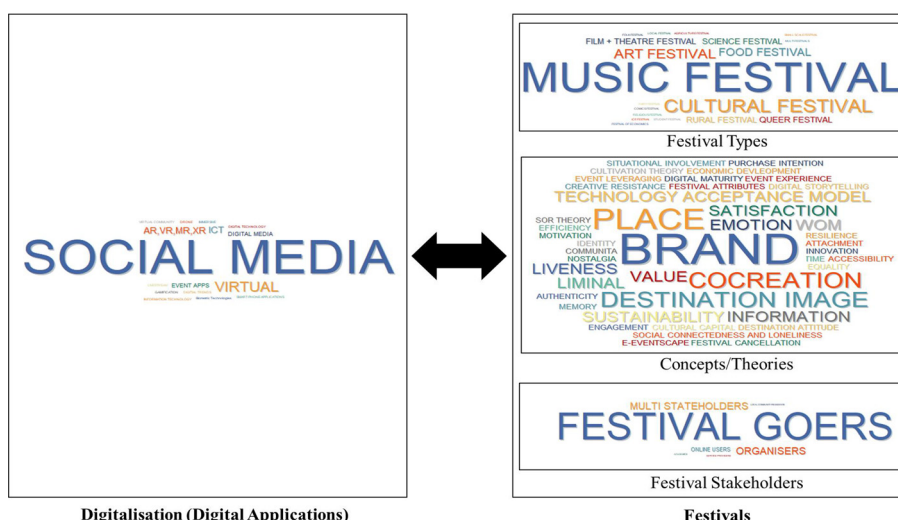
Figure 1. Bibliographical and methodological information of the publications

between 2010 and 2014. However, the growth became more pronounced from 2015 to 2019, with 13 publications, and further accelerated from 2020 to 2024, reaching 49 publications. Among the journals, *Event Management* had the highest frequency with 13 publications, followed by the *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* (9), *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (5), *Tourism Management* (4), *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism Leisure and Events* (4) and *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* (3).

The coding results of research contexts underscore a significant global interest, particularly evident in the attention garnered across Europe. Among the nations or regions, the UK, China, Spain and the USA stand out as notable leaders in research development, indicating their pivotal roles in advancing understanding and exploration within this field. Regarding research methods, questionnaire surveys were the most commonly used method with a frequency of 16, followed by interviews (14), mixed methods (11) and social media analysis (6). Additionally, researchers used diverse analytical approaches such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (FsQCA), Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis and economic impact analysis. This variety underscores the breadth of analytical methods used in the field.

Findings

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the coding outcomes pertaining to the digital applications, and key aspects of festivals like types, participants and conceptual/theoretical frameworks. The analysis reveals that the widespread use of digital technology and



Source: Figure by authors

Figure 2. Coding results of digitalisation and festivals

applications has greatly enriched the forms and experiences of festival activities [Table 2(a)]. Among all digital applications, the use of social media is the most common, with 19 cases accounting for 28.80% of total cases. Most research emphasises that social media has expanded the scope of festivals and diversified the range of organisers (Cimbaljevic *et al.*, 2021; Dinis *et al.*, 2020; Garay and Morales, 2020; Llopis-Amorós *et al.*, 2019; Neuhofer *et al.*, 2021; Uriarte *et al.*, 2020), transforming attendees from passive observers to active participants and influencing decisions ranging from ticket purchases to post-event sharing (Chen and Lei, 2021; Hudson *et al.*, 2015; MacKay *et al.*, 2017; Strand and Robertson, 2020). Limited discussion exists within the collected journal articles on the criticism that social media diminishes face-to-face interactions in real life, while some book chapters had concerned such issue (Mair, 2019).

A number of cases consider the influence of virtual technologies, including virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality and extended reality, enhancing the attractiveness of activities by creating immersive experiences (Dieck *et al.*, 2021; Green, 2023; Olya *et al.*, 2020). Several cases investigate the utilisation of event-related mobile applications that provide value and convenience to participants through real-time information and functionality (Li *et al.*, 2019; Tsai *et al.*, 2022; Yun and Park, 2015). Other digital applications also include live streaming (Estanyol, 2022), gamification (Lee, 2023), virtual communities (Tamajón and Pérez, 2020) and drones (Chen and Girish, 2023). These technologies demonstrate significant potential and diverse value in enhancing the security of activities, promoting participant interaction and increasing audience engagement. Given that ChatGPT was invented in late 2022, it is unsurprising that no festival research has been published focusing on generative AI applications in the fields of tourism, hospitality and leisure.

The results categorise various types of festivals, showcasing the application of digital technology across a myriad of celebrations and events [Table 2(b)]. Music festivals take the

Table 2. Major codes of digitalisation and festivals

Code	Subcodes	Cases	% cases
<i>(a) Major codes of digitalisation/digital applications</i>			
Social media	Social media; digital media	19	28.80
Virtual technologies	AR; VR; XR	8	12.10
Event apps	Event app; smart phone applications	4	6.06
<i>(b) Major codes of festival types</i>			
Music festival	Music festival	16	24.20
Cultural festival	Modern cultural festival; traditional cultural festival	7	10.60
Art festival	Art festival	5	7.60
Food festival	Food festival	4	6.06
Queer festival	LGBTQ festival; pride	3	4.55
Film + theatre festival	Film festival; theatre festival	3	4.55
Science festival	Science festival	3	4.55
Multiple festivals		2	3.03
Urban festival		63	95.45
Rural festival		3	4.55
<i>(c) Major codes of festival stakeholders</i>			
Festivalgoers	Festival attendees, festivalgoers	20	30.30
Organisers	Organisers	5	7.60
Online users	Online users	3	4.55
Multi stakeholders	Multiple stakeholders	5	7.60
<i>(d) Major codes of concepts/theories</i>			
Brand	Brand, branding, brand personality	9	13.64
Place	Place; sense of place, place making	7	10.60
Destination image	Destination image	6	9.10
Cocreation	Cocreation	6	9.10
Sustainability	Sustainability	3	4.55
Information	Information	3	4.55
Liveness	Liveness	3	4.55
WOM	Word of mouth	3	4.55
Liminal	Liminal	3	4.55
Satisfaction	Satisfaction	3	4.55
Emotion	Emotion	3	4.55
Technology acceptance model	Technology acceptance model	3	4.55
Value	Value	3	4.55

Source: Table by authors

lead, comprising 24.2% of the cases (16 out of 66 publications, e.g. [Bossey, 2020](#); [Lei and Li, 2021](#); [Brown et al., 2020](#); [Dinis et al., 2020](#); [Gilstrap et al., 2021](#); [Kerroum and Anasse, 2023](#); [Li et al., 2017](#); [Strand and Robertson, 2020](#)), followed by cultural festivals at 10.6% (e.g. [Liu et al., 2024](#); [Richards, 2020](#)) and art festivals at 7.6% (e.g. [Dresler and Jackson, 2024](#); [Luonila and Kinnunen, 2020](#)). Other noteworthy categories include food festivals (e.g. [Duignan et al., 2018](#)), queer festivals (e.g. [Bachman and Hull, 2024](#)) and film/theatre festivals (e.g. [Benjamin et al., 2019](#)). Additionally, the findings shed light on niche festivals such as science festivals ([Olya et al., 2020](#)) and ice festivals ([Yun and Park, 2015](#)), each representing smaller percentages of the total cases. The majority of studies analyse festivals within urban contexts, with only three cases focusing on rural festivals comparatively

(Gamble, 2022; Yun and Park, 2015). Moreover, a few studies, such as, explore the digital impacts by comparing and integrating various festival categories (Choi *et al.*, 2021; Folgado-Fernández *et al.*, 2021).

The analysis delineates diverse groups navigating the shift within the study of festivals in the digital era [Table 2(c)]. Festivalgoers make up the largest portion at 30.30%, indicating the significant engagement of individuals attending these events. Within the category of festivalgoers, there is a notable focus on catering to the needs and preferences of both the younger generation (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020; Norfolk and O'Regan, 2020; Strand and Robertson, 2020; Tsai *et al.*, 2022) and individuals with disabilities (Bossey, 2020; Dinis *et al.*, 2020). Organisers account for 7.60%, indicating a collaborative effort in festival planning and execution, involving various entities (Bossey, 2022; Luonila and Kinnunen, 2020; Ryan *et al.*, 2020). Online users, academics, service providers and the local community contribute to the richness and inclusivity of festival participation, each representing smaller percentages yet adding to the diversity of engagement within festival contexts (Bachman and Hull, 2024; Duignan *et al.*, 2018; Ryan *et al.*, 2020; Tamajón and Pérez, 2020). The analysis also indicates that multi-stakeholders, comprising 7.60% of cases, embody a collaborative approach involving various entities in the planning and execution of festivals (Dresler and Jackson, 2024; Gamble, 2022; Tkaczynski *et al.*, 2022).

In the expanding field of festivities and their modern adaptations, the integration and diversification of various concepts and theories have broadened our understanding and given rise to a complex interplay between digitalisation and the nature of festivals [Table 2(d)]. Brand-related concepts (e.g. brand, branding, brand personality) have been discussed, indicating the importance of brand strategies in enhancing festive experiences and reaching audiences in the digital age (Gilstrap *et al.*, 2021; Hudson *et al.*, 2015; Llopis-Amorós *et al.*, 2019). The technology acceptance model highlights how the use and adoption of digital technology influences the overall quality of experience for festival participants (Lee *et al.*, 2012; Norfolk and O'Regan, 2020; Van Winkle *et al.*, 2019). The stimulus-organism-response model is used for exploring the relationships of authenticity, perceived value, flow experience, satisfaction and destination loyalty (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

Place theory plays a crucial role, exploring how contemporary platforms transform our perceptions of locales and influence participation in events hosted through digital media (Dresler and Jackson, 2024; Green, 2023). The concept of destination image is critical, examining how representations on digital platforms can shape perceptions of a festival locale, which can influence both physical and virtual attendance (Londoño *et al.*, 2022). Adding to the emotional depth, theories related to emotion and satisfaction discuss the importance of fostering positive emotional connections and meeting participants' expectations to ensure a rewarding experience (Lee *et al.*, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2019). The analysis also highlights the importance of browsing and participation behaviours on festival intention. Previous research has examined how festivalgoers share word-of-mouth on social media (Saragih, 2021) and how technology-enhanced travel experiences influence destination attitudes and word-of-mouth spread (Chen and Girish, 2023).

Authenticity deals with the genuine representation of cultural practices in the modern setting (Scott and Campos, 2024). It involves adapting these elements in ways that retain their original essence and integrity, thus ensuring that new adaptations do not dilute or distort the core values and meanings. This careful adaptation helps maintain a genuine experience that resonates with festival participants (Bossey, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2024). Liveness addresses authenticity and immediacy, analysing how digital adaptations of events maintain the essence of being "live" and authentic (Bossey, 2020).

The use of liminality and *communitas* offers a unique perspective on the transformative potential of festivals (Duignan *et al.*, 2018; Lovell and Sharma, 2023). Liminality, the experience of being on the threshold between the routine and the extraordinary, pairs perfectly with *communitas*, the sense of community and shared equality among participants. Together, they illustrate how digitalisation can dissolve traditional boundaries and foster a united yet diverse participant base. Memory plays a crucial role in festivals, serving as a means of recalling and honouring traditional elements (e.g. Wood and Kinnunen, 2020). This entails preserving historical and cultural references that provide a sense of continuity and connection to the past. Such preservation fosters a deeper, more personal connection for participants, resonating with both their collective and individual histories. Identity, accessibility and equality establish a foundation ensuring that festivities are inclusive, offering equal access regardless of physical or socio-economic barriers, allowing all participants to explore and express their identities (Bossey, 2020; Dinis *et al.*, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2017; Masiello *et al.*, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has spurred a surge of research focusing on the challenges of interaction and connectivity, particularly evident in the context of festivals (Bachman and Hull, 2024; Estanyol, 2022). Digital applications offer new avenues for interaction and connection, leading to evolved interpretations. However, festivals, deeply rooted in connectivity, community and togetherness, still face hurdles in replicating the euphoria and health benefits of in-person attendance despite technological advancements. Co-creation emerges as a significant concept, emphasising a participatory approach where attendees are not merely spectators but active contributors, shaping the content and interactions, thus transforming the overall experience into a highly interactive engagement (Benjamin *et al.*, 2019; Brown, 2023; Luonila *et al.*, 2019). Sustainability within event management calls for the integration of environmentally sound practices, ensuring that events contribute positively to ecological well-being (Bossey, 2022; Luonila and Kinnunen, 2020).

Critique

The review findings offer insights into the diverse range of digital applications within festival contexts, as well as the experiences of various stakeholders involved. The review underscores how digital advancements have improved festival experiences with abundance and efficiency, while developments in social media and digital marketing offer platforms for user-generated content and personalised experiences (Duffy and Mair, 2021). As generative AI increasingly influences our work and daily lives, it is imperative to conduct more comprehensive research through interviews, surveys and experiments to explore its transformative impact on festival marketing, operations and experiences, examining the changes faced by both traditional and emerging stakeholders in the digitally evolving festival landscape (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2024; Oh and Lee, 2021).

Existing studies have deepened the discussion on the digital expansion of festival commercialisation, the digital transcendence of local spaces and the importance of cocreation brought about by digital media. However, further examination is needed on the complex interplay between festivals and digitalisation, particularly concerning the nature of festival making (representation and authenticity), the form of festival community (community and participation), the change of festival discourse (memory and narratives) and the dynamic of festival equality (power and accessibility).

The literature sheds light on how festivals are represented and perceived in digital spaces, highlighting the potential for digitalisation to raise questions regarding the authenticity of the festival experience (Bossey, 2020, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2024). However, there remains a need to delve deeper into the nature of knowledge and understanding in the digitally mediated world.

More nuanced inquiries are necessary to understand how the dilemma of blending reality and virtuality has reshaped the meaning of “authenticity”, especially at the intersection of spaces, places, cultures and times (Birenboim, 2016; Dai, 2013; Ryan *et al.*, 2020).

Many questions of representation and authenticity demand further interpretation and theoretical analysis. As for the festivalgoers, can their digital-mediated experiences, filtered through screens and algorithms, be called “authentic”? How these experiences convey the underlying social and cultural values of festivals, rather than merely replicating them in visual and auditory formats. Within the quandary of merging reality and virtuality, how do digitally-mediated festival experiences compare in terms of the direct, irreplaceable interactions and emotional connections found in the physical realm, considering various perspectives? It is also intriguing to delve into how festival organisers navigate the challenge of maintaining the core essence of festivals while accommodating digital demands, which encompass technological applications and replicating the social significance within the digital realm. Amidst a plethora of digital data and online content, how do researchers discern and reconstruct the core values of festivals and participant experiences? The role of researchers should be considered in interpreting the digitally-mediated authenticity of festivals and using mixed methodologies (Woodfield, 2017) to enhance the understanding of how festivals are presented in both physical and digital domains.

The discussion on community and participation within digital festival spaces provides insightful observations, particularly noting the potential of digital platforms to expand participation beyond geographical boundaries (Duffy and Mair, 2017; Kitchen *et al.*, 2023; Tkaczynski *et al.*, 2022). However, there is a noticeable gap in critical analysis concerning the nature of communities in these digital spaces. More rigorous exploration is required to understand how digital interactions influence notions of belonging and participation, especially considering the dynamics between physical presence and virtual engagement. The ideas of “we” and “other” are challenged to evolve in this context, where their redefinitions involve integration among community members and transcends cultural/geographical limitations. The diminishing relevance of physical geographical boundaries introduces a new sense of “proximity” in digital events, cultivating a virtual yet interconnected environment known as “digital localness”. In such environments, the traditional, physical “local” becomes secondary. It is crucial to further delve into how digital platforms foster a new sense of belonging that transcends physical locations, anchored instead in shared experiences and cultural expressions. This analysis could provide deeper insights into the transformative potential of digital festival spaces in reshaping community connections.

While the literature explores the role of memory and storytelling in shaping our understanding of festivals (Mair, 2019; Wood and Kinnunen, 2020), there is a lack of critical examination of the construction of knowledge through digital archives and narratives. More specifically, there is a need to interrogate how digital storytelling influences dissemination, preservation and generativity of festivals. It is worth considering how digital storytelling manifests diverse forms and strategies across social media, long videos, short videos and official accounts. It is also important to explore how the interplay among these different application forms complements as well as potentially constrains each other, potentially limiting the diversity of narratives and perspectives in digital storytelling across platforms. Moreover, the dissemination of digital storytelling possesses creativity and generativity, which can stimulate audience imagination and participation, allowing them to engage in shaping and spreading narratives. Exploring variances in the acceptance and modes of engagement in digital storytelling across

different generations would provide valuable insights, moving beyond the notion that younger individuals gravitate towards fast-paced, diverse narrative forms, while older generations may lean towards traditional, sequential storytelling methods (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020; Tsai *et al.*, 2022).

The discussion on power dynamics within digital festival spaces is insightful, highlighting tensions surrounding equality, diversity and accessibility (Bossey, 2020; Dinis *et al.*, 2020). Further investigation is needed to understand how power dynamics shape the representation and accessibility of festivals between digital and physical spaces, particularly in terms of who has the authority to create and control digital narratives. Without addressing these power imbalances, it would be challenging to fully capture the complexities of festival digitisation. There is an urgent need for a more meticulous study of the enduring effects of power dynamics within digital festival spaces, requiring a thorough exploration of how to redefine and redistribute power for true empowerment. Additionally, the intricate relationship between lifestyle pursuits, life politics and festivals in the digital context needs to be further investigated. It is crucial to delve into how festivals reflect and shape people's lifestyle choices, political perspectives and social identities in the digitised landscape.

Conclusion

This paper represents an exploration into the realm of festival research within the digital age, unearthing the implications of digitalisation on this vibrant field. The systematic literature review and critical synthesis used highlighted the transformative role of digital technologies in festival experiences and also opened a discourse on how these changes affect stakeholders across the spectrum. There is a clear need for more critical engagement with issues of authenticity, community, storytelling and power dynamics across the physical and digital festival spaces.

In light of the findings from the review and critique, it is evident that strategic enhancements are essential for optimising festival activities in the digital era. Key strategic concerns include the potential for over-commercialisation and the technical limitations of digital experiences, which necessitate a balance between leveraging technological advances and preserving the cultural integrity of festivals (Mair, 2019; Ryan *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, to combat digital exclusion and foster stronger community engagement, it is crucial to implement inclusive strategies that promote widespread participation and connectivity. Event organisers should focus on designing highly interactive digital activities that encourage active participation from community members. These activities should provide effective platforms for participants to share personal experiences and stories, thereby creating a digital archive of collective memory. Ensuring equitable access and representation on digital platforms is also crucial, which can be achieved by adopting simplified user interfaces and providing multilingual support to minimise technical barriers. Offering assistance to groups lacking technological support can foster broader inclusivity. Moreover, enhancing representation by curating diverse programmes that include a wide range of voices and stories will help reduce information asymmetry and increase diversity, ensuring that the events benefit a wider audience.

The study is not without its limitations. Focused primarily on peer-reviewed academic journals within the domains of hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism, the review maintains a rigorous analytical consistency but may overlook broader perspectives presented in other types of publications. Additionally, the relatively small volume of existing literature on this topic limits the ability to form comprehensive themes or to visualise patterns and trends effectively. Looking ahead, there remains substantial scope for future research to

expand upon the findings of this study. Further investigations could explore a wider array of publications and interdisciplinary approaches, enhancing the breadth and depth of understanding in festival research. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, so too will the opportunities to delve deeper into the intricate relationship between digital applications and festival experiences, promising new avenues for exploration and critical inquiry.

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