Users' Engagement and Drivers in Music Festivals' Virtual Communities. A methodological proposal to understand the Case of Sonar, Primavera Sound and BAM Festivals in Barcelona

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Abstract

Festival branding is undergoing a revolution based on the consolidation of the leading role of user conversations in virtual communities. This research note analyses the creation of the image of some of Barcelona's most prominent festivals (Primavera Sound, Sonar and BAM) via their two most important virtual communities (Twitter and Primavera Sound), at different time periods (before, during and after the event but also during the rest of the year). A stakeholder analysis was also undertaken to observe the main drivers of this process. The research note puts forward several theoretical, methodological and practical considerations.

Keywords: Festivals' Virtual Communities, User Engagement, User Drivers, Contents, Networks

1   Introduction

In a globalisation context, Festivals have a wide range of effects on places as to generating income, social cohesion and creation or improvement of destination image (Presbury & Edwards, 2005). In this context, the irruption of virtual communities has created a new context to analyse the relation between festivals, tourists and destinations as now festivals take place both in physic and in virtual spaces. To understand the importance of virtual conversations, the present research aims to know and analyse more in depth the festival's engagement in diverse festivals' communities: Primavera Sound, Sonar and BAM's Twitter and Facebook communities. With this objective, we formulate these research questions: What are the drivers that move the dialogue in these events' communities? Are more based in the festival branding, in social capital creation, or in placemaking? How are these drivers related to the engagement behaviours of the stakeholders that conform these communities? Are there differences or similitudes between social media platforms? In achieving this objective, quantitative and qualitative multi-platform, multi-period and multi-stakeholder analyses are employed.

2   Conceptual Background

2.1 Festivals' virtual communities and their contents: Festival branding, Place Making and Social Capital creation

Festivals, as tourism products, are important resources in the adoption of destination branding strategies (Richards & Wilson, 2004) that seek to transform fixed cultural capital into competitive advantage. And even some major festivals have arguably become 'brands' in their own right (Evans, 2003). Literature has also underlined the complexity in the impact of festivals in these process, considering the role of the diverse

stakeholders that participate in it (Richards & Wilson, 2004). In any case, previous studies have emphasised the fact that one of their main values is that they (re)create the image and knowledge of destinations (Hede, Jago, & Deery, 2005), projecting it to the outside (Boo & Busser, 2006) and contributing to the creation of place-based brands (placemaking) (Richards, 2015). And, in a context where virtual communities are increasing their importance, authors as Sevin (2013) consider that destination branding analysis needs to adopt a stakeholder approach. Hudson, Roth, Madden, and Hudson (2015) supported the idea that social media interactions can lead to high levels of emotional engagement. Along similar lines, MacKay, Barbe, Van Winkle, and Halpenny (2017) argue that the benefits of participating in online virtual communities include social capital creation, an ingredient which constructs civic commitment and is an indicator of the creation of collective attributes.

2.2 How community users act and interact: user engagement and networks in virtual communities

User (especially consumer) engagement has gained much attention in the recent marketing literature because it has been related to diverse important brand performance indicators (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017). Users engaged with brand communities online feel more connected to their brands, have higher satisfaction or are more loyal (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). With its origin in the field of public relations, the concept of engagement has been developed in particular in the domain of relationship marketing in terms of the interaction between users and brands. After undertaking an extensive literature review, Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić (2011) (p.4) stated that "Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community". For them, consumer engagement is highly interactive and based on several sub-processes, and finally it has many consequences, including consumer loyalty satisfaction or empowerment, connection bonding, trust and commitment. Hollebeek et al. (2014) found different attributes to measure user engagement highlighting the cognitive, emotional and behavioural ones. In this same context, So, King, and Sparks (2014) developed a 25-item scale that comprised five main factors: identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction. Meanwhile, Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) identified three key engagement dimensions (cognition, affect and behaviours) but, more interestingly, they proposed several drivers, outcomes and objects of consumer engagement in online brand communities. And, it is in relation to these drivers that it is possible to reconnect users' behaviour with the brand construction process, including festival brands.

3 Methodological Framework

Methodologically, this study adopts a mixed-method approach; collecting, analysing and mixing quantitative and qualitative methods to provide an in-depth analysis. The quantitative approach is based on generating numerical data using the collected information and by analysing the databases derived therein. The application used to capture the conversation data from these virtual communities was Ncapture®. Three

weekly captures were made during a period that went from a month before each festival until a month after, beginning in May 2016 and finishing in October 2016. From these captures, several thousand posts or comments were obtained, divided in time periods (Other, Before, During and After). From these populations, the samples were obtained choosing a random sample that met the criteria of a 5% sample error, a 95% confidence level and a distribution of responses of 50%. For example, in the first festival and platform that was analysed, Sonar and Twitter we have obtained four samples of 342, 269, 253 and 175 tweets, with what in this case entailed to analyse nearly 1,000 tweets. The qualitative approach is applied via a content analysis of the communities' conversation capturing the meanings, valid inferences deriving from emphases and the thematic content of messages, to understand how they are presented. From the random samples, the processes at the methodological level were conducted: coding their contents according to a coding map, based on the existing literature. After testing it, we finally defined a final coding map (Table 1) to develop the contents analysis.

Table 1. Coding Map: Affection and cognition attributes, behavioural manifestations and conversation drivers

Family	Code	Code description	Literature
Affection	Enduring level of emotions experienced by a user (Dessart, 2015)		
Affection	Disaffected	User expresses disaffection about something related with the festival	Disengagement (Brodie et al., 2011)
Affection	Emotionally passive	User doesn't express affection	Dormancy (Brodie et al., 2011)
Affection	Excited	User expresses affection regarding something related with the festival	Enthusiasm (Dessart, 2015; So et al., 2014)
Affection	Pleased	User expresses happiness regarding something related with the festival	Enjoyment (Dessart, 2015), Identification (So et al, 2014)
Cognition	Enduring and active mental states that a user experiences (Dessart, 2015)		
Cognition	Uninterested	User expresses no interest regarding something related with the festival	Disengagement (Brodie et al., 2011)
Cognition	Cognitively passive	User doesn't express attention	Dormancy (Brodie et al., 2011)
Cognition	Attentive	User expresses attention regarding something related with the festival	Attention (Dessart, 2015; So et al., 2014)
Cognition	Dedicated	User is dedicated to talk about something related with the festival	Absorption (Dessart, 2015; So et al., 2014)
Behaviour	Behavioural manifestations which results from motivations (Dessart, 2015)		
Behaviour	Asking	User asks the community about something related with the festival	Information Seeking (MacKay et al., 2017)
Behaviour	Sharing	User shares information regarding something related with the festival	Sharing (Brodie et al., 2011; Dessart, 2015, McKay et al., 2017)

Behaviour	Evaluating	User evaluates something related with the festival	Advocating (Brodie et al, 2011), Endorsing (Dessart, 2015)
Behaviour	Dialoguing	User dialogues with other/s community partner/s	Socializing (Brodie et al., 2011), Interaction (So et al., 2014)
Focus		What is the purpose of the conversation? (McKay et al., 2017)	
Focus	Festival Branding	User promotes and/or express satisfaction with the festival	Brand engagement (Dessart et al., 2016), Brand Recognition & Experience (So et al, 2014)
Focus	Social Capital Creation	User mentions and/or interacts with other community partners	Community engagement (Dessart et al., 2016; Taylor & Kent,2014), Relationship Building (MacKay, 2017)
Focus	Place making	User mentions and/or describes a place	Place Making (Richards, 2015)

In this table, we present our theoretical and methodological proposal (defining each family in the grey rows and codes in each cell), amplifying the observed in the literature from our findings in the coding process. At all events, the proposal goes beyond categorizing these families, since it intends to carry out a joint and systemic analysis of these elements to observe the relationship between them. It is also very important to note that these tweets have also been classified from a stakeholders' perspective, basing this classification in what was observed in literature and what our findings provided (Festival Manager, Musicians, Music Professionals, Other Professionals Media (Internet), Media (Radio), Media (Newspapers & Magazines), Media (Television).

4 First findings and discussion

Although the analysis of results is still at a very exploratory stage, some of the former can already be discussed. Festivals organizers are engaged in the conversation all over the year, and with different purposes, in with the findings of MacKay et al. (2017). In our analysis and in all time periods predominates a conversation that is emotionally passive, cognitively attentive, that is especially based in sharing information and with its focus in festival branding, but mostly in combination with creating social capital and particularly in relation with the cultural industry. Moreover, the closer we get to the start of the event, the more weight it takes to be affective and the more weight it takes civic engagement. In fact, affectivity plays a very important role in this type of focus. Amplifying Richards (2015, 2017) ideas, the importance of the place making in these conversations is also observed, and we add that it acquires greater importance after the own event, when the organizer is dedicated to promoting the same all over the globe.

With our coding map and stakeholders' classification, we are observing which combinations of cognitive and affective attributes are more frequent in these virtual communities' conversations, with which level of users' engagement and what is the final drivers of these conversations. But also, we can analyse differences or similarities between festivals, platforms and periods, and what it is more interesting, user or stakeholder groups' roles in a virtual community relation. We think that our theoretical contribution is not only based in the collection, reordering, gradation and addition of

some category to the traditional analysis of users' engagement in tourism-related brand communities, but especially in its systemic formulation and its capacity to observe interesting (and often hidden) relationships between cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions and their links with the stakeholders' role in a network relation.

These elements can help us understand how the process of festivals' image creation, understanding that nowadays virtual communities are protagonists in them. Regarding this, our purpose is to clarify: (1) what actors are responsible for creating this image and what weight they have in the conversation, (2) What is their behaviour in affective and cognitive terms and what relation do these attributes have with their brand engagement, and (3) the extent to which the creation of this brand image important and how it is related to other aspects such as the need to create social capital while is also related a territorial identity. This has much potential for organizers, administrations and other users in understanding their communicative challenges in these spaces.

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