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An investigation of Hove festival's consumers' attitudes towards sustainable practices

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Abstract

A key driver for this research is the absence of consumer perspectives in many sustainability studies. Also Triple-Bottom-Line (TBL) based sustainability, whilst is widely accepted as the platform for sustainability, is largely ignored in the marketing domain. There is growing acknowledgement that marketing's extant definition of sustainability is too narrow and the nascent paradigm of Sustainable Marketing (SM) is gaining credence. Hence this research is inherently inter-disciplinary being located in the overlap between sustainable development and the customer centric disciplines of services marketing and consumer behaviour.

Even during recent economic hardships, the leisure economy continued to be fast changing, ferociously competitive and inherently complex. It is diverse with many contributory sectors such as the creative industries. The live music sector continues to be a key component of creative industries economically and socially. Festivals are a key contributor to the live music sector.

Attending a festival represents one of the largest purchasing situations for many consumers. Hence it is vital that the festival-sector must recognise and be ready to react to changes in consumer behaviour. For example consumers are increasingly aware of ethical and/or environmental issues and their increasing awareness of greenwashing may render merely stating green credentials as insufficient (Ramus & Montiel, 2005). Also many organisations simply conjoin green issues with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and there is increasing evidence that consumers may no longer consider this to be enough. However the key festival studies make little reference to sustainability despite some larger festivals having operated in a sustainable way for decades.

Festivals are worthy of consideration because other laudable 'sustainable' service providers (eg those in the FTSE4GOOD index) are unlikely to have the complexity of often temporary sites with many thousands of transactions taking place often in locations of outstanding natural beauty. This cross-sectional, exploratory study seeks to identify attitudes towards emergent sustainability factors amongst consumers of the Hove festivals in 2011 and 2012. Hove is located near Arundel in southern Norway and is owned by Festival Republic, a UK based organisation.

This research is largely quantitative as it sought to engender objectivity (Saeidi, 2002) however qualitative elements were used to identify trends in Hove festival-goers' perceptions of sustainability issues. This research drew upon both interpretive and positivist philosophical approaches featuring inductive and deductive elements. Probability sampling was used to identify respondents who were over 18 years of age in order to comply with University ethics approval. A Sustainable Marketing (SM) benchmarking framework was used to inform the quantitative tool applied to Hove festival-goers. This produced a substantial pool of data to analyse.

This study will lead to an improved understanding of changing perceptions (of sustainability) that will benefit the stakeholders of the individual festivals. It will also seek to identify themes across festivals that will provide useful insights for the sector as a whole.