

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Millennials and Gen Z's Perception of Social Media Marketing Effectiveness on the Festival's Branding: The Mediating Effect of Brand Gestalt

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Abstract: Despite the increasing interest in social media use in tourism, limited empirical work has been devoted to the effectiveness of social media marketing on festival tourism branding. The present study proposed a theoretical model that explains the effect of social media marketing (SMM) on festival brand gestalt and brand loyalty. Furthermore, this study examines the mediating effect of brand gestalt on the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty. Based on relevant literature, a conceptual model that explains the link among variables was developed and tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). An online survey was carried out from August 2019 to February 2020 on 865 millennial and generation Z (Gen Z) attendees of the two most popular festivals in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The analysis revealed three major findings. First, SMM exerted a significant and positive effect on brand gestalt's dimensions (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder). Further, SMM and the two brand gestalt dimensions, sensescape and stakeholder, were found to be the significant determinants of brand loyalty. Finally, the results confirmed a partial mediating role of the brand sensescape and stakeholder on the effect of SMM on brand loyalty.

Keywords: Social media marketing, millennials, Generation Z, branding, festival tourism, brand gestalt, brand loyalty

With the exponential growth of internet users, social media continues to revolutionize tourism marketing landscape. Recent data shows more than 3.6 billion active social media users worldwide as of April 2020, encompassing 59% of the global population, and projected to reach over 4.41 billion in 2025 (Statista, 2020a). Tourists utilize social media to obtain travel-related information instantly and conveniently (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Scorrano et al., 2018). The information provided by social media is perceived to

be more reliable than other traditional sources (Fotis et al., 2012) and significantly influences tourists' travel decision-making process (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Leung et al., 2013). Social media also facilitates the creation, sharing, and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) such as photos, videos, stories, and other travel-related content (Schaffer, 2015). Furthermore, it enables the tourist to express their opinion, communicate, interact, and collaborate with their peers (Leung et al., 2013).

From the DMO's side, the adoption of social media in tourism marketing is paramount. With more than half of the world's population using social media, it is a powerful tool to reach highly targeted global tourists at a relatively low cost than traditional channels (Ajina, 2019; Hays et al., 2012). Second, social media is useful in obtaining rich consumer insight (Hudson et al., 2015). By monitoring and analyzing relevant conversations in social media, DMO can better understand the dynamic of tourists' preferences and use it to create, improve, and enhance tourism offerings (Fait et al., 2016). Further, DMO can utilize social media to establish a sustainable destination brand (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Dijkmans et al., 2015; Priporas et al., 2019) through direct interaction, engagement, and collaboration with the tourist globally (Harrigan et al., 2018; Hudson et al., 2015). The #MeetSouthAfrica campaign in 2013 is an example of an SMM success story. Collaborate with travel bloggers, South African tourism utilized social media to promote real-time and stories about their South Africa experience. This SMM activity generates incredible e-WOM and UGC, such as 9,000 tweets, 77.8 million Twitter impressions, and more than 1,000 pictures shared on Instagram (Antevenio, 2019).

However, social media can be a double-edged sword for the DMO. Despite all the advantages, it also poses various challenges. For instance, it allows the tourist to create, co-create, and exchange their travel experience with the low levels of control by the DMO (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Sotiriadis, 2017). Furthermore, negative word-of-mouth (WOM) such as opinions, ratings, or reviews displayed on social media potentially harm businesses (Dwivedi et al., 2020) and destroy a destination's reputation. Therefore, a continuous evaluation of tourists' attitude towards social media marketing and how it influences their behavior is critical for the DMO to fully embrace its advantages to build a sustainable destination brand and overcome its challenges.

The present study explores the effectiveness of social media marketing on festival tourism. Festival tourism is a specific tourism product that plays a critical role in creating a unique meaning to a tourism destination, enables collaboration among stakeholders, and contributes to economic development (Lau & Li, 2019; MacKay et al., 2017; Ma & Lew, 2012). Empirical studies on festival tourism also documented some significant roles of festival tourism

in influencing various tourists' behavior such as motivation, satisfaction, intention to visit, and loyalty to a destination (Matheson et al., 2014; Maeng et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2015). However, despite a considerable amount of empirical work on the use of social media in festival tourism, previous work focused only on the effect of social media on the tourist-festival relationship (e.g., Hudson et al., 2015) or tourist behavioral intention (e.g., Lee et al., 2012; Lockstone et al., 2013; Hudson et al., 2015; Llopis-Amoros et al., 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). The influence of social media on festival branding is still unclear and under research. It can be argued that understanding social media's effect on branding is crucial for the DMO and festival practitioner in designing and implementing an effective social media marketing strategy and building a sustainable festival brand. The present study will broaden the knowledge in festival tourism branding, particularly how SMM affects festival brand gestalt and brand loyalty.

The focal point of this study is the millennials and Gen Z festival attendees' perspective. Millennials and Gen Z were selected for several reasons. First, these generation cohorts have emerged as the most dynamic and significant segment market in the global tourism industry. As they enter the labor market and reach their prime working time, this market segment is projected to have spending power more significant than any other generation over the next 20 years (Birnstingl, 2019). Second, both millennials and Gen Z are digital natives and early adopters of technology. They are actively using social media and other various online tools that drive new trends in the business and tourism sectors. Yusof et al. (2019) noted that social media use influences how they communicate with their peers and the way they interact with products or brands.

Millennials and Gen Z also share similar characteristics in terms of travel preferences. They seek adventure and participate in different leisure activities (Skinner et al., 2018). They also prefer something that allows them to express identity and facilitate social interaction or networking (Martin, 2015). Hence, festival tourism somehow interlinks with millennials and Gen Z's characteristics by providing a means for social interaction, share experiences (Rihova et al., 2015), and engage in a collaborative activity (MacKay et al., 2017). Therefore, given their familiarity with social media and the link between these generations' characteristics and festival tourism, it is relevant to

study social media's effectiveness on festival tourism branding from the millennials and Gen Z's perspective.

In this study, we focus on SMM's effectiveness in the context of festival tourism in Indonesia. Indonesia is the third most prominent social media market globally, with more than 198 million active social media users in 2019 and is forecasted to reach over 256 million by 2025 (Statista, 2020b). In terms of tourism potential, the tourism sector is one of Indonesia's largest industries that contributed to more than four percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and around 15.6 billion USD of its foreign exchange revenues (Statista, 2020c). Further, with an annual growth rate of 20% in its tourism industry, Indonesia is one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations globally (The Business Year, 2018). Festival tourism is a significant contributor to Indonesia's tourism sector. Given its potential in culture and heritage, a festival is a strategic tool in showcasing unique images to promote tourism destinations and stimulate tourist traffic. We argue that a constant evaluation of social media's effectiveness on festival tourism branding helps the country design and implement a successful SMM strategy to build a sustainable destination branding and maintain its significant growth in the tourism sector.

This study aimed to develop and test a theoretical model explaining SMM effectiveness in festival tourism branding. Specifically, this study is designed to answer research questions:

- (1) How do millennials and Gen Z's tourists' attitudes toward SMM activities affect their perception of the festival's brand gestalt?
- (2) How does the attitude toward SMM activities affect the festival's perceived brand loyalty?
- (3) Does the festival's brand gestalt lead to brand loyalty?
- (4) Does the festival brand gestalt mediate the effect of attitude towards social media on brand loyalty?

Theoretical Framework

Social Media Marketing

Social media is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content"

(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). It consists of various forms, including social networking sites, content communities, forums, reviews, opinion sites, blogging, microblogging, bookmarking and media sharing, and other collaborative online tools. Social media marketing (SMM) is the utilization of a combination of numerous social media channels and platforms to communicate, interact, and collaborate with the customer and understand their needs, preferences, and behavior in ways that lead to the achievement of marketing goals and create value for stakeholders (Felix et al., 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2020). SMM's components can be classified into entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, WOM, and perceived risk (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo & Park, 2018). However, in the present study, we focus on the tourists' evaluation of the festival's SMM components: entertainment, interaction, and trendiness.

In tourism marketing practices, the utilization of SMM is paramount. DMOs utilize social media to communicate and interact directly with existing or potential tourists worldwide at a relatively lower cost than traditional marketing tools (Ajina, 2019). Social media are also useful in gaining tourists' insights and monitoring online conversations or E-WOM relevant to the destination brand. Additionally, social media plays a crucial role in establishing a tourism destination brand and consumer-brand relationship (e.g., Kim & Ko, 2010; Hudson et al., 2015, 2016; Lockstone et al., 2013; Priporas et al., 2019). As Huang et al. (2018) noted, customers who received a prompt response from a brand's customer service representative on social media are more willing to pay more for the brand or continue purchasing the same brand.

The present study explores the effectiveness of social media marketing on festival tourism. Festival tourism is a particular tourism product that can be formally defined as "organized events, representing different emanations of human culture, during which people meet irrespective of their work" (Cudny, 2013, p. 108). The use of social media in festival tourism is found to have a positive effect on consumer decision process (e.g., Lockstone et al., 2013), tourist engagement (e.g., Hudson et al., 2015), intention to attend (e.g., Lee et al., 2012), and intention to recommend (e.g., Hudson et al., 2015). However, despite these critical roles of social media, there has been little discussion on social media's effectiveness on festival branding, specifically, the influence of

the user's attitude towards social media on festival branding, which is the focus of this study. We argue that a constant evaluation of tourists' attitudes toward social media marketing campaigns and understanding its effectiveness on festival branding is critical for DMO to design effective social media marketing strategies.

Millennials and Gen Z

The Millennials, often labeled as Generation Y, net generation, echo boomers, Generation 2000, or Generation XX, are the group of people born between 1980 and 2000 (Lee & Kotler, 2015). There are approximately 1.8 billion millennials worldwide, comprising 23% of the global population (Morgan Stanley Capital International, 2020). The post-millennials generation, also called Generation Z or iGeneration, is a generational cohort born after 1995 (Priporas et al., 2017; Kamenidou et al., 2019; Priporas et al., 2019). With a total global population of over 7.7 billion in 2019, or equivalent to 32% of the global population, Gen Z has emerged as the largest and most diverse generation cohort (Miller & Wei, 2018). As Millennials and Gen Z enter the workplace and reach their prime working age, this generation quickly emerges as the most prominent market segment, not only because of its market size but because of its buying power.

Millennials and Gen Z are often lumped together because they share many traits and characteristics. Members of these generation cohorts are characterized as highly educated, experts in technology and other digital tools, innovative, and creative (Priporas et al., 2017). The most apparent characteristics relevant to this study are their familiarity with technology and social media (Ruangkanjanases & Wongprasopchai, 2017; Priporas et al., 2017; Yusof et al., 2019). These generations are more digital natives and have distinct social needs compared to the generation that precedes them (Ruangkanjanases & Wongprasopchai, 2017). Similarly, Yusof et al. (2019) stated that Millennials are early adopters of social media and fully embrace it as the primary communication tool, which affects how they communicate with others and their overall lifestyles. They also love to express themselves and use social media to display their personal and professional lives. Further, they tend to rely on social media information and are heavily influenced by their peers' opinions in making a decision (Berset-Price, 2016).

Millennials and Gen Z's familiarity and expertise in social media have a significant impact on business practices. Driven by the need to connect with their peers and express themselves, members of these generations are willing to promote brands and are more likely to share their experiences or opinions through social media (Wiedmann et al., 2001). Further, the Millennials play a critical role in setting future trends in the consumption of products or brands (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016). Hubspot (2021) reported that more than 70% of consumers today, especially the younger generation make their purchasing decisions based on the information from social media. They perceived that the information recommended by friends is perceived to have more credibility compared with conventional advertising (Whitler, 2014). The influence of this UGC information on purchase decisions was as powerful as expert reviews' influence (Bounie et al., 2008).

Brand Gestalt and Festival Tourism

The present study extends the brand gestalt concept into the festival tourism context. The concept of brand gestalt as a holistic brand approach provides an advantage in capturing festival tourism's complexity and the dynamic interaction among its components. Brand gestalt postulates that the brand is a product of a continuous synergy among its elements and should be examined in its totality (Diamond et al., 2009). A festival is a multi-element tourism product characterized by a celebration (Grappi & Montanari, 2011), exotic culture, a unique atmosphere, and specific interaction of people with similar interests. Like any other tourism product, we argue that festival branding also has a distinct gestalt or the synergetic interaction among its multi-elements that function as a system or gestalt. Given its complexity, it is imperative to explore a festival tourism's gestalt to understand better how consumers perceived its multidimensional elements as a whole system. As Diamond et al. (2009) noted, brand gestalt is the source of brand power. Thus, exploring festival brand gestalt helps us understand how strong a festival brand is perceived in consumers' minds.

Brand gestalt is a relatively new concept in marketing, especially in tourism, that has not received much attention among researchers. The first and most notable discussion of brand gestalt can be found in the empirical work of Diamond et al. (2009). According to the authors, a brand comprises multidimensional elements that continuously interact and enhance one

another, forming a dynamic system or gestalt. This gestalt represents synergy among brand components and determines brand power. Hence, brand gestalt is an enabler in holistically understanding festival tourism by looking at the dynamic interaction of its elements. It serves as a total cognitive representation of how a brand is constructed in consumers' perceptions.

Mandagi et al. (2021) extended the brand gestalt concept into the tourism context and identified its four interrelated dimensions: story, experience, environment, and stakeholder (see Figure 1). A story is an essential tool in building a powerful brand because it helps consumers sense their brand experience, provides meaning to a brand (Huang, 2010), and provides a strong reason to purchase or repurchase the brand. Further, the story is the core of brand gestalt as it reflects the memorable experience that connects the consumer with the brand on a deeper level. The second dimension is sensescape, which can be defined as how consumers perceive or interpret their previous brand encounters (Mandagi et al., 2021). It is how consumers derive meaning from their brand experience. The third dimension is servicescape, which can be regarded as the physical environment where a marketplace exchange occurs (Bitner, 1992). Brand servicescape in the tourism context can be regarded as the setting or physical environment tourists encounter when they visit a destination. Lastly, brand stakeholders consist of various groups such as residents, government, business people, environmentalists, and the tourists themselves. The present study operationalizes brand gestalt construct into these four interrelated but distinct dimensions: story, experience, environment, and stakeholder.

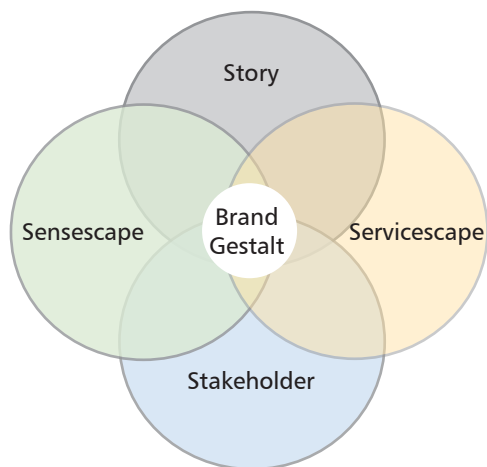


Figure 1. Four S Dimensions of Brand Gestalt (Mandagi et al., 2021)

The Effect of Social Media Marketing

Our hypotheses on the influence of SMM on festival brand variables are built from the interpersonal relationship theory, which postulates that consumers can establish a relationship with a brand similar to the qualities of interpersonal relationships in a social context (Fournier, 1998). In this sense, consumer-brand relationships are formed based on consumers' evaluation of their previous interaction or engagement with a brand. In other words, when consumers have a favorable evaluation of their previous brand interaction, they tend to form relationships with the brand.

Diamond et al. (2009) stated that a brand is a complex system or gestalt. It is a product of the dynamic interaction among its components, enhancing one another, that performs a function more than just the sum of its elements. The essence of brand gestalt is how consumers perceive a brand holistically as a synergetic interaction among its complex elements that create synergy. Following Mandagi et al. (2021), we operationalize brand gestalt in this study as a multidimensional construct composed of four interrelated dimensions: story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder.

Social media marketing is a form of marketing communication that facilitates consumer-brand interaction (Kim & Ko, 2012; Hudson et al., 2015, 2016; Lockstone et al., 2013; Priporas et al., 2019). From the interpersonal relationship theory perspective, customers value the SMM activities they are more likely to develop a positive brand perception and commitment (Chang & Fan, 2017). As Bartlett (1932) stated, people's evaluation of the previous experience shapes their perception. Bringing this flow of thought into the context of this study, we can conjecture that when tourists' attitude toward SMM activities is positive, they are more likely to establish a positive brand gestalt (i.e., holistic brand perception about the festival). Therefore, the following hypotheses are introduced:

$H1_a$: SMM has a positive effect on brand story, such that tourists' positive attitude towards festival's SMM activities leads to a favorable perception of the festival's brand story.

$H1_b$: SMM has a positive effect on brand sensescape, such that tourists' positive attitude towards the festival's SMM activities

leads to a favorable perception of the festival's brand sensescape.

$H1_c$: SMM has a positive effect on brand servicescape, such that tourists' positive attitude towards the festival's SMM leads to a favorable perception of the festival's brand servicescape.

$H1_d$: SMM has a positive effect on brand stakeholders, such that tourists' positive attitude towards the festival's SMM leads to a favorable perception of the festival's brand stakeholder.

In this study, we also argue that social media facilitates the formulation of brand loyalty. McKee (2010) noted that social media enables online networking, information sharing, and brand community, leading to the formulation of brand loyalty. Recent studies in tourism marketing also provide supporting evidence for the positive effect of social media marketing activities on tourists' loyalty behavior, such as word of mouth (e.g., Hudson et al., 2015), intention to visit (e.g., Le et al., 2012), and intention to recommend (e.g., Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). Hence, we predict that:

H_2 : SMM has a positive effect on brand loyalty, such that tourists' positive attitude towards the festival's SMM activities leads to a stronger festival brand loyalty.

The Effect of Brand Gestalt on Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty continues to be the focus of research in marketing and tourism because of its crucial role in creating and sustaining competitive advantage (Grönroos 2009). Brand loyalty is more than simply repeat a purchase. It involves consumer's long-term attitude towards the brand and their commitment to repurchase or continue to use a brand. Brand loyalty can be formally defined as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronizes a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). This definition postulates that brand loyalty can be seen of two dimensions—behavioral and attitudinal (Jacoby & Kyner 1973; Oliver 1999). The first dimension represents repurchase behavior, and the second

captures a degree of commitment in terms of some distinct value associated with the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

In this study, we predict that brand gestalt can influence brand loyalty. Keller (2009) suggested that cognitive components or the meaning of the brand in the minds of customers are essential determinants of brand loyalty. Brand gestalt can be viewed as a cognitive brand representation in consumers' minds which can be influential for creating brand loyalty. Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

$H3_a$: Brand story has a positive effect on brand loyalty, such that a positive tourist's perception of a festival brand story leads to a stronger festival brand loyalty.

$H3_b$: Brand sensescape has a positive effect on brand loyalty, such that a positive tourist's perception of a festival brand story leads to a stronger festival brand loyalty.

$H3_c$: Brand servicescape has a positive effect on brand loyalty, such that a positive tourist's perception of a festival brand servicescape leads to a stronger festival brand loyalty.

$H3_d$: Brand stakeholder has a positive effect on brand loyalty, such that a positive tourist's perception of a festival brand stakeholder leads to a stronger festival brand loyalty.

The Mediating Effect of Brand Gestalt

Furthermore, we predict that the effect of SMM on brand loyalty also follows through brand gestalt. Brand gestalt can be identified as a proxy of holistic brand representation in the consumer's mind (Diamond et al., 2009; Mandagi et al., 2021). Oliver (1999) suggested that brand loyalty is developed from the accumulation of a consumer's cognitive evaluation of brand information. We argue that consumer's attitude towards SMM forms part of consumer perception towards the brand (i.e., brand gestalt), which eventually converts into brand loyalty. In other words, the effect of consumers' attitude towards SMM on brand loyalty is more likely to enhance when brand gestalt is positive and robust. Given that attitude towards SMM has a direct effect on both brand gestalt and brand loyalty, while at the same time, brand gestalt has a direct impact on brand loyalty, it is reasonable to investigate the possible mediating effect of each dimension of brand gestalt. Hence, the following hypothesis is introduced:

- $H4_a$: Brand story mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, such that the more favorable tourist's perception towards a brand story, the stronger effect of SMM on brand loyalty.
- $H4_b$: Brand sensescape mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, such that the more favorable tourist's perception towards a brand sensescape, the stronger effect of SMM on brand loyalty.
- $H4_c$: Brand servicescape mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, such that the more favorable tourist's perception towards a brand servicescape, the stronger effect of SMM on brand loyalty.
- $H4_d$: Brand stakeholder mediates the relationship between SMM and brand loyalty, such that the more favorable tourist's perception towards a brand stakeholder, the stronger effect of SMM on brand loyalty.

To examine all the hypotheses, a theoretical model was proposed in Figure 2.

Methods

Context of the Study

This study sets the context of investigation in festival tourism in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Known for its extraordinary tourism potential, North Sulawesi

is one of the five super-priority tourism destinations in Indonesia and currently undergoing a massive development of its tourism infrastructure. The two most famous festivals in North Sulawesi, were selected, namely, the Tomohon International Flower Festival (TIFF) and the Manado Fiesta. The Tomohon International Flower Festival is an annual tourism event hosted by the Tomohon City government since 2006. This international festival is a series of art and cultural events that promote the attractiveness of Tomohon City as a tourist destination. The main attraction is the flower parade displaying ornamental vehicles decorated with colorful native flowers, enhanced by a flower-themed fashion parade. This event was also enlivened by art and culture performances, a flower beauty pageant contest, a floriculture exhibition, a tourism trade, and an investment expo. The Manado Fiesta Festival, on the other hand, is an annual cultural and tourism event launched in 2016 by the Manado City government to promote the city's tourism potential. This festival is a combination of multi-events, such as fish, coral, and underwater-themed carnival; a traditional-themed fashion show; local's exotic culinary fiesta; flying actions of paragliding, paramotoring, and parachuting; choir and music jazz festival; and a fair expo showcasing local products, crafts, and souvenirs.

Festival organizers utilized the official Facebook page to communicate, promote, and advertise festival events. As noted by Sigala et al. (2012), Facebook is one of the most used social media for tourism. These two

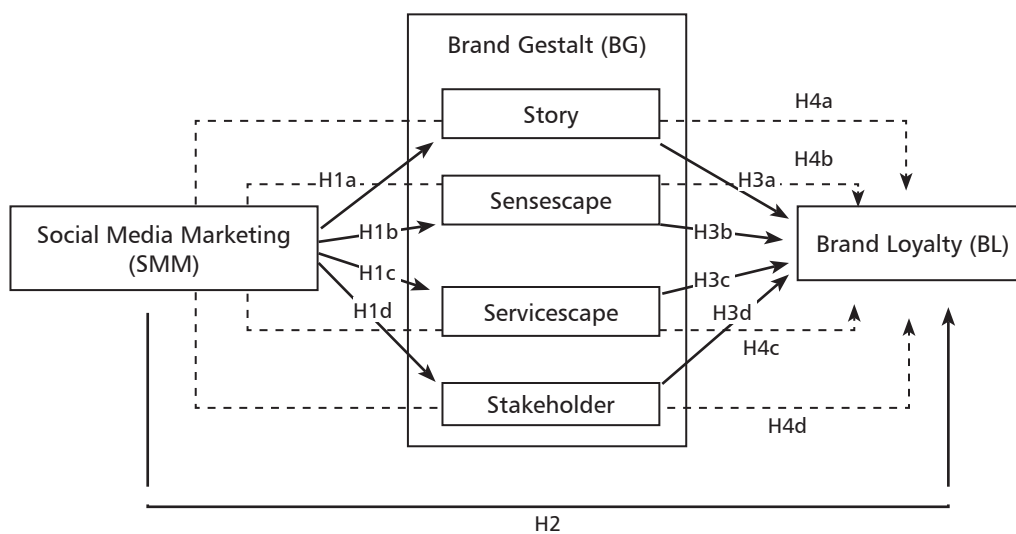


Figure 2. Conceptual Model

international festivals were selected as the focus of this study for several reasons. First, as upcoming tourism events, they are gaining popularity from both local and foreign tourists. Furthermore, these two flagship events have just been included in the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism's calendar of significant events from 2020 onwards. Second, these two international events play a vital role in the growth of tourism and the economy of North Sulawesi in particular and Indonesia in general. Lastly, despite its critical role, no empirical work, to the best of our knowledge, has been devoted to evaluating the effectiveness of social media use for these festivals.

Sample

The final sample for this study consisted of Millennials and Gen Z college students and recent graduates from several universities in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, which were selected through snowball and convenient sampling because of their familiarity with social media. Three filter questions were employed to ensure that the respondents met the criteria to be included in the study. The first question asked about their age. The second question asked whether they had attended the TIFF or the Manado Fiesta in 2019. Lastly, respondents were asked if they have a Facebook account and actively use it.

Measurement

The questionnaire was designed as the survey instrument pre-tested to all constructs of the proposed model. The survey instrument consisted of two sections. The first section covered the demographic characteristics of respondents and some instructions. The second section listed measurement items with a multi-item 5-point Likert scale statement ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

All four constructs in this study were measured with a multiple-item scale from existing well-established scales with a slight modification to suit the present study. SMM was measured using seven items derived from the previous studies (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo and Park, 2018). These items covered multiple aspects of user's evaluation of social media experiences, such as perceived entertainment, interaction, and trendiness. Brand gestalt, in this study is measured by 19 items scale as proposed by Mandagi et al. (2021), comprising four dimensions (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder). The measurement for brand loyalty construct consisted of five items developed

in accordance with previous studies (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ha et al., 2011).

Pilot Study

A pilot study with 87 samples, independent of those in the main study, was conducted to assess the instrument's internal consistency and reliability. Concerns from the respondents regarding the length, clarity, and wording of the item questionnaire were incorporated. The questionnaire was revised and refined after considering input from two experts in the marketing and tourism field.

Data Collection

Online surveys were administered from August 2019 to February 2020 after the festivals were held. The primary reason for using online surveys was because the target respondents were Millennials who mostly prefer to answer an online survey than a paper-based or phone-based survey. Furthermore, the use of an online survey was somehow in line with evaluating social media effectiveness. Using an online survey enabled us to send links to the questionnaire along with the links to social media pages of the festivals in the same invitation.

The research team contacted the target respondents personally to get their agreement to participate in the survey. When the participants answered "yes" to all the three screening questions, an invitation to participate in the study was sent through their email or social media (i.e., Facebook Messenger). The invitation contained a link to the festival's official Facebook page and the online questionnaire. Before completing the survey questions, the respondents were asked to visit and evaluate the TIFF and the Manado Fiesta's official Facebook page by clicking the link provided along with the invitation. The evaluation of the festival's Facebook page would last for 5 to 10 minutes. Subsequently, respondents were then asked to fill out the questionnaire by clicking the provided link. Upon completing the questionnaire, respondents were asked to voluntarily share an invitation with their Millennial peers who meet the criteria.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was processed with the statistical package SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 18. The first was used to extract demographic data, analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, and reliability test (Cronbach's

alpha. AMOS was utilized to perform the two-stage methodology of structural equation modeling (SEM), as suggested by Gerbing and Anderson (1988). AMOS's advantages for SEM analysis lie in its ability to draw models using a simple graphical interface, perform the computations, and display the results quickly. In the first stage, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the measurement model and evaluate each instrument's validity. Finally, the full SEM with maximum likelihood was used to test the hypothesized model. The reason for using SEM in the analysis was because of its advantage in providing more meaningful and valid results in analyzing a complex pattern or relationship between multiple variables (Hair et al., 2011).

Results

Demographic

Table 1 shows that a total of 865 complete responses were received. This final sample comprised a reasonably high proportion: 53% attended the TIFF, and 47% attended the Manado Fiesta. Most respondents were female (61%), and 39% were male. Respondents are ages 16 to 34. The largest age group consisted of those aged 16 to 20 (65.9%), followed by those who

were ages 21 to 30 (28.4%) and 30 to 34 (4.3%).

Table 1

Demographic of the Respondents in the Main Study

Characteristic	Category	N=865	%
Gender	Male	334	38.6
	Female	531	61.4
Age	16 – 20	570	65.9
	21 – 25	245	28.4
	26 – 30	38	4.3
	31 – 34	12	1.4
Festival	TIFF	456	52.7
	Manado Fiesta	409	47.3

Analysis of Variance

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to evaluate the potential differences in perceptions between the attendees of TIFF and Manado Fiesta. Table 2 displayed a comparison between each group of samples for each first item in each variable. The result showed that there are no significant differences in the perception between these two groups of samples in all variables. Therefore, it is reasonable to treat them as a single data set (Hair et al., 2009).

Table 2

One-Factor ANOVA Test Attendees of TIFF and Manado Fiesta

Variables	Group	Descriptive Statistic		ANOVA Test	
		Mean	St. Dev	F Statistic	p
Attitude towards SMM	Manado Fiesta	3.73	0.75	1.997	0.158
	TIFF	3.66	0.70		
Story	Manado Fiesta	3.68	0.77	0.065	0.799
	TIFF	3.67	0.77		
Sensescape	Manado Fiesta	3.72	0.74	0.057	0.811
	TIFF	3.73	0.79		
Servicescape	Manado Fiesta	3.99	0.74	0.025	0.873
	TIFF	3.98	0.83		
Stakeholder	Manado Fiesta	3.99	0.75	0.063	0.801
	TIFF	3.74	0.78		
Brand loyalty	Manado Fiesta	3.73	0.74	0.064	0.800
	TIFF	3.73	0.78		

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the first stage of the data analysis, a series of CFA was carried out to evaluate the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the four constructs. Following Brown (2006), several goodness-of-fit indicators were used to evaluate the measurement model: comparative fit index (CFI); goodness of fit (GFI); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA); and root mean square residual (RMR), incremental fit index (IFI), and Tucker Lewis index (TLI). The recommended cut of value is $GFI > .90$, $RMSEA < .06$, $RMR < .08$, while CFI, IFI, and TLI should all be greater than 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Brown, 2006).

Preliminary CFA showed that the measurement model did not sufficiently fit the data. Based on the inspection of the modification indices, seven items with the lowest factor loading and high cross-loading (see Appendix A) were removed to improve the goodness of fit of the model and satisfy convergent and discriminant validity requirements. The removal of the items was done after careful theoretical consideration. The results of the revised measurement model showed that all goodness-of-fit indicators were within the acceptable ranges ($GFI = 0.92$; $RMSEA = 0.05$; $RMR = 0.03$; $TLI = 0.96$; $IFI \& CFI = 0.97$), which imply that the measurement model provides a good fit to the data. The chi-square value is significant (996.740, $p < .001$), which can be explained by our large sample size. Furthermore, all factor loadings of the indicators were statistically significant ($p < .001$), ranging from 0.74 to 0.96. Table 3 presents a summary of the CFA results.

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used as the indicator (Hair et al., 2009) to evaluate the reliability of the overall scale. Table 3 displays that each variable's reliability was satisfied as Cronbach's alpha and CR values for all constructs were higher than the recommended cutoff value of 0.7 (Cronbach, 1970; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The average variance extracted (AVE) and the significance of the factor loading was evaluated to establish the convergent validity. Convergent validity is achieved if factor loading ≥ 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011) and $AVE \geq 0.5$ (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows

that all the convergent validity indicators are higher than the recommended threshold value.

As suggested by Hair et al. (2009), the discriminant validity was determined by examining CR, AVE, and maximum shared squared variance (MSV). The CR values were greater than the AVE values, which indicate a certain degree of discriminant validity (Byrne, 2010). The AVE values were higher than the MSV, which also indicates that the discriminant validity of the model was achieved (Hair et al., 2009). Additionally, as shown in Table 4, the square root of AVE in the diagonal matrix was higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficient, supporting the sufficient degree of discriminant validity of all constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Equation Modeling

In the second stage of the data analysis, the structural model was estimated using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS to test the research hypotheses (see Arbuckle, 2007). The goodness indicators for the full model indicated adequate goodness-of-fit ($GFI = 0.91$; $RMSEA = 0.59$; $RMR = 0.03$; $IFI, TLI \& CFI = 0.95$), supporting the appropriateness of the structural model.

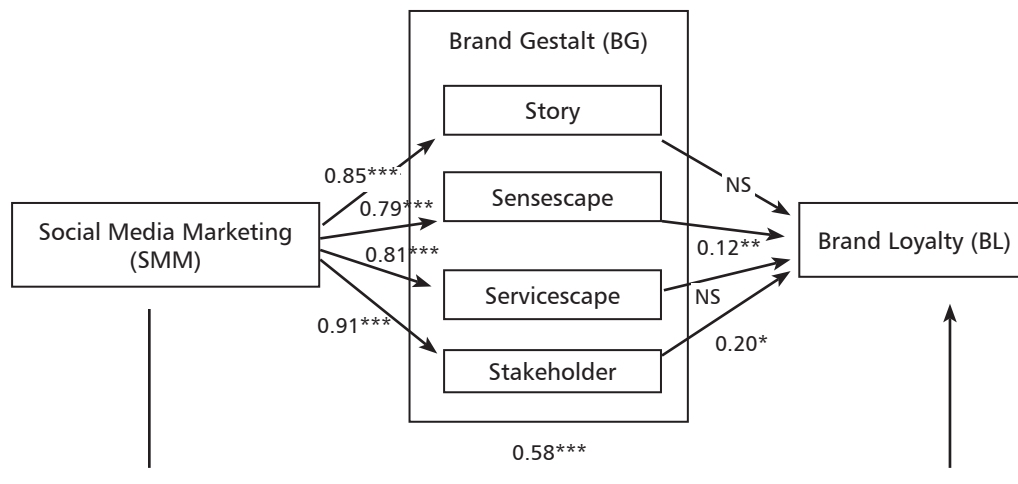
The result for the structural model with the significance of each path is displayed in Figure 3 and Table 5. The results showed that the final model provides support for seven out of the nine hypotheses in this study. SMM had a significant and positive effect on brand story ($\beta = 0.85, p < 0.001$), brand sensescape ($\beta = 0.79, p < 0.001$), brand servicescape ($\beta = 0.81, p < 0.001$), and brand stakeholder ($\beta = 0.91, p < 0.001$). These results confirmed H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d that predicted the direct effect of SMM on four dimensions of brand gestalt. Significant and positive effects were also detected for the effect of SMM on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.58, p < 0.001$), which corroborated H2. Further, the result confirmed H3b and H3d that predicted a positive effect of brand sensescape ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.01$) and stakeholders ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$) on brand loyalty.

Table 3*Confirmatory Factor Analysis Result*

Item	Factor Loading
Social media marketing ($\alpha = 0.92$, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.67, MSV = 0.7)	
The festival's Facebook page is useful for social networking.	0.80
The contents displayed on the festival's Facebook page seem interesting.	0.79
I find It is easy to use festival's Facebook page.	0.90
The festival's Facebook page allows the exchange of information with others.	0.80
The festival's Facebook page provided up to date information about the event.	0.79
Brand story ($\alpha = 0.90$, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.72, MSV = 0.63)	
The story of this festival is an important part of its brand.	0.81
The story of this festival makes it more attractive.	0.93
The story of this festival affects me emotionally.	0.81
The story of this festival makes me feel connected with it.	0.83
Brand sensescape ($\alpha = 0.90$, CR = 0.89, AVE = 0.68, MSV = 0.61)	
This festival puts me in a good mood.	0.74
This festival gives me pleasure.	0.91
This festival satisfies my adventure needs.	0.87
This festival makes a strong impression.	0.78
Brand servicescape ($\alpha = 0.91$, CR = 0.91, AVE = 0.71, MSV = 0.63)	
There is warm ambience and atmosphere.	0.84
The location is clean.	0.81
There is comfortable overall temperature in the place.	0.91
The location of the festival is accessible.	0.82
Brand stakeholder ($\alpha = 0.86$, CR = 0.88, AVE = 0.66, MSV = 0.63)	
The local resident is an important part of this festival brand.	0.85
The recommendation of other tourist is an important part of this festival brand.	0.81
The involvement of local government in promoting this place is an important part of this festival brand.	0.81
The collaboration among stakeholder is an important part of this brand.	0.78
Brand loyalty ($\alpha = 0.94$; CR = 0.94, AVE = 0.71, MSV = 0.57)	
I intend to encourage other people to visit this festival.	0.87
I will visit this festival for vacation in the future.	0.84
I intend to keep visiting this festival.	0.86
This festival would be my first choice.	0.82
I will speak positively about this festival.	0.86
I usually visit this festival instead of other events that offer similar attractions.	0.90

Table 4*Inter-Construct Correlation Coefficient With AVE in the Diagonal Matrix*

	SMM	Story	Sensescape	Servicescape	Stakeholder	BL
SMM	0.819					
Story	0.705	0.847				
Sensescape	0.608	0.725	0.825			
Servicescape	0.657	0.704	0.657	0.843		
Stakeholder	0.701	0.793	0.782	0.791	0.810	
Brand loyalty (BL)	0.753	0.744	0.743	0.722	0.746	0.842

**Figure 3.** Final Structural Model With Standardized Path Loadings**Table 5***Result of Structural Equation Model*

Path relationship	Estimate	Conclusion
SMM → Story	0.85***	H1a is supported
SMM → Sensescape	0.79***	H1b is supported
SMM → Servicescape	0.81***	H1c is supported
SMM → Stakeholder	0.91***	H1d is supported
SMM → Brand Loyalty	0.58***	H2 is supported
Story → Brand Loyalty	0.01	H3a is not supported
Sensescape → Brand Loyalty	0.12**	H3b is supported
Servicescape → Brand Loyalty	0.02	H3c is not supported
Stakeholder → Brand Loyalty	0.20*	H3d is supported

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 6*Mediation Analysis*

Path relationship	Estimate	Conclusion
SMM → BL	0.51***	
SMM → Sensescape → BL	0.26**	Partial mediation
SMM → BL	0.31***	
SMM → Stakeholder → BL	0.46**	Partial mediation

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Mediation (Indirect Effect) Analysis

The mediation effect of brand gestalt dimensions (i.e., sensescape and stakeholder) is further tested using the bootstrapping method (Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Awang et al., 2015). As recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), the bootstrap sample should be at least 500 to 1000. In this study, AMOS was used to generate 2,000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals that were selected (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The results are displayed in Table 6.

The result shows that the indirect effect of SMM on brand loyalty mediated by brand sensescape is significant ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, a significant effect was also detected in the indirect effect of attitude towards social media on brand loyalty mediated by brand stakeholder ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .001$).

As both direct and indirect effects of SMM on brand loyalty are significant, it can be concluded that the effect of SMM on brand loyalty was partially mediated by brand sensescape and brand stakeholder.

Discussion

This study attempts to develop and test a theoretical framework highlighting the critical interplay of SMM in festival tourism branding. Building from the existing theory supported by previous empirical findings, we propose our hypotheses on the relationship between SMM, brand gestalt, and brand loyalty. Although extant empirical work on SMM mostly focuses on the effect of social media on tourist behavioral intention (e.g., Hudson et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2012; Lockstone et al., 2013; Llopis- Amorós et al., 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020), the present study documented evidence on a significant effect of SMM on festival

branding variables. First, tourists' attitude towards SMM exerts a positive and significant effect on four dimensions of festival brand gestalt (i.e., story, sensescape, servicescape, and stakeholder of the festivals). In this sense, when tourists positively evaluate the festival's SMM activities, they tend to develop a more positive perception of its overall brand and its components. Through direct interaction, engagement, and collaboration with the tourist in the social media, DMO can establish a positive consumer-brand relationship (Ayeh et al., 2012; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Harrigan et al., 2018; Hudson et al., 2015), which in turn leads to brand building process (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Dijkmans et al., 2015; Priporas et al., 2019).

The results of this study further demonstrate the significant effect of SMM on festival brand loyalty. This finding corroborates the recent studies on the significance of social media in building loyalty intentions (e.g., Lee et al., 2012; Hudson et al., 2015; Llopis-Amoros et al., 2019; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020). This result implies that if DMO wants improved loyalty of the festival brand loyalty, a continuous evaluation of their social media marketing and its components is imperative. These components include the user's perceived entertainment, interaction, and trendiness of the festival's social media.

Another significant result in this study lies in identifying the influence of brand gestalt's two dimensions on festival tourism brand loyalty. First, the finding in this study provides empirical evidence that brand sensescape is a crucial determinant of brand loyalty. In this sense, a positive consumer sensation, feelings, and cognitions evoked by the festival tourism brand's related stimuli lead to the formulation of festival brand loyalty. This finding corroborates previous studies that advocated that a memorable

brand experience triggers brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009; Dagger & O'Brien, 2010; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014; Ding & Tseng, 2015; Barnes et al., 2014; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015; Hung et al., 2016). Second, the result shows that in the context of festival tourism, stakeholders' involvement has a significant impact on brand loyalty. This result implies that if tourists positively evaluate the stakeholder's involvement in the festival tourism, they are more likely to establish loyal behavior towards the festival brand. In other words, tourists value stakeholders' involvement such as local resident participation in the festival event, other tourist recommendations of the festival, local government activities in promoting the event, and collaboration among stakeholders, which are essential determinants of brand loyalty (Solem, 2016).

Findings in this study also confirmed the mediating role of the two dimensions of brand gestalt (i.e., sensescape and stakeholder). First, the effect of SMM on brand loyalty flows through brand sensescape. The degree to which SMM influences brand loyalty depends on the strength of the brand sensescape. Further, the result of this study demonstrates the mediation role of brand stakeholders. In this sense, SMM's effect on brand loyalty is more likely to enhance when tourists' perceived stakeholders' involvement in festival branding is positive. These findings align with the notion of brand loyalty suggested by Oliver (1999) that consumers develop loyalty to a brand from the accumulation of a consumer's cognitive evaluation of brand information.

Interestingly, the brand story is not a significant determinant of brand loyalty, implying that tourists do not find the event offers a unique and memorable experience. In this sense, tourists perceived festival brand story lacks novelty, extraordinariness, or emotional connection, which are essential ingredients of loyalty to tourism attraction (Yuichi & Masaki, 2014; Toyama & Yamada, 2012). Another possible reason is that tourists have formed a prior expectation of the festival, and the actual festival experience is below their expectations. As noted by Yuichi and Masaki (2014), expectation is a significant determinant of destination loyalty.

Similarly, the effect of brand servicescape on brand loyalty is found to be not significant. This result implies that tourists' evaluation of the festival's physical environment is not the primary factor that forms their loyalty to the event. Servicescape-related

determinants of brand loyalty such as infrastructure, amenity, transportation (Meleddu et al., 2015), and other physical environment do not provide a positive impression to the tourist.

Theoretical Implications

Although previous research has discussed the concept of brand gestalt (e.g., Diamond et al., 2009; Mandagi et al., 2021), the literature on brand gestalt is still scarce. The present study contributes to this theoretical gap by extending the brand gestalt concept into the festival destination context. Further, this study establishes the nomological network of brand gestalt by exploring the link between brand gestalt and the other two crucial constructs: social media marketing and brand loyalty. Given the multidimensionality of a festival brand (Grappi & Montanari, 2011), viewing it from the lens of brand gestalt helps us understand how a festival brand is perceived in consumers' minds in its totality. Mandagi et al. (2021) suggested that brand gestalt serves as an insight tool for synergistic analytics for the marketers in evaluating their brand. This synergetic interaction among brand elements, if strategically managed, is the source of brand power (Diamond et al., 2009). In line with the notion of brand gestalt, Keller (2003) argued that adopting broader perspectives covering the multidimensionality of brand concept is imperative to advance brand concept.

Specifically, the present study contributes to the marketing and tourism literature by revealing the following empirical evidence: (a) positive effect on social media marketing on brand gestalt, (b) positive and significant effect of SMM on brand loyalty, (c) positive impact of the two dimensions of brand gestalt (i.e., brand sensescape and stakeholder) on brand loyalty, and (d) the mediating role of the sensescape and stakeholders on the relationship between SME and brand loyalty implies that these two brand gestalt's dimensions are critical factors in enhancing loyalty to a festival brand in SMM activities.

Practical Implications

Based on empirical evidence well-supported by a sound theoretical framework, this study provides several recommendations for the DMO as a basis for decision making, strategy planning, and improving social media marketing practices in festival branding. First, this study informs DMO and festival tourism practitioners that SMM is critical in enhancing festival

brand gestalt and loyalty. To achieve a robust and more durable brand gestalt and loyalty, a continuous evaluation of SMM activities is critical. DMO needs to ensure that their SMM activities effectively facilitate adequate social networking, display content that is attractive to the audience, allow the user to exchange information, and provide up-to-date, relevant information about the event. These effective SMM practices are beneficial not only in achieving marketing goals but also in creating value for the customer (Felix et al., 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2020) turn leads to brand loyalty.

Further, this study revealed that festival brand sensescape are significant determinants of brand loyalty. This finding further implies that DMO needs to create a unique and memorable festival experience that satisfied tourist experiential needs, makes a strong impression on them, and evokes a positive tourist response. As noted by Yuksel et al. (2010), tourists tend to establish a positive response to a destination that resulted from a favorable experience. Furthermore, to attract more millennials and Gen Z tourists, the festival organizer needs to create unique experiences that allow them to express identity and facilitate social interaction or networking (Martin, 2015). DMO will reap the fruit of tourist loyalty to a festival event from this unique and memorable festival experience.

Additionally, the stakeholder's participation in festival brand creation is also essential in establishing brand loyalty. Centeno and Wang (2017) noted that not just the brand owner actively creates the brands, but it is co-created by groups of stakeholders (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Centeno & Wang, 2017). DMO would need to consider strategic partnerships or collaboration among the festival's stakeholders to enhance festival brand gestalt, which eventually establishes festival brand loyalty. Collaboration and partnership among public and private stakeholders are crucial in tourism destination planning, managing, and decision making (Bornhorst et al., 2010) and a key determinant of successful destination branding (e.g., brand loyalty).

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its valuable contribution and insights into an understanding of the effectiveness of social media on festival branding, this study is subject to some limitations. First, a self-report approach was utilized for tourists' evaluation of their social media experience and festival branding variables, which potentially

result in a response bias. Second, this study's context was in two festivals in Indonesia, which could not be generalized in other settings or other countries because every country is different in terms of culture, economic, social, and other conditions. Cross-country comparisons or multi-country studies are beneficial to validate the result of this study further. Further, a cross-sectional analysis was used in this study, which does not allow for real causal inference. Future studies can utilize longitudinal studies to enhance causal inference.

Declaration of ownership:

This report is our original work.

Conflict of interest:

None.

Ethical clearance:

This study was approved by the institution.

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Appendix A

Items Removed in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Items

Social Media Marketing

I got useful information when visiting the festival's Facebook page.

Visiting the festival's Facebook page is fun.

Brand story

This festival has authentic stories.

Brand sensescape

This festival offers novel experiences.

Brand servicescape

I feel safe and secure in this festival.

Brand loyalty

I would be willing to pay a higher price for this festival over another festival.

I will recommend this festival to someone who seeks my advice.
