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Research Paper

Advancing the 5E's in festival experience for the Gen Y framework in the context of eWOM

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ABSTRACT

The study queries whether providing a memorable music festival experience will encourage Gen Y attendees to share their experience via electronic word of mouth (eWOM) for a small island destination (SID) and a music festival. The study advances the 5E's framework in festival experience for Gen Y by adjusting the dependent variable of interest to that of eWOM. The adjustment to the model framework is done in order to address some prominent challenges of confined island economies with regard to festival production, such as: restrictive market access, limited capital for promotions, and the need for generational market succession to sustain tourist arrivals. The research uses the case study of the Aruba Electric Festival, which was created by tourism officials in order to increase Gen Y tourist arrivals without deflecting other generational cohorts from arriving to the island. The study recognizes the importance of creating a music festival experience that would influence attendees' intentions to promote the event and destination via eWOM, thus increasing market reach and decreasing promotional expenses. The data was assessed using a structural equation model. The results reveal that if festival organizers craft an overall memorable music festival experience that incorporates the 5Es, then Gen Y attendees are likely to provide positive eWOM for the festival and the destination. The results address some immediate industry concerns of Aruba's destination managers and festival organizers.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, music festival consumption has continued to increase within pop culture trends resulting in many cities and regions incorporating various types of music festivals in their destination offerings (Frey, 1994). The continued increase in music festival consumption has widely been attributed to peoples' tastes and preferences for live music, which is consumed in an immersive environment that engages festival attendees with the music, other people, and a stimulating atmosphere (Morgan, 2008). A prominent marketplace that has emerged in music festival production is that of small island destinations (SIDs) located in the Caribbean region. SIDs are defined as island destinations with a population of one million or less (e.g. Aruba) (Croes, 2011a).

In relation to music festival consumption, SIDs within the Caribbean provide festival attendees with an immersive environment that includes music, interaction with locals and their culture, and the ambience of an island destination. Thus, given the number and variety of music festivals that these SIDs offer, it appears that

there has emerged an understanding of the value of music festivals to island marketing (Meschino, 2012). Table 1 provides a summary of some popular music festivals occurring in the Caribbean region.

According to Andersson and Getz (2009), music festivals may be used as experiential products to diversify destination product portfolios that draw local, domestic, and international event attendees to specific destinations during specific time intervals. Music festivals have also been referenced as major economic catalysts within constrained economies such as those of island destinations (Kim, Prideaux, & Chon, 2010; Rivera, Semrad, & Croes, 2015a). Thus, with the continued increase of music festivals occurring in the Caribbean region, it seems that destination managers may also be viewing music festivals as economic opportunities, as well as opportunities to diversify tourism offerings beyond the traditional sun, sand, and sea island attractions, thus encouraging new tourist market segments to visit Caribbean SIDs (Nurse, 2004).

One of the newly emerging tourist market segments is that of Generation Y (Gen Y). It is noted as the most homogenous and influential spending generational cohort, which will soon surpass the Baby Boomer Generation (Benckendorff, Moscardo & Pendergast, 2010). Gen Y is defined as people born during 1977–1992 (Glass, 2007). Benckendorff et al. (2010) posit that Gen Y will spend and travel more than previous generations, are hungry for

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Table 1
Caribbean Music Festivals.

Festival Name	Country	Festival Name	Country
Soul Beach Music Festival	Aruba	The Red Strip Sumfest	Jamaica
Aruba Piano Festival	Aruba	Rebel Salute Music Festival	Jamaica
Jazz and Latin Music Festival	Aruba	Ocho Rio Jazz Festival	Jamaica
Junkanoo Festival	Bahamas	Jamaica Rock and Blues Jam	Jamaica
Barbados Jazz Festival	Barbados	Reggae Sumfest	Jamaica
Barbados Gospelfest	Barbados	St. Lucia Jazz Festival	St. Lucia
Bermuda Music Festival	Bermuda	Rhythm and Blues Festival	US Virgin Islands
Curacao North Sea Jazz	Curacao	Tobago Jazz Experience	Trinidad & Tobago
St. Kitts Music Festival	St. Kitts	Jazz Artists on the Green	Trinidad & Tobago

*Compiled by authors.

experiential products, desire memorable experiences from their travels, and search for information via numerous channels (including social networking sites) prior to booking in order to ensure consumption of an experience is worthwhile. Consequently, given this vast tourist resource, it is crucial for tourism destination managers to gain a comprehensive and strategic understanding of the type of experiences deemed memorable to Gen Y tourists, while also considering what could drive Gen Y recommendations to others via information sharing, especially on social networking sites (Ralston, Ellis, Compton, & Lee, 2007).

Most SIDs position tourism as a major economic pillar (Croes, 2011b, 2013; Schubert, Brida, & Risso, 2011). Thus, in order to increase and sustain tourist arrivals and receipts, these island economies are largely dependent upon finding tourists who are willing to travel long distances in order to consume experiential products, such as music festivals (Crouch, 1994). Moreover, given the increase in music festival productions, it appears organizers are aware of the music experience as a viable product with which to draw tourists. Yet, limited research has been conducted to determine whether a music festival experience would attract Gen Y tourists to an island destination. As a result, destinations may be without guiding information that might otherwise aid in securing and sustaining Gen Y tourist arrivals and receipts.

While past research has addressed Gen Y's commitment and use of social networks to acquire information regarding travel related products (Bilgihan, Okumus, & Cobanoglu, 2013; Bolton et al., 2013) literature is devoid of investigation that links whether a memorable music festival experience will encourage Gen Y attendees to promote the festival and/or the destination via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This would be valuable information for purposes of aiding festival and destination marketing. Such informed marketing could help underwrite the host destination's brand, draw more tourists, and ultimately contribute to the welfare of the islands' tourism industries. Thus, given the proclivity for Gen Y to be a valuable market segment to SIDs, it becomes vital to study their viability as a gainful resource germane to music festivals.

The purpose of this study, then, is to determine whether a memorable music festival experience could generate eWOM from Gen Y tourists attending a SID music festival. For purposes of this research, the 5Es model of festival experience for Gen Y (Rivera, Semrad, & Croes, 2015b) is applied as the measurement instrument. Aruba, a small island destination, is used as the case study with which to examine Gen Y's use of eWOM after the consumption experience of an inaugural electric music festival; and the tourists' use of eWOM is applied for the island destination and

the festival. The music festival attendees are surveyed on their likelihood to promote the festival and/or the destination via eWOM using three common social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). The survey data is then assessed using a structural equation model (SEM).

The research considers two prominent challenges of SID festival market constraints. First, SID music festivals have only two audiences that may attend the event: locals and international tourists. The local market is constrained by the island's resident population and may therefore be quickly saturated from a marketing and sales perspective. However, the international tourist market is vast and may be lucrative providing that the marketing acquisition cost to attract these tourists is not exceedingly expensive. Second, as most SIDs are considered to be developing countries or states with scarce resources (Croes & Semrad, 2013; Srinivasan, 1986), it becomes difficult to fund an international festival marketing campaign. Thus, the relevance of eWOM as a variable of interest for analysis in this study is deemed appropriate, as eWOM is a form of communication that is especially cost effective in acquiring the Gen Y market and extending market reach into international markets (Dellarocas, 2003; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

The study builds upon the 5Es model of festival experience for Gen Y (Rivera et al., 2015b) by examining the influence that a memorable music festival occurring in a SID may have on Gen Y tourists' intention to promote the festival and/or destination via eWOM. In a time period where SID managers are looking to diversify their destination portfolio with experiential products that could attract the newly emerging Gen Y international tourist market, a pragmatic advancement of the 5Es model of festival experience for Gen Y framework is necessary. Thus, the current study delineates itself from the founding framework via inclusion of eWOM, a marketing channel that may increase market reach with cost efficiency.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework: 5Es in festival experience for Gen Y

Rivera et al. (2015b) tested the Pine and Gilmore's experience economy framework (1998) in order to determine the experiential domains that were specifically important to Gen Y tourists attending a SID music festival. The study found that in order for Gen Y tourists to declare an overall music festival as memorable, the experience economy framework of Pine and Gilmore (1998) requires an adjustment that would include economic value as a first order construct. In other words, Gen Y tourists that attended a music festival occurring in a SID specifically enlisted the 5Es (education, entertainment, escapism, esthetics, and economic value) as critical factors in determining whether the overall music festival experience would be deemed memorable.

The research findings from Rivera et al. (2015b) advance Pine and Gilmore (1998) experience economy framework. That is, the economic value construct appeared as a first order experiential domain as opposed to a second order mediating variable when tested in the context of a SID music festival with the primary audience consisting of Gen Y tourists. Rivera et al. (2015b) referred to the addition of the new first order construct in the experience economy framework as the 5Es in festival experience for Gen Y. The current study applies the 5Es in festival experience for Gen Y as the principal framework to guide the study with specific focus on the unit of analysis for measuring the dependent variable (behavioral intentions).

Rivera et al. (2015b) applied the 5Es in festival experience for Gen Y by measuring behavioral intentions with Gen Y attendees'

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