

Hold your nose at the boutique festival

November 8 2013

The advent of a boutique festival culture is nothing new. Humanity has always had celebratory gatherings with music, dancing, arts and crafts, food and drink. But, in the modern world there is a n urge to study how such gatherings are experienced, and more to the point how they are marketed to the prospective clients who will attend, buy the goodies on offer, listen and dance to the music, take part in the proverbial barrel rolling and Wellington-boot throwing, and drink the beer.

Maria Laura Toraldo of the University Federico II of Naples, Italy, has investigated to modern boutique festivals that take place annually in the UK – a pop music festival and a foodies' festival on a farm. Specifically, she has looked at the role of the senses in building a sense of anticipation for these events, capturing the imaginations of the punters before they arrive. She points out that until now research into the festival phenomenon has focused largely on managerial aspects and all but ignored the multi-sensory nature of consumption at such events, the sights and sounds, the aromas, the rain, the mud... the sunburn.

Toraldo's research shows just how much of the marketing and festivalgoer anticipation is driven by visual and textual means to hint strongly at the sensory experience promised. Of course, thousands of people attend these and other festivals and have a good time, many repeat the experience while others opt not to part with the hard-earned cash for such an event again. The research fills a gap in festival management knowledge, revealing how the senses extend into the cultural production sector, where seemingly spontaneous [experiences](#) are highly orchestrated and planned by festival organizers and promoters.

However, points out Toraldo, such a scientific exploration cannot, no matter how in-depth, provide an insight into "the sensory reality of the festival" it doesn't capture certain aspects of the festival experience, she says "the incessant noise from other participants, the stench of the toilets, and the smell of burnt grease" ...all of which are common to festivals, boutique or otherwise.*

*This description is in no way intended to cast aspersions on any particular festival, anyone who has attended will attest to the noise, the aromatic sanitation and the inevitable burnt offerings at almost every such event.

More information: Toraldo M.L. (2013). Mobilising the cultural consumer through the senses: festivals as sensory experiences, *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 5 (4) 384. [DOI: 10.1504/IJWOE.2013.057403](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWOE.2013.057403)

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