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## Beyond the venue: the role of digital visual communications in sustaining and recreating the music festival experience

### Más allá del recinto: el rol del audiovisual digital en el mantenimiento y la reconstrucción de la experiencia de festival de música

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#### Abstract

The current spread of music festivals in Spain - prominent players in the music industry - has increased competitiveness in this sector. To differentiate themselves from the wide range of musical events, the organisers design their festivals as an experience renewed every year but which, at the same time, lives on as a festival culture disseminated by way of digital audiovisuals. This exploratory paper builds on previous studies that define festivals as cyclical and experiential, multi-dimensional and communicational spaces. It aims to determine the role of video and digital images in constructing, maintaining and redefining this experience. A mixed methodology is employed through a documentary review, a multi-case analysis of three of the most important festivals in Spain and interviews with experts. The results show the relevant role of audiovisual narratives in defining and fixing these experiences, as well as in their memorability and the creation of expectations for the next edition. The main characteristics and elements that compose it are also detailed. Finally, it highlights the role of after-movies as markers of the graphic and narrative pattern of the storytelling of these events.

#### Keywords

music festivals; cultural industries; cultural experience; digital communication; social media marketing; Spain

#### Resumen

La proliferación actual de festivales en el territorio español —agentes destacados dentro de la industria musical— ha traído consigo un aumento de la competitividad en este sector. Con la intencionalidad de diferenciarse dentro de la amplia oferta de eventos musicales, los organizadores diseñan sus acontecimientos en forma de experiencia que cada año se renueva, pero que a la vez perdura como cultura de festival, la cual es difundida a través del audiovisual digital. El presente trabajo, de carácter exploratorio, parte de estudios previos que definen a los festivales como espacios cíclicos y experienciales, de naturaleza multidimensional y comunicacional. Pretende determinar el rol del vídeo y la imagen digital para construir, mantener y redefinir dicha experiencia. Se emplea una metodología mixta mediante una revisión documental, un análisis de caso múltiple de tres de los festivales más importantes de España y entrevistas a expertos y expertas. Los resultados demuestran la relevante función de las narrativas audiovisuales en la definición y fijación de dichas experiencias, así como en su memorabilidad y creación de expectativa para la siguiente edición. Se describen igualmente las principales características y elementos que la componen. Por último, destaca el papel de los aftermovies como marcadores de la pauta expresiva y narrativa de la comunicación digital de estos eventos.

#### Palabras clave

festivales de música; industrias culturales; experiencia cultural; comunicación digital; marketing digital; España

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the global surge of musical festivals has highlighted the music industry's commitment to a format wherein many live performances converge in a confined space in just a few days. This condensed showcase has become one of the most significant attractions for Generation Y and Z, the primary audience for such events (Mediabrand Content Studio, 2023). Hence, the music industry has been affected by a major crisis brought about by the emergence of the Internet, a key revenue stream comes from music festivals, second only to streaming (Buceta, 2019).

Spain is one of the countries that boasts a wide array of music festivals, and the tourism and entertainment sectors have also taken a keen interest in these festivals. Exploiting its capacity to attract tourists and contribute to urban regeneration (Colombo and Richards, 2017; Quinn et al., 2021), various institutions and companies have promoted the organization of festivals. Consequently, in 2022, Spain hosted nearly 900 music festivals (Mediabrand Content Studio, 2023), surpassing pre-pandemic figures of 804 in 2019 (Ministerio de Cultura, 2020). Notably, in 2022, this surge generated a record-breaking turnover, with ticket sales generating €459.3 million, an increase of 20% from 2019 and almost 200% compared to 2021 (APM, 2023). Finally, Spain has indisputably positioned itself as a leader in promoting festival tourism (Pardo, 2022; de Elena, 2022).

Despite the data, significant gaps remain in analyzing this phenomenon, mainly due to the oversight of its multidimensional nature. In fact, previous research has focused on some of its dimensions, primarily economic and tourism dimensions (Getz, Andersson, and Carlsen, 2010; Estrada, Soto, and Monferrer, 2015; Cardoso et al., 2019; Ziakas and Getz, 2021). Also, numerous studies have focused on the social and cultural dimensions of music festivals (Colombo and Richards, 2017; Maasø, 2018; van der Hoeven and Hitters, 2019; Barrière and Finkel, 2022) and have analyzed marketing and communication strategies (Yolal et al., 2012; Freitas Santos et al., 2017; Portugal, Correia and Àguas, 2022).

Given the above and considering macro-festivals as communicative and experiential ecosystems, this paper concentrates on digital and audiovisual narrations. To this end, it examines marketing and communication tools employed by three of these events held in Spain - Mad Cool (hereinafter MC), Primavera Sound Barcelona (hereinafter PS), and Bilbao BBK Live (hereinafter BBK) - are analyzed. Thus, the focus is on assessing their effectiveness in conveying values, behaviors, emotions, and sensations integral to the festival experience (Anderton, 2019; Holt, 2020; Llopis-Amorós et al., 2018).

### 1.1. Music festivals as experiential events

Recognizing the central role of festivals in the live music ecology (van der Hoeven and Hitters, 2020), these cultural products function as communicational ecosystems, contemporary expressions of popular mass culture (de Aguilera and Adell, 2010). The stakeholders involved- promoters, organizers, artists, audiences, staff, suppliers, sponsors, public institutions, and agents from other industries- interact to make them possible. They achieve this by disseminating their narratives- predominately audiovisual formats- showcasing their perspectives of their business models (Pérez-Ordóñez, 2023), emphasizing the communicational nature of these events. Festivals are marketed to audiences, offering a diverse array of satisfying activities, whether artistic, social, cultural, or recreational, which motivate each stakeholder to participate. In essence, modern music festivals represent multidimensional phenomena, encompassing material and economic aspects (Anderton, 2018; Webster et al., 2018), social (Getz and Andersson, 2010; Webster and McKay, 2016; Colombo and Richards, 2017), meaning-making (Richards and Colombo, 2017; Anderton, 2019; van Vliet, 2019; Quinn et al., 2021), and cultural practices (Colombo, 2017; Quinn and Wilks, 2017). Simultaneously, they function as audiovisual narrative ecosystems, where marketing and communication, primarily through digital channels, play a pivotal role in constructing the authentic festival experience [1], as explored in the subsequent paragraphs. In addition, these narratives contribute to shaping a festival's brand image, conveying values and behaviors associated with them (Pérez-Gálvez et al., 2017; Llopis-Amorós et al., 2018; Garay and Morales, 2020a; Anderton, 2022), cultivating the culture unique to each festival.

### 1.2. The new festival experience: from the venue to the digital environment

In the competitive landscape of today's music festivals, especially those of large scale, the need to stand out leads to the use of strategic digital resources to maintain and disseminate their brand image and convey their core values. Moreover, this digital environment transforms them into cyclical spaces, i.e., collaboratively built on the collective and individual images, meanings, and experiences derived from the interactions, actions, and beliefs of the organizers, intermediaries, and attendees (Anderton, 2019). The conceptualization of these places revolves around four related aspects: a unique sense of place- under constant construction, yet maintaining stability through mediatized narratives-; cyclical reconstruction- where these spaces remain the same each year yet are different-; mediation- they must be disseminated effectively through the media channels-; and the sense of change and continuity- the place it belongs while simultaneously changing each year to attract new actors- (Anderton, 2021).

At the same time, within these cyclical spaces, ephemeral societies are constituted, characterized by the need for the corporeal experience and also their continuity on social media:

This is what I term as an event's cyclic sociality, the social meanings, mediations, and performativities that come to define the meaning and social atmosphere of an event through their regular renewal on-site, and through informal conversations on social media and between groups of friends (Anderton, 2022: 78).

Pivotal in facilitating mass dissemination and emphasizing communicative sociability, especially in mass consumption products, such as music festivals (del Amo, Letamendia and Diaux, 2016).

This influence extends to the construction of the festival experience, as highlighted by Holt (2016), who highlights the significance of the audiovisual format, identifying two important trends: broadcasts and online video. However, he considers the latter more adept at creating and sustaining the festival experience beyond its scheduled dates. He also highlights the audiovisual nature of these festivals, which originate from popular visual culture and evolve into an industry that generates visual identities, spectacles, and mediation flows through the physical and digital spheres (Holt, 2016).

Among these, aftermovies [2] have emerged as the leading creators of visual identities and experiences, mainly when disseminated through social media, facilitating rapid assimilation by digital communities (Holt, 2018; Pérez-Ordóñez and Sosa Valcárcel, 2022).

Specifically, aftermovies play a pivotal role as generators of visual identities and experiences when shared through social media (Holt, 2018; Pérez-Ordóñez and Sosa Valcárcel, 2022). Since their emergence in 2010 and subsequent widespread popularity, aftermovies have disrupted the traditional order of image dissemination and consumption of festivals, evolving alongside digital storytelling and in-person experience design (Holt, 2020). Consequently, aftermovies have become central tools in the communication strategies of organizers, alongside other audiovisual narratives, responsible for shaping the experience of attending a festival.

Based on the cyclical conception of festivals regarding space and experience, this paper investigates how organizers leverage digital audiovisuals to expand, sustain, and generate this experience. To this end, the following research questions are posed:

Q1. What role do audiovisual narratives distributed on the platforms play in constructing and maintaining the festival experience?

Q2. What elements constitute the mediatized and cyclical experience?

Q3. What values, behaviors, and symbols are emphasized in the audiovisual narratives, particularly in aftermovies?

Q4. What is the organizers' narrative intentionality in producing their digital audiovisual materials?

Q5. Can the mediatized digital experience suffice to construct the festival's own cyclical image?

To address these questions, the general objective (GO) is to describe the proposed festival experience by organizers through their digital audiovisual narratives. This overarching goal is complemented by the following specific objectives (SO):

SO1. To determine promoters' use of audiovisual items distributed via social networks in extending the festival experience beyond the venue.

SO2. To establish the role of aftermovies in shaping the cyclical festival experience.

SO3. To highlight the values, symbols, and spaces incorporated into the audiovisual narratives of festival organizers and the intentionality behind their messages.

SO4. To explore the potential and limitations of digital audiovisual narratives in constructing the festival experience and image.

## **2. Methodology**

Due to the limited number of articles analyzing the phenomenon, this study falls within the realm of exploratory research (Hernández, 2006), adopting a descriptive approach and employing a mixed methodology. The methodological approach includes a comprehensive documentary review of relevant literature, a multiple case study, and semistructured interviews with experts to respond to the established RQs.

The sample for the multiple case study (Yin, 2009; Jiménez Chávez and Comet Weiler, 2016) consists of three macro festivals- each attracting over 100,000 spectators- (APM, 2023) identified as reference models within the sector and among audiences: PS- with 500,000 attendees in 2022 organized by Primavera Sound, created in 2001-, MC in Madrid- with 300,000 attendees in 2022; organized by Mad Cool Events in collaboration with Live Nation, whose first edition was in 2016- and BBK- established in 2005; organized by Last Tour, with 115,000 attendees in 2022-. The data collection techniques included a content analysis of the Instagram profiles of each festival (610 posts in total), considering that Instagram is the most widely used social network by Generation Z and the second most used by millennials (IAB Spain, 2023). A visual and narrative study of the aftermovies from 2022 is also conducted. The analysis period spans 11 months- from the end of the 2022 edition to one month before the 2023 edition, from July to May in the case of PS and August to June in the case of MC and BBK-. This period allows for examining the transmission of the in-person and aftermovie experiences. The study focuses mainly on the aftermovies of the three events in Spain to describe the experiences they offer and the values and identities they disseminate. The subsequent step involves verifying whether these elements are reflected in Instagram posts. A narrative and visual analysis table has been applied (see Table 1), which has proven helpful in previous research (Pérez-Ordóñez, 2023).

**Table 1. The operationalization of the aftermovie analysis variables**

<b>Identifiers</b>	Title/Festival/Year/Year/Genere/Duration/Direction/Direction	
<b>Image</b>	Formal aspects	Shot size/Shot duration/Frame/ Camera Movements/ Color- BN//Color/Lighting (Harsh/Diffuse/Neutra)/ Postproduction (Synthetic image/Color correction/VFX)
	Narrative elements	Textual information/Editing and montage/Action/ Time/Space  /Staff
<b>Audio</b>	Formal aspects	Presence- absence/Identification event/Music/Voice/ Silence
	Narrative elements	Sound shots/Dialogues/Image relationship/Sound
<b>Symbols</b>	Related to the music/music/venue/festival location	

Source: Pérez-Ordóñez, 2023

The analysis of Instagram posts was based on Blanco-Sánchez y Moreno- Albarraíns' (2022) work, integrating specific variables tailored to the context of music festivals(see Table 2). Various profiles have been monitored using the tools Pathsocial, FanpageKarma, and Instagram Scraper. In the case of this particular social network, the study encompassed data from the entire timeframe; the interactions with the posts between March 26 and June 26 2023 have been studied in-depth. This specific period was chosen as it represents the overall duration and aligns closely with the upcoming editions of the festivals.

**Table 2: Analysis table of posts on Instagram**

<b>Festival</b>		
<b>Dates</b>	Likes	Comments
<b>Mentions</b>	Groups-artists/sponsors/	Type of mention
	Festival staff/ other festival initiatives	
<b>Hashtag</b>	From the Festival/related to the festival/other initiatives/other	
	Hashtag text	

<b>Discursive intent</b>	Informative-diachronic (the text alludes to the history of the festival)	
	Informative-sectorial	Useful info./venue/cinema/Festival lineup/Previous editions/Sponsors/Audience/Other brand events
	Advertising	Ticket sales/Raffles/Audience/Awards and other recognition/Promotions/Venue
	CSR Action	/environment (atmosphere, behaviors, satisfaction) Action
<b>Image format</b>	Imagen/ Carrusel/ Video	
	Type of image	Photography/Illustration/Infographics/Real Video Image / Synthetic Video Image
	Orientation	Buildings, concerts, long shots, spaces
<b>Image function</b>	Humanizing	Artists and other figures connected to the festival
	Interaction	Interactions with people
	Informative	Graphs and plans
	Otros	

Source: created by the authors based on Blanco-Sánchez y Moreno-Albarracín (2022)

Finally, 11 semi-structured interviews with experts have been conducted both in the academic (AS) and professional sphere (PS), guaranteeing the subsequent methodological triangulation that precisely validates the data obtained (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Among the interviewees, 5 are renowned national and international researchers and specialists in music festivals and/or visual culture, while the remaining 6 are professionals within the sector in Spain- including festival promoters, journalists, and musicians-. A thematic script guided the interviews, covering key topics such as the role of online communication in shaping the festival image and experience, the most effective audiovisual formats for this purpose, and the potential of online experiences to complement and/or substitute the in-person experiences of attending a festival.

### 3. Results

The main findings of the multiple case studies reveal the values, symbols, and experiences transmitted by festival organizers through their audiovisual content, as outlined in the following sections. In the case of PS, the predominant values include innovation, modernity, and the significance of musical activity, as shown in the analyzed items. PS positions itself as the leading festival- showcasing the behind-the-scenes creation of an aftermovie. It positions itself as the place to stay abreast of the latest musical trends and embrace an alternative lifestyle. To this end, it employs recognizable symbols such as a brightly lit sign, the site of its main stages, and nearby buildings that evoke an urban festival context, contributing to its distinctive identity (see image 1).

MC's narrative highlights its experiential aspect above all else, showcasing the myriad activities within the venue, among them musical performances. The proposed experience reflects a spacious entertainment space where attendees enjoy live shows, summer vibes, socializing, and several recreational alternatives the brand and organizers provide. Symbols such as a Ferris wheel, entrance sign, palm trees, commercial spaces, and artistic installations (see Image 1) are strategically shown for this purpose, presenting a fully professionalized festival model.

**Image 1. Some symbols of the PS, BBK, and MC festivals are highlighted in their aftermovies.**



Source: Primavera Sound, Bilbao BBK Live and Mad Cool.

Lastly, BBK draws upon the discourse of nostalgia linked to the traditional events of the 60s and 70s in vast natural settings, where thousands of young people migrated to partake in an authentic festival experience. At the same time, it highlights its connection to the surroundings by featuring unique buildings in Bilbao, its iconic wolf symbol, and the Kobetamendi, the location of the venue and its campsite (see image 1). All set in an enchanting site, where festivalgoers can relish the experience.

Experts acknowledge the critical role of meticulously planning this visual communication on social networks and by the venue since all these elements collectively shape the image and associated festival experience (PI, 2022). Similarly, it propagates the event's style, enabling commercial success and cultivating audience loyalty (EA3, 2021). However, experts also highlight some drawbacks to the experience of a live festival attended in person:

I think the festival experience is diminishing in excitement. It's becoming more predictable. With the development of the Internet, many people have already watched the concerts of the performing artists, and they have already watched the concert (PI 2, personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Formal similarities are evident across various aftermovies, including a fast pace and condensed rhythm marked by short, numerous shots. These similarities extend to shot typology- featuring general photographs of the venue and close-ups of people, as well as the use of color, frontal framing, scarce camera movements (with a preference for internal movement), and natural lighting.

Regarding postproduction, it coincides with using synthetic 2D images and color grading to create desired atmospheres. For instance, In PS, colorimetry enhances saturation, particularly in reddish and blue tones, creating greater contrast; BBK aims to highlight red and green tones- aligned with corporate colors and natural hues in Bilbao, MC, on the other hand, aims for a warm, summery atmosphere.

Visual effects (VFX) are a consistent feature in all the videos, incorporating filters, glitches, virtual cameras, acceleration and deceleration, masks, and other effects, each serving a distinct purpose. In PS, various effects are linked to the chosen video tutorial format. This type of production marks a departure from the typical aftermovie approach that usually summarizes events inside the venue. MC extensively uses VFX, such as masks and image overlapping, to convey the multitude of experiences within the venue, whether musical, social, experiential, or related to sponsoring brands. In BBK, VFX simulates analog images, glitches, and slow and fast cameras, contributing to the depiction of various experiential elements.

The soundtrack similarly shares characteristics across the aftermovies, using music as the principal element, accompanied by specific sound effects. Notably, there are no dialogues or significant silences in any item.

Although the formal elements exhibit similarities, it is at a narrative level where the most differences emerge. Consequently, there are three different experiences. The key findings are summarized below (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Narrative elements of after-movies**

	Primavera Sound	Bilbao BBK Live	Mad Cool
Year	2022	2022	2022
Editing and montage	Linear	Rhythmic and expressive; in the cut	Linear, expressive; dissolve with masks

	Primavera Sound	Bilbao BBK Live	Mad Cool
Action	Making a video tutorial	Festival attendance	Undetermined: what you experience at the festival
Space	Computer screen	The entire site, Bilbao	Venue; brand space
Time	The video production	Undetermined, that of the festival	Festival evening
Protagonists	Artists, attendees, video editor (extradiegetic)	Audience, artists, venue	Audience, sponsors, artists, venue
Shots sound	No	No	No
Sound effects	Yes (keyboard typing, effects)	Yes	No
Symbols	Bright/Luminous festival, the venue, nearby buildings	Venue, festival poster, Bilbao, wolf, campsite	Precinct, brands, the event's Ferris wheel, palm trees, art installations

Source: Authors

In social network communications, visuals and audiovisuals play a pivotal role, especially in the aftermovies: "If you show an image where many people are having a good time and singing, with renowned artists delivering a great show, you are going to create a sense of a festival that works" (PI1, personal communication, June 8, 2023). The festival images "allow you to anticipate and remember the experience" whether the videos have sound or not and foster a "feeling of nostalgia" and connection to the live event (EA2, personal communication), June 15, 2023). Therefore, marketing and communication departments are increasingly investing in digital video to establish a stronger connection with the audience (PI 5, 2021). This approach allows them to define the most suitable experiential proposal that extends beyond musical activities (PI4,2022), presenting a more visually appealing aesthetic (PI6, 2021) and positioning the festival within the industry (PI2, 2022). The festival's image of the festival conceptualized as a ritual, is even reconstructed, but in this case, it is mediatized (PI5, 2021), heightening audience expectations and motivations (IA5, 2021).

PS Barcelona's aftermovie stands out as the most innovative in terms of its narrative, offering a unique video tutorial on how to edit an aftermovie. The textual information marks the narrative, providing 10 steps for postproducing this type of audiovisual text. Using virtual cameras, various visual effects, synthetic images, and digital resources contributes to the story's authenticity.

During the analysis period from July 1, 2022, to May 31, 2023, the official and central Primavera Sound (PS) Instagram account featured 324 posts. It should be noted that other branches or events associated with PS have their own accounts. Among these posts, 142 were videos (43.83%), while the remaining were still images or photo carousels (56.17%). Of the video posts, 121 were reels, which has become the exclusive video format on the account as of September 2022. The posts featuring still images are divided into 85 carousels (26.23% of the total posts)- mainly referring to the music performances and lineups, of these 48 were unique festival posters (14.81%), 21 photographs showcasing the festival setting and venue (6.48%), 16 unique photographs of performances (4.94%) and 12 (3.7%) covering varied subject matter (memes, screenshots of supposed social media conversations, song lyrics related to artworks, and festival merchandise, etc.)

The absence of artifices characterizes the editing and postproduction of the video items, with variations depending on the content. Videos showcasing musical performances from the 2022 edition mainly include brief phrases taken directly from the live performances. The video titled "Relive Primavera" showcases performances from the 2022 edition, with only a few featuring montages from single-camera productions devoid of transitions- except for cut-visual effects and graphics (only in specific items and occasional slowed-down shots). Interviews with groups, soloist artists, and attendees employ cuts to create time ellipses and lettering to transcribe spoken content. Still, they do not use other visual or sound resources. The only item that stands out is from the other aftermovies in the PS 2022 edition, where the entire construction process is shown, as already mentioned.

Regarding the still images, it should be noted that a distinction is made between photographs of the artists during their performances- mainly featuring close-ups and medium shots, especially close-ups in

both cases- and those portraying the festival's atmosphere, venues, and surroundings, characterized by long shots. The exception to the latter includes a few extreme close-ups of gestures and defining elements, such as an audience member's wristband. This audiovisual planning and photography use aligns with the abovementioned case of the aftermovie.

The festival posters share several common features, including legible and sober typography- given their predominantly informative nature. They employ dual lettering in Spanish and English and incorporate light, soft background colors framed by floral motifs.

The BBK's aftermovie emphasizes the venue, Kobetamendi, a natural space overlooking Bilbao. The connection to the city is accentuated through shots of its unique buildings, the wolf associated with the city, and its promotion of sustainability or views of the capital city. In the same way, the emphasis on the outdoor festival experience is emphasized through expressive editing techniques, which manage to convey the emotional essence of the event with slow and fast cameras, effects simulating images recorded on magnetic tape, or numerous visual effects.

The narrative space spans the entire site, from the campsite to the stages. It also features undefined action and time, alternating day and night shots without sequentiality, emphasizing the participants' and artists' emotions and experiences. Thanks to the colorimetry resources and other VFX, the aesthetic recreates a magical atmosphere of freedom and warmth, reminiscent of the classic 60s and 70s rock festivals.

BBK shared 140 posts on its Instagram during the analysis period, most of which are still images (83%), predominately in carousel format. These images are usually photographs or photographic montages with the consistent presence of graphics and overprinted texts. Infographics and graphs provide practical information about the event or its promotions. The videos (17%) follow a reel format characterized by a short duration, dynamic editing, graphics, and meticulous aesthetics. They also feature excerpts from live performances and a short video format of still images of artists with dynamic background texts.

The thematic variety is characteristic of BBK's posts, with a prevalence of posts about the artists (45%), followed by those showcasing individuals enjoying the festival experience (15.7%). A striking number of posts focus on the surroundings and city (10%) as a complement to the event, with frequent appearances of the venue and facilities (8.5%). Promotional posts (7%) and posts featuring the festival poster and lineup (8.5%) are numerous. Practical information (7%), generic content about the event (3.5%), awards and nominations (3.5%), and CSR actions (2.1%) related to sustainability and 8M are also present. On the other hand, posts about ticket sales are insignificant (1.4%). BBK also uses the story format, grouped into 7 categories, to provide practical and tourist information about the area, culture, Basque Country traditions, or the lineup.

MC's aftermovie provides an idealized vision of the festival, showcasing the venue as the central figure and some of its symbols, such as a Ferris wheel, artistic installation, or sponsors' commercial areas. It highlights this event's multiple leisure and entertainment experiences, encompassing music, leisure and entertainment, art, gastronomy, and more. Notably, the after-movie dedicates significant time to showcasing sponsoring brands, demonstrating its commercial nature. Moreover, an explicit action or a specific time is shown, making it more descriptive than narrative. It employs a linear and occasionally expressive montage, using various visual resources, such as slow and fast cameras, masks, and color grading. The color scheme creates a summery, festive, warm atmosphere, associating the event with summer, while the abundance of visual effects adds dynamism and emotionality. All the participants including the audience, workers, artists, sponsors, etc.- take center stage, using medium shots and close-ups for individuals and long shots for the venue, drawing attention to its amplitude.

In the case of MC, 100% of the Instagram posts, including the videos and photographs, incorporate graphic elements. The creative theme of this profile is characterized by a colorful, pop, casual, and fun aesthetic, prominently featuring event-related graphics such as the brand or upcoming edition dates. While bold and highly legible typefaces predominate, some posts incorporate typeface families with more ornate styling.

Regarding the texts accompanying the posts, they initially appear in English and are subsequently translated into Spanish. The texts are usually short and informative and include a call to action (buy tickets, participate in contests, listen to the playlist on Spotify, etc.), expressed in plain, straightforward, youthful language often accompanied by emoticons. 92% of the posts are videos, and the rest are graphics. Reinforcing the connection with the aftermovie by starting with the video summary and reinforcing the aesthetic and symbology.

The vast majority of the posts serve purely advertising purposes since the content is about the artists in the lineup (49.34%), promoting ticket sales (16.5%), and presenting festival lineups (5%) or content related



to the festival. Practical information about the event is scarce (4%), and images of the attendees are minimal (0.6%). On the other hand, the mini aftermovies hold significance, comprising 5.2% of the posts. There are summary videos spanning 7 previous editions (between 2016 and the 2022/23 edition) and a special event held in Madrid for San Isidro. A promotional teaser and a call for the 2023 edition also feature general audiovisual and specific videos for each day.

While only one infographic about the venue is posted, it appears regularly interspersed in the videos. Iconic elements such as the Ferris wheel, rest areas, the solid sign at the venue entrance, photocall, different stages, artists, or the day and night atmosphere are frequently highlighted.

The video reels are characterized by their meticulous editing and a wealth of varied visual elements, carefully refined in postproduction. These reels feature dynamic, brief montages that encapsulate the experience of attending MC using evocative images of the venue and artists as their main attraction. The images predominately serve an orienting and humanizing function, including individual interactions. Regarding the video formats, there are still shots of interviews with artists, items created through graphics, animations, still images, cut montages or with visual effects, and excerpts from live performances.

Stories, grouped into 9 categories: travel advice, contests, lineups, practical information, sponsors, etc, are also used. These short videos are sometimes sequential and narrative, at other times independent, featuring a mix of graphics and visual effects with photographs, moving videos, and illustrations.

Interviews highlight the crucial role of social networks in conveying the unique festival experience. They contribute to branding and strengthening the sense of belonging (PI1, 2023; AI1, 2023), particularly among recurring audiences (AI5, 2021). But also because "they make it possible to mediate the presence at the festival beyond the event itself both in time and space" (IA2, personal communication, June 15, 2023). Furthermore, they convey the brand's identity, ensuring it remains known throughout the year (AI4, 2021; PI3, 2022; AI5, 2021).

A comparison of Instagram profiles from the three festivals reveals that PS stands out as the most successful, according to the analysis of the metrics (table 4), since it boasts a growing community and a good interaction rate.

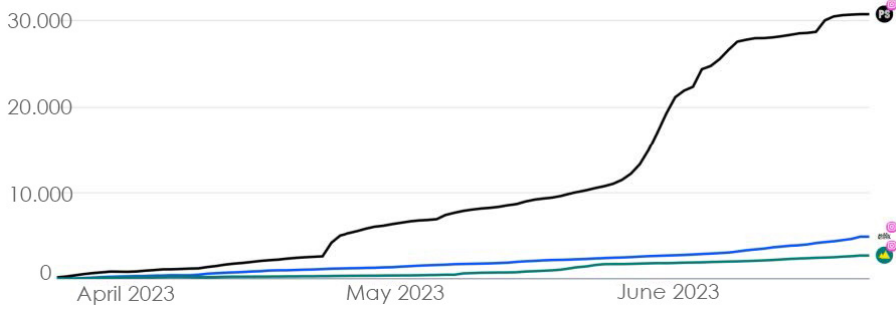
**Table 4. Comparison of Instagram profiles**

	@Primavera_sound	@MadCoolFestival	@BilbaoBBKLive
Followers	347K	176.2K	81.2K
Following	347	381	120
Total posts	2026	1734	1998
Post/analysis period	318	152	140
Posts/day	3	0,5	0,8
Interaction rate	0,76%	0,59%	0,97%
Engagement rate	2,59%	1,90%	0,94%
Performance index	89%	30%	54%
Increase in fans	9,70%	2,90%	3,40%

Source: Instagram, Fan Page Karma and Pathsocial

On the other hand, BBK maintains a more stable community of followers, evolving to a lesser extent (image 2). However, it stands out for its cohesiveness and high interaction rate, demonstrating consistently strong performance (image 3).

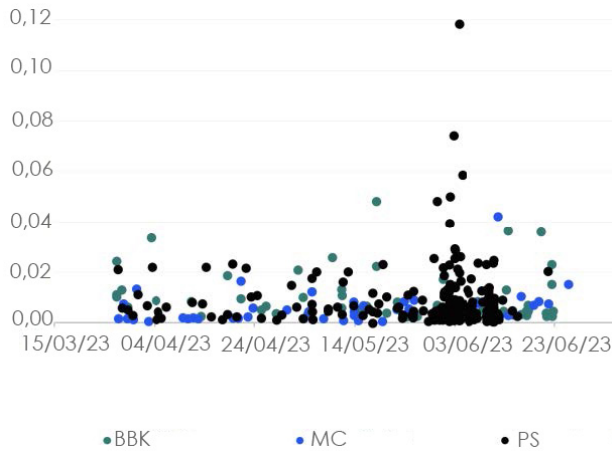
Image 2. Evolution of the communities between April and June 2023



Source: Fan Page Karma

MC is the festival with the least remarkable community performance, as it receives a relatively low level of interaction, and the growth in followers is modest.

Image 3. Interaction rate of posts



Source: Fan Page Karma

Concerning the most used hashtags (table 5), the primary one is the official hashtag featuring the event's name. However, sometimes, there are variations in writing or versions tailored to specific locations. In the case of BBK, the use of several tags related to the venue where the event is held, Kobetamendi, and the organization's CSR initiatives are highlighted. Particularly striking are two initiatives related to environmental sustainability: the "Ascent to Kobetamendi Kobetamendi Irteera, experience the festival from km 0" (#IrteeraKobetamendi y #IrteeraBBKLive) and the creation of a giant wolf by the artist Bordalo II representing the festival (#BordaloesBBKLive).

**Table 5. Hashtags used by the accounts**

Account	Main Hashtags	Top 50 Hashtags: post interaction rate
@primavera_sound	#psbog23 #PrimaveraSoundSaoPaulo #PrimaveraSoundAsuncion #PS23 #PrimaveraSoundMadrid	#CostaVasca #madridcultura #PrimaveraSound2023 #Kobetamendi #TeamPixel #amistadverdadera #PrimaveraSoundMadrid #ps23 #Herrian #GooglePixel #sevdaliza #arca #Bilbaobbkive #centralcee #Basurto #Bilbaobbkive #themoldypeaches #bilbaobbkive #Bilbaobbkive-ra #bbl23 #Lekeitio #primaverasoundmadrid #PrimaveraSoundBarcelona #NewTalent #DrivenByMusic #kobtamendi #primaverasound #depechemode #Bereziak #arcticmonkeys #bbkive23 #FutureStars #rosalia #karate #Basoa #PrimeVideo #Kobetamendi-en #PrimaveraSound #FirestoneStage #PS17 #PS23 #EmergingMusic #BilbaoBBKLive #bilbaobbkive #blur #fredagain #Mungia #kendricklamar #MadCool2023 #Hirian
@MadCoolFestival	#MadCool2023	
@BilbaoBBKLive	#Bilbaobbkive #IrteeraKobetamendi #BilbaoBBKLive #BordaloesBBKLive #IrteeraBBKLive	

\* \* The bigger the word, the more it is used. The greener the word, the more these publications were interacted with

Source: Instagram, Fan Page Karma and Pathsocia

The image with the highest interaction rate across the three festivals features a publication of the MC venue, comprising an infographic and summary of the event's facilities. The remaining top 10 images with the highest responses are publications about the PS and BKK lineup. Regarding videos, PS's videos encouraging attendance to the festival garner the most interaction, followed by BKK's videos centered on the artists, except for one focusing on the venue. None of the top 10 videos elicited the most reactions were from MC.

Despite the importance of the experience conveyed in the digital environment, all the experts unanimously acknowledge that it could never replace in-person festival attendance: "Festivals are exclusively based on the party and the sensation of live music, impossible to replicate in any other way than in person" (P11, personal communication, June 8, 2023). This experience is associated with disconnecting from daily life (EA2, 2023): "A festival is still a clear exponent of social life, experience, excitement, happiness, being able to hug your friends, etc., concepts that are lost through streaming or a digital video" P14, personal communication, September 30, 2022).

This digital experience is classified as complementary (EP3, 2022) since, while capable of conveying emotions and experiences, it is always mediated through the screen, eliminating any sensory or social component present in live festivals (P14, 2022; EP5, 2021; A13, 2021; A14, 2021).

#### 4. Discussion

The findings highlight the communicational and experiential nature of music festivals, especially large-scale ones, which serve as exemplary models for the broader sector (Pérez-Ordóñez and de Aguilera, 2023). They are positioned as communicative ecosystems; these festivals extend beyond their cultural dimension- mainly the musical dimension- which is just one more facet that has converted them into one of the most outstanding products within the industry (Quinn et al., 2021; Anderton 2022).

Based on the concepts of sociability and cyclical venues (Anderton, 2019; 2022), this paper adopts the term experience since it is the most appropriate for defining festivals, as evidenced by the study's findings. This experience- disseminated by the promoters and continually reconstructed through audience interaction for each edition, relies on the venue as the container space for the intended experiences. Thus, audiovisual narratives play a crucial role, especially the aftermovies, which establish the festival culture disseminated throughout the year, in line with the analyses carried out and coinciding with prior research (Holt, 2016, 2018; Pérez-Ordóñez and Sosa Valcárcel, 2022). The remaining items also show fragments of the venue experiences, contributing to keeping the experience in the venue alive beyond the festival dates.

The critical components of the mediatized experience include participants and the venue. Regarding participants, the focus extends beyond performances to encompass relationships between participants and the social nature of these events. Festivals emerge as spaces for encounters, emotions, and shared

listening, aligning with the traditional conception of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 2000). The venues are portrayed as sensory spaces enriched with meaning through symbols unique to each event, following the lines of Turner (1988) or Massey (2005). Given their wide variety of activities, festival spaces are depicted as leisure and entertainment hubs for adults. Still, at the same time, they serve as places of pilgrimage and collective life. Both elements are highlighted in the digital audiovisual content through short and medium shots for individuals and long shots for spaces, strategically using close-ups to capture emotions.

This use of spaces and symbols allows organizers to distinguish themselves from other proposals, constructing a unique discourse about what defines an authentic festival. The narrative appears intentional, motivating the audience to attend one event or another and shaping and disseminating a unique festival culture that attracts fans year after year.

For all these reasons, this research successfully achieves its objectives by elucidating the organizers' proposals through digital audiovisual narratives according to the GO: PS is a hub for celebrating alternative lifestyles and the latest innovative music styles. MC positions itself as a multifaceted space for experiencing a myriad of sensations through a wide variety of recreational activities. Meanwhile, BBK is portrayed as an authentic festival, a venue closely connected to its natural surroundings, making it a place of pilgrimage that draws thousands of young people.

On the other hand, we show how audiovisual items on social media extend the festival experience beyond the venue (SO1) by highlighting the symbols, emotions, and sensations that characterize the festival atmosphere. Likewise, the aftermovies (SO2) play a pivotal role in shaping the festival experience, turning it into a cyclical phenomenon thanks to widespread dissemination and interaction with audiences. They establish the festival culture, which is maintained during the rest of the year, shaping it for the next edition.

The audiovisual narratives of these events employ values, symbols, and spaces (SO3) to convey their unique cultural experiential propositions. Notably, aftermovies serve as "windows to the liminality" (Holt, 2018: 5), recreating an idealized atmosphere that introduces spectators to the festival's image, culture, and experience (SO4). This unique capability, coupled with the potential to engage their community, build the festival brand, and motivate attendance, highlights the impact of aftermovies in the festival landscape.

Finally, despite the progress in digitalization and the increase in virtual experiences, there is a strong indication that the online experience alone cannot shape a cyclical image of festivals. First, it must originate from the in-person event and what happens there. As indicated by the experts, it is evident that no digital experience can substitute the corporeal one. This reaffirms the collective effervescence of Durkheimian sociology, and organizers recognize this reality, which is why they go to great lengths to highlight the value of the community over the individual.

The authenticity and internal validity of the results are ensured through methodological triangulation employed, as well as the rigorous recording, handling, and coding of data by the research team during the analysis phases.

The limitations of this work are inherent in multiple case studies in which three modern Spanish music macrofestivals are analyzed; consequently, the results are not directly generalizable to the entire industry or applicable on an international scale. Nonetheless, the study's value lies in its ability to detect common trends and patterns describing the nature of the sector in Spain, facilitating the identification of strategies for engaging with audiences, as well as providing expert perspectives on critical aspects of analyzing this cultural phenomenon and its approach as an experience. This research is part of a broader project on music festivals as multidimensional, essentially experiential, and cultural phenomena, but at the same time audiovisual narratives, which the research team will continue to explore.

## **5. Conclusions**

Music festivals serve as spaces where attendees consume the experience of attending the event, creating a ritual and customary experience of the event when repeated cyclically. With this in mind, promoters strive to convey the experiential advantage of attending the festival by employing key messages in their communications. This is achieved through the use of audiovisual narratives disseminated primarily on digital platforms, mainly social networks, and more specifically Instagram. In this way, they broadcast memorable messages to retain and foster loyalty among past attendees, while attracting new audiences who view the festivals as aspirational. Content creation for social networks of the three major Spanish macro festivals is characterized by its abundance, variety of themes and formats, meticulous productions, relaxed and contemporary tone, and for adapting to both the festival's aesthetics and essence; in other words, to its brand image. However, the emotional value

embedded in these narratives allows them to connect with audiences, who interact and engage with the promoters to sustain the festival's image beyond the venue and scheduled dates. This interaction also cultivates a sense of belonging to the event, making the festival experience a cyclical and regenerated phenomenon every year.

The importance of the venue is evident in the three macrofestivals- through long shots and aerial shots that capture their magnitude-since it is the focal point where the experience of attending is given meaning. However, the interpretation of this significance varies among the events, which helps them carve out a differentiating proposition within the market. In summary, BBK is experienced as a festival immersed in nature and freedom: PS, as an innovative, modern, and urban event; and MC as the festival for entertainment and leisure. They also coincide in highlighting the artists and musicians through medium shots and close-ups, while also emphasizing symbolic elements that transcend the venue to become identity markers on social networks- the Ferris wheel, artistic installations, or the commercial areas in MC: the lighting and main stages, in PS; the natural venue itself, lights and Bilbao's scenic backdrop in BBK.

In all cases, these audiovisual items respond to a professionalized and planned marketing and communication strategy, evident in the attention paid to their creative aspects. The aftermovies are particularly significant, as they establish the narrative and aesthetic line that will follow for the entire year.

Beyond the competitive advantage offered by each of the three festivals analyzed, they all leverage recognizable symbology for their online and offline community, which invariably includes references to their respective venues. Their communications focus on conveying the unforgettable and distinctive experience of attending a macro music festival. While their primary purpose is to advertise, it is not necessarily direct advertising, instead audiovisual texts are used extensively, serving a humanizing and interactive function.

This research contributes to the academic literature on the music industry, specifically within the live music sector, from a communicative perspective- a facet that has received limited attention in Spain, particularly compared to the English-speaking world's scientific output. On the other hand, it departs from traditional research on commercial and advertising strategies to focus on the meaning of music festivals as experiential and cyclical phenomena.

Regarding professionals in the field, this study raises questions that may prove beneficial for those involved in managing the communication and experiential marketing of music events, by broadening their strategic vision and providing examples of the development of digital communication practices of the three leading brands in Spain.

It is crucial to establish new research avenues that provide diverse approaches to the phenomena cutting across cultural industries tied to live music. The following aspects, among others, can be addressed in a multidisciplinary way:

- Their multidimensional and experiential aspects
- Audience motivations and practices
- The social responsibility of organizing and collaborating brands.
- Establishing cyclical spaces and the communicative relationships with them.
- Using new digital communication tools to increase attendee participation.
- New forms of advertising applied to live music.
- Approaching events from a gender perspective
- Establishing international comparisons between the characteristics of macro-festivals.

## 6. Contributions

<b>Contributions</b>	<b>Author</b>
<b>Conception and design of the work</b>	Author 1
<b>Documentary search</b>	Author 1 and 4
<b>Data compilation</b>	Authors 1, 2 and 3
<b>Critical analysis and interpretation of data</b>	Authors 1, 2 and 3
<b>Revision and approval of versions</b>	Authors 1, 2, 3 and 4

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## 9. Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## 11. Notes

1. For Anderton (2011; 2019) the authentic festival is one that is socially constructed on the collective imaginary associated with the British free festivals of the 1980s, which promoted an alternative lifestyle and community, and to which their attendees felt strong ties. Nowadays, and according to this author, this feature has become a packaging that organizers use to market these products by means of three strategies: the multiplicity of live performances, independence and hedonism.

2. The aftermovie (Holt, 2018) is the farewell video that is disseminated through social media and focuses on providing images of the arrival and liminal pleasure. It aims to sum up the event in an evocative way, that is more akin to a ritual than a music event E.g. Exit & Sea Dance festivals 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF1cD03iKVK>