

‘From mosh pit to posh pit’: Festival imagery in the context of the boutique festival

Marjana Johansson^{a*} and Maria Laura Toraldo^b

^a*Essex Business School, University of Essex, Colchester, UK;* ^b*Department of People Organizations and Society, Grenoble Ecole de Management, Grenoble, France*

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This paper addresses market-based cultural production in the context of the UK festival field, with a focus on the framing of the festival experience through anticipation. In particular, boutique festivals are discussed as examples of a contemporary cultural ‘product category’ which has emerged and proliferated in the last decade. Through discourse analysis of media representations of boutique festivals, we situate the boutique festival in a broader sociocultural discourse of agency and choice, which makes it meaningful and desirable, and outline the type of consumer it is meant to attract. For the contemporary consumer, the boutique festival is presented as an anticipated experience based on countercultural festival imagery, while simultaneously framing cultural participation through consumption. The paper contributes to a wider debate on the construction of the consumer in the cultural economy.

Keywords: cultural production; anticipation; aesthetic experiences; boutique festivals; discourse analysis

Introduction

Once the exclusive preserve of the student, the crusty and the semi-pro psychonaut, festivals are now an enshrined element of the cultural calendar. (Lawrence 2007, 100)

In this paper, we examine market-based cultural production in the context of the UK festival field. Festivals have gained a prominent position in the cultural production sphere. They are seen as important mediators of cultural meaning-making, attributed significant economic importance, and constitute a popular form of cultural organization (Oliver 2014; Sassatelli 2011; Watson, Jenner, and McCormick 2009). The central role of festivals in the cultural economy has been related to a general trend of ‘festivalization’, denoting how festivals and events have become important tools for tourism development and place marketing (Andersson and Getz 2008), and how they are primary meaning-making vehicles for performing identities and lifestyles (Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward 2014) through combining consumption with education and entertainment (Richards and Palmer 2010). Rather than simply providing a format for the dissemination of cultural products, the festival itself constitutes the product. The positioning of festivals as an important growth industry in the UK (Jacobs 2011) is indicative of the increasing attribution of economic importance to festivals,

*Corresponding author. Email: mjohana@essex.ac.uk