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## Building a Music Festival: Understanding Media Industry Lore

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BUILDING A MUSIC FESTIVAL: UNDERSTANDING  
MEDIA INDUSTRY LORE

By

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2017

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts- Journalism and Media Studies

Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies  
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The Graduate College

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## **Thesis Approval**

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Building a Music Festival: Understanding Media Industry Lore

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## **Abstract**

### **Building a Music Festival: Understanding Media Industry Lore**

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Music festivals have become culturally salient within the new age of consumer participatory culture. Festivals fundamentally warrant a rite of passage by providing consumers a unique, all-encompassing experience. This critical media industry study examines the music festival industry and its' usage of lore as industry held logics based off of perceptions of consumer wants and desires that calcify within the industry (Havens and Lotz, 2012). I contend three substantial and emergent lore in the music festival industry identified include millennials, experience economy, and prosumer culture. In addition, this thesis explores industry lore as various textual representations across social and physical media marketing platforms at music festivals.

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## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

The lights are low, and there is a faint hum of music in the background as individuals weave through the crowd holding hands with friends; replicating the pattern of following the leader, one creates the pathway for the others to quickly flow behind. As groups search for the perfect location, people quickly fill the open spots surrounding assorted clusters of friends. Simultaneously a jolt of music and dazzling lights amplify the festival's colossal main stage. Ringing music intensifies as the crowd swiftly finds the appropriate words and dance moves to accompany the performance. Friends and strangers share this communal moment together manufacturing a fleeting, ephemeral connection in time and space. It isn't until the first song ends that attendees witness a camaraderie alongside one another as they shout along to their favorite songs smiling ear-to-ear.

Recognized as culturally and economically significant events, music festivals play a substantial role in contemporary media industries. Media industries including newspapers, television, radio, film, magazines, music and more, create meaningful cultural products by circulating ideas, attitudes, and information in society (Havens and Lotz, 2012). Unlike the car, food and beverage, tax, and other industries that offer essential tangible goods and services, media industries produce and disseminate cultural content to modern societies (Hesmondhalgh, 2008), creating an overwhelming amount of popular entertainment discourses. Overtime

media industries have experienced the effects of digitalization as new technology continues to shape how consumers interact with media.

Given the lack of information regarding content producers working within media industries, scholars regularly inquire about media industry workers' agency, the amount of control employees possess over content distributed which recognizing them as significant actors within company's operations and the development of media products (Havens & Lotz, 2016). It is impossible to predetermine society's reaction to media content and the potential impact it can leave. Artistically music festivals are novel to the music medium itself. Within the last three decades of the millennium, they have taken on an enhanced presence in social life, generating new concepts, new approaches, and further claims of innovative experiences considering media participation. Timothy Havens and Amanda Lotz (2016), professors of communication studies, observe how the isolation of media producers from consumer audiences unintentionally assists in the reproduction of norms and characteristics rooted deeply in the industry's professional culture (Havens & Lotz, 2016). The music festival industry has created a unique marketing niche for themselves constructed from industry lore. Media industry personnel consider industry lore the "common sense" way of doing things (Havens and Lotz, 2009); they are perceptions rather than research on ideas including, what consumers want and popular trends.

Industry lore is often not necessarily based on concrete, quantifiable evidence. These practices deemed the best by an industry, often portray myths



concerning what audiences like and dislike. There is a multitude of ways industry lore hinders creativity and profit across media industries. Lore shapes industrial structures by enabling particular content to reach certain viewers while disabling others (Havens and Lotz, 2009). For example, the television industry was long ruled by the idea that white audiences would not watch shows with ensemble casts that primarily starred African Americans. It wasn't until 1984 that *NBC* aired *The Cosby Show*, which went on to spend five years as the most watched show on television; forecasting the success of later all African American cast and further diversified television shows. These articulations of lore present serious consequences because they remain intact and calcify. Repeatedly ideas that challenge industry logics are marginalized or made invisible due to opposition to entrenched industry lore.

While lore may have positive aspects or correctly understands a particular audience with regards to different generations and social norms, it remains a conglomeration of product reviews, industry messaging, industry reports, and the “scuttlebutt” or gut instincts from industry leaders (Gitlin, 1983). This reveals industry executives' substantial influence over content, audiences, and subsequently the circulation of culture. Building from Burroughs (2018), however, industry lore “can also be read more broadly during times of rupture and transition for media industries” beyond the closed-door meeting. Articulations of industry lore, according to Burroughs, can be read as “sites of rupture.” Thus, the emergence of a music festival and how the festival is grafted into existing industry lore, in addition

to the ways that the festival articulates that lore, represents a particularly poignant opportunity to study musical festivals through the lens of media industry studies.

There are several standard dictionary definitions for the word ‘festival,’ ranging from a feast; a period of time marked for celebration; to a musical, film or theatrical performance over a series of time which recurs periodically. The Encyclopedia Britannica states a festival, is a “day or period of time set aside to commemorate ritually celebrate or reenact, or anticipate events or seasons, agricultural, religious, or sociocultural that give meaning and cohesiveness to an individual and to the religious, political, or socioeconomic community” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Digging further, all festivals can be understood as cultural products, and date back to the earliest known civilizations. Historically music holds significance across all cultures as it is considered an efficient and effective means for communicating nonverbally (Bruner, 1990), by generating a range of emotional reactions. Active participation in music assists in identity development by providing a medium for self-expression, mood enhancement and spiritual functions (Sloboda & O’Neill, 2001). Music contributes to the development of a sense of place and belonging (Duffy, 2005), and assists people to participate actively in social activities (Davis, 1992), feel accepted, valued and needed (Kahn, 1999), and engage in lifelong learning (Small, 1996). Allan Bloom (1987), a philosopher and infamous critic of contemporary education writes, “Music, as everyone experiences, provides an unquestionable justification and a fulfilling pleasure for the activities it

accompanies.” Regardless of gender, race, or occupation music remains a commonality among populations.

## **A Cultural Lineage of Music Festivals**

Music festivals are the ultimate collaboration between artists and audiences. Throughout history, they strived to foster a spirit of hope, discovery, and collectivity to form a utopian society within venue limits. Amid the manifestation of chaos throughout the nation, music has stood the test of time by sustaining a power that naturally bonds people together. Generation after next graciously welcomes the notion that attending a music festival undeniably warrants a rite of passage. Initially, music festivals were used as a way to discover different forms of new music with like-minded people (Brant, 2008), and while festivals were once recognized for the embodiment of a countercultural spirit (Battan, 2016), they ultimately modernized into a mainstream experience.

Music festivals swiftly gained mass popularity after the success of Woodstock in 1969, held at a dairy farm in Bethel, New York. Woodstock creators predicted roughly 50,000 people would attend the festival. Tickets sold for \$6.50 per day and \$18 for the full three-day experience. In actuality, 200,000 tickets were sold and over 500,000 individuals arrived causing festival executives to tear down the event fences and open the festival to the public. Creating a site for thousands of young adults to come together gave Woodstock symbolic power of expressed freedom. The

violence and crime committed throughout the duration of the festival is often overlooked as society chooses to recall the festival as a widely successful countercultural event that defined the era.

Another significant festival after Woodstock, emerged as a week-long festival which promoted self-expression and anti-consumerism (despite the long shadow cast from Silicon Valley), Burning Man. The initial Burning Man took place on San Francisco Beach in 1986; two friends decided to morph together a large-scale wooden figure of a man and burn it as a way to spark interest among average nearby citizens. Within moments a community of 35 people was born as the members would engage the fire and facilitate various interactions with the burning figure. Burning Man is an authentic representation of creating a festival from nothing. Now located in Nevada's Black Rock Desert, Burning Man spans across eight days as a participatory metropolis produced by festival goers. The festival hosts art installations, vendors, and music performances promising a community of inclusivity and embodied support put before politics and inequality. Interpersonal relationships were the primary form of extending information regarding the desert abyss of artistic expressions throughout the music festival. Implementation of marketing techniques were not the initial focus of early music festivals, instead favoring a sense of community and self-worth. In his ethnographic research of Burning Man, Koiznet (2002), delivers examples of individualistic and communal characteristics blending through the act of gift giving, explaining festivals provide ritual power that renounces the social order of market logic.

At the turning point of the 1990s there occurred a shift from light-hearted hippie foundations of the past to a new age of disaffection and rejection. The rise of alternative music was distinctly different than that of the 1960s' counterculture; alternative music produced throughout the new era and in conjunction with festivals often centered around suffering the loss of innocence in the wider society (Weinstein, 1995). As a new creative age emerged and discarded past moralities, concerts and festivals articulated new values to the audience through multiple forms of communication, subsequently creating products of social influence. In 1991, Perry Farrell invented Lollapalooza, a touring music festival with a transgressive coalition of grunge, punk rock, heavy metal and eventually hip-hop. Lollapalooza successfully toured across the nation annually from the summer of 1991 until 1997; yielding large crowds interested in hearing unorthodox music. After ultimately dwindling, the festival was revived in 2003, but was forced to shut down due to low ticket sales. Eventually in 2005, Lollapalooza obtained a permanent venue located in Grant Park, Chicago; featuring numerous stages and bands from across the world for attendees' enjoyment. Marking Lollapalooza as the first music festival to overtly manifest an alternative youth audience. Today Lollapalooza is a four-day festival with a recorded 400,000 attendees generating roughly \$6 million to the Chicago Park District and an estimated \$245 million to the neighboring local economy over the course of the weekend.

Music events including- festivals, concerts, musicals, operas, and music shows accounted for nearly \$30 billion of revenue in digital and physical tickets

worldwide in 2017, and are projected to make over \$50 billion in ticket sales by 2023, with an average cost of festival tickets around \$200 (Statistica, 2017). Recent trends show a remarkable growth within the music festival sector that has been paralleled by an expansion of brand sponsorship initiatives. IEG Sponsorship Reports estimates \$1.34 billion was spent sponsoring music venues, festivals, and tours in North America for the year 2014; increasing almost 5% at \$1.54 billion just three years later in 2017. Eventbrite, an event management and ticketing website, partnered with MusicWatch, Inc. and surveyed over 1,000 18-49 year olds in North America who attended at least one music festival in the past 12 months, to reveal how much money they were spending and why they were attending (Eventbrite, 2016). The survey found 67% of festival-goers prefer watching a favorite headlining artist at a festival in comparisons to a concert; 41% have future plans to attend a festival within the same year, 70% of attendees engaged with sponsors for free food and drinks, and 57% engaged with social media while on-site of the music festivals (Eventbrite, 2016). Headlining artists lead the festival in expenses; however, they are the symbolic principle reason attributed to festival attendance. In 1969 at the first Woodstock Jimi Hendrix was paid \$18,000 to headline; in 2018 at Coachella, Beyonce was reportedly paid over \$3.2 million; although considerably higher income than other artists they both act as cultural gurus attaining massive fandoms throughout generations unmatched by other industry professionals. Marketing the festival appropriately is crucial to ensure profitable attendance rates; therefore,

industry executives must play an active influential role in accessing headliners who attract attention and can persuade fans to attend.

According to Nielsen, a global measurement and data analytics company, nearly 32 million people attend a minimum of one music festival per year in the United States (Nielsen, 2015). 14.7 million of those attendees were classified as millennials, marking them as nearly half of the entire music festival population. Millennials, defined as individuals born between 1981-1996, account for a fourth of the total U.S population. Eventbrite notes “more than 82% of millennials attended a live experience within the last year, ranging from parties, concerts and festivals” (Eventbrite, 2015). Millennials spend upwards of six hours a day on social media (Fortune, 2017), demanding constant media production of exceptionally unique experiences worth broadcasting to expansive audiences. Industry executives must avoid monotony in a world fueled by an experience economy.

Music festivals consistently maintain factors for social change but outwardly foster an experience-scape, a site of market production that stages experiences for diverse groups of individuals to come together (Cuthill, 2007). However, over time music festivals have become commodities by means of exclusivity and luxury. Festival attendees longingly await a positive all-encompassing event (Hoyle, 2002), which promises more than just musical performances, food, and alcohol, but rather extravagant offers of yoga and meditation areas, silent discos, hairdressing stations, fashion pop-up stores, cooking classes, and beyond.

In 2015, Eventbrite sponsored Harris Corporation, an information technology provider, to conduct national research on the millennial generation, and found millennials respond that they place a higher value on experiences over assets (Eventbrite & Harris, 2015). Millennials are presented as believing that creating memories with others through experiences is the secret to living a self-fulfilling life in comparison to unhappy career focused individuals. Harris notes, “77% percent of millennials said their best memories are from live experiences, and 69% believe experiences make them more connected to other people, the community, and the world” (Eventbrite & Harris, 2015). Because this generation continues to invest time, money, and interest in live-events the experience economy continues to rapidly grow (Eventbrite & Harris, 2015).

Music festivals continuously reinvent themselves in the wake of cultural fluctuations, but disputably maintain implicit festival structures and practices parallel with market competition. Although the industry has shown exponential growth over the past decade, music festivals continue to face problems concerning location, admission fees, musical headliners, brand sponsorship, production cost, and legislation (Davis, 2016). Today’s largest and debatably flashiest music festival, Coachella, located in the southern desert town of Indio, California, embodies multiculturalism and promotes a harmonious phenomenon suspended outside of society’s new political norm. Simultaneously, Coachella acts as a large-scale social event. Friends travel across the nation, even the world, to attend this music festival



together. With luxurious offers of private cabanas and backstage passes to on-site camping in tents, Coachella's venue appeals to the masses.

In 2018, Coachella recorded an audience of over 150,000 daily festival goers averaging around 750,000 attendees with two back-to-back 3-day weekends, grossing an income of over \$115 million (Varga, 2018). Notably, Coachella has the most significant number of social media influencers and celebrities in attendance to arguably enhance the overall popularity of the event itself. Attendees eagerly purchase expensive tickets, upwards of \$500, for the upcoming year directly following the end of the festival, in anticipation of imminent new experiences. Tickets for the 2019 festival sold out within three hours with headliners including Childish Gambino, Tame Impala, and Ariana Grande. Headliners prove controversial every year at the time of the announcement. Individually these headliners represent diversity; collectively they present a socio-cultural movement through music. The remarkable achievements Coachella has accomplished within the first 20 years of its' lifetime has gained an array of loyal followers and supporters.

Unfortunately, Coachella's recognized success has also inspired fraudulent attempts at producing a large-scale music festival. The 2017 Fyre Festival was set to take place on a remote island in the Bahamas and promised guests an exclusive music festival with all-inclusive VIP packages of costs ranging from \$4000 to \$250,000. The festival founder, Billy McFarland, strategically created a promotional video starring society's most well-known social media influencers and models on the

private island partying on speed boats and dancing to popular dance songs.

McFarland successfully grasped the attention of an entire generation of millennials who aspired to have the same experiences as the elite featured in the promotional video; luxury, money, friends, and memorable experiences worth documenting. The development of the video and marketing techniques were so intricate that McFarland was capable of convincing over 4,000 people to attend a festival that was impossible to produce. Although Fyre Festival was fraudulent, the marketing strategies are essential to understanding how they were created entirely from the perception of what the target consumer -millennials- want, with no factual evidence it could work.

This thesis examines the unique creation of a music festival native to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada; Life is Beautiful. Created by a local industry entrepreneur, Life is Beautiful, was brought to life across 18 city blocks, bars, and casinos in the downtown district of Las Vegas. It is a significant site of study for various reasons; primarily regarding the foundation of the festival being built using previous learned hotel and entertainment industry knowledge. This knowledge, or lore, in question arguably guided prominent decisions throughout the creation of the festival and further the brand.

Previous scholars have researched motivations for festival attendance, the importance of branding, cultural ideologies, and popular marketing techniques (Hudson, Roth, Madden, Hudson, 2014); and while critical media industries studies have explored various fields of industries including; television, tourism, advertising

and even certain aspects of music (Havens and Lotz, 2012), there is a gap in scholarship concerning the music festival industry. This research uncovers the primary perceptions, held by industry executives, of consumers' wants that ultimately assist in building music festivals that embody the ideal consumer experience. It investigates the music festival industry and establishes how millennials, the experience economy, and influencers as participatory culture as industry lore are articulated, which influences the cultural production of festivals. This critical media industry study approach adopted from Havens et al. (2009), examines the business dimensions of the music festival industry and simultaneously connects them to the production and operation which frames usages within digital, social, and physical marketing space.

To adequately address the lore stated above this thesis is organized into five complementary chapters. As Chapter 1 demonstrates, music festival production continuously advances to match the needs of current target audiences. The second chapter analyzes features which frame the critical media industry study toolkit utilized for this research and examines scholarly literature regarding diverse aspects of music festivals categorized under three significant scopes. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the music festival; Life is Beautiful and begins to make connections between implemented marketing strategies traditional industry logic. Millennials, experience economy, and participatory culture, the age of influence marketing, are three substantial findings of prevailing lore further discussed in Chapter 4. Lastly, Chapter 5 forecasts the future of music festivals. This thesis adds

to the field of critical media industry studies and ultimately portrays a sharper understanding of the music festival industry.

## Chapter 2:

### Literature Review & Methods

#### Critical Media Industry Studies

This paper, a study of industry lore framing the construction of music festivals from perceived audience desires, contributes to a field of critical media industry studies scholarship. By analyzing how the music festival industry operates we can better understand how and why content we interact with is created. Havens et al. (2009), attests critical media industry studies seek to understand how particular media texts arise from industry lore and subsequently reshape industrial practices. By adopting Havens et al. approach, this critical media industry study examines how the music festival industry creates, circulates, and changes knowledge about texts and audiences; and how it influences textual and business practices (Havens et al., 2009).

In the past media industry studies, have been primarily used for researching traditional media industries such as the television, film, radio, recording, magazine, book, and newspaper industry. Amanda Lotz (2014), a television and media scholar, studies the evolution of the television industry detailing the routine advancements among production, consumption, networks, advertisers, and technology creators. Lotz observed industry lore and the deviations content creators made from them as new technologies developed more ways to access television (Lotz, 2014). Edward Jay Epstein (2012), a political scientist an investigative journalist, investigates the

economics of the current film industry studying budgets, reports, contracts and marketing expenditures and analyzes them in comparison to past generations. Scholars continually depict the rise and fall of the recording industry noting substantial successes like the CD and the subsequent creation of file sharing and following streaming services which overthrew the industry (Negus, 1999; Knopper, 2009). Paul du Gay et al. (1997), introduces the ‘circuit of culture’ framework in their work “Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman” (Paul du Gay et al., 1997). His framework connects media industry operations to the content they create, in this case, the Sony Walkman’s representation, social identities associated with it, and production, consumption, and distribution are evaluated (Paul du Gay et al., 1997). There are many other distinct representations of media industry studies, but it is important to note these types of studies each similarly research significant changes occurring within a particular media industry. They connect the industry’s historical importance to their relevance today, describe production and distribution practices, explore the emerging use of converging platforms and industry synergy to reach audiences and analyze the influence of marketing on content. However, a critical media industry studies approach has never been applied to the music festival industry.

This research is qualitative and exploratory- a stride towards initiating a novel scholarly conversation regarding the relationship between industry lore and the production of culturally significant goods and events, in this case specifically, music festivals. Following existing methods and literature from the critical media

studies toolkit, I attended and further conducted an in-depth analysis of the emerging music festival, Life is Beautiful. On-site observations of marketing and branding, entertainment, food and alcohol, artistic performances, and digital and social interactions were all noted. Living within close proximity to the festival granted previous and extended exploration of the space used for the production of the music festival.

In addition to the on-site field research, I spoke with industry executives, accessing literature -public talks and PowerPoints delivered for branding the festival- from Life is Beautiful festival creator and fellow employees while located at offices on the University of Nevada, Las Vegas main-campus. Supplementing the PowerPoint presentation, I drew upon a variety of Life is Beautiful websites, promotional marketing videos, business reports, journal and magazine articles, and all active social media accounts - Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, including hashtags and tagged photos at the festival. This literature represents their institutional production of knowledge.

Marketing material produced within digital, social, and physical platforms have been examined. While these fields are categorically significant for framing diverse discourses and theories, they work collectively to describe industrial business practices essential for producing long-lasting culturally salient festivals. The digital scope has been examined foremost, due to the accessibility of the audience, brand loyalty measures, and overall popularity of the communication channel. This scope presents textual representations of marketing directly posted

from producers, Life is Beautiful executives and staff, to target audience, millennials and avid festival goers. Following the digital scope is social media; social media extends from the traditional digital communication channel and allows for live interaction between consumers and producers. Social media platforms include, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, other usages include hashtags and tagged photos from audience members. Social media easily disseminates important information across networks leveraging marketing material to new opportunities. Lastly, the physical scope explores the actual environment of Life is Beautiful. It details the liminal space used to produce an experience capable of generating memories which last much longer than the event itself.

The music industry view festivals as an opportunity for new artists to reach audiences and allows established artists to gain a larger media following through marketing promotions and advertisement of the event. There is considerable existing literature concerning music festivals; identity theories, liminal spaces, marketing strategies, and social media participation are among the most reviewed topics. Scholars have extensively examined counterculture and various subcultures displayed throughout historical musical movements; simultaneously acknowledging the context of authenticity. Research also recognizes the recapturing of youth culture and the commercialization of popular music, yet there is a discontinuity of scholarship regarding the music festival industry and the nature of constructing and implementing unique industry perceptions of content desired by target markets. This study and the following literature review chart media industry logic



concerning the cultural production of music festivals distinguished by three complementary spheres- digital, social, and physical marketing space.

## **Digital Marketing and Music Festivals**

Digital media marketing is an important communication channel with platforms including - websites, blogs, emails, mobile advertisements, and most importantly social media. The cost of digital marketing is relatively low; however, it stimulates high levels of brand loyalty through targeted algorithms and provides exceptional customer feedback. Traditional marketing strategies entail the use of print ads, newspapers, magazines, radio or television advertisements, and billboards. Traditional marketing allows the consumer to maintain a hard-copy of the marketing material which can be revisited numerous times, however, it can be costly and generates minimal interaction between the medium and the audience (Cave, 2016).

The media industry converges consumption and production of content within digital marketing space. Anna Kerr and Daryl May (2011), event and marketing specialists, study relationship marketing techniques utilized within the music festival industry. Relationship marketing is a fundamental business strategy and is important for building and maintaining consumer and sponsorship relationships with two-way communication (Kerr & May, 2011). Passionately arguing for festival organizers to recognize the benefits associated with engaging their consumers'

needs and wants pre-festival, during the festival and post-festival, Kerr and May (2011), initiate reactive marketing techniques through in-depth analyses of consumer reviews of brands, products, and services, on social media platforms (Alborz et al., 2008). Their marketing initiative is deemed reactive because the study primarily follows post-unforeseen circumstances of market competition and backlash which overwhelmed the quality and success of the festivals in question (Kerr & May, 2011). Further exploring consumers concerns post-festival granted the industry reliable information necessary to improve in upcoming years. In contrast a proactive marketing campaign anticipates the change in audience reach and market desires. Encouraging brand awareness, generating audiences reaching various media platforms, and redirecting traditional marketing costs to viral content (Vinerean, 2017).

Music festivals have managed to create a niche market that appeals to the masses. Karen Freberg, et al (2011), studied the implications of public relations shaping audiences' attitudes and perceptions of products. Freberg, et al. (2011), clarifies media influencers are third-party marketing endorsers who attribute to audiences through the use of social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and various blog sites. Anyone with a significant following who has monetized their identity is considered an influencer, this can range from models, artists, to actors, and is considered a full-time job portraying an attractive life. Influence marketing reflects the quality of posts and quantity of followers (Freber, et al., 2011). In their book, *Social Media Marketing*, influence marketing researchers, Tuten and Solomon

(2015), argue marketing has become informal by allowing consumers to control the product. Extending previous research on influencer marketing, they note the progression of marketing, the shift in consumer engagement, and the new means of swift access to brands (Tuten and Solomon,2015). Ultimately influencers bridge the gap between consumers and products by presenting themselves to the audience as relatable individuals using a must-have branded product.

Scholars Hudson and Hudson (2013), examined the ways social media emerged as a leading digital marketing channel for consumers, and investigated the various stages of a new consumer decision journey. Their research analyzed three popular music festivals, Lollapalooza, Bonnaroo, and Latitude, and the marketing strategies used to engage consumers online. Within the past decade, consumers have gained access to methods marketing and branding never accessible before, primarily with the social media realm. Because of this excess of information, consumers are spending more time researching products and evaluating purchases that eventually lead them into long-term relationships with the brand, making them more likely to remain loyal and promote the brand through earned media. (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). The study concluded that innovative social media ideas such as, interactive applications with location access, were implemented as a tool that enhanced the consumers' overall experience by allowing them to feel engaged physically and digitally.

Nicholas Alexander (2009), extends Michael Beverland's (2005), research regarding the careful production of authenticity and the creative importance its

holds in branding. Beverland (2005), defines six attributes of authenticity: heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial motives. Alexander (2009), designed a case study that analyzed co-branding relationships and argued that of Beverland's (2005), attributes, relationship to place and stylistic consistency correlated to rates of believed authenticity supplementary to higher sponsorship initiatives between co-branding partners. Subsequently, Hudson, et al. (2015), examined how social media interaction affects consumers' emotional attachment to festival brands, and whether or not stronger brand relationships, cultivated through social media interaction, enhance the willingness to recommend a brand. They found that social media had a direct impact on emotional attachment which in turn reflects word of mouth communication among friends, overall amplifying the brand relationship quality (Hudson, et al., 2015).

The phenomenon of popular culture is of such high importance because it exudes great influence associated with education, production, mass communication, and everyday mainstream accessibility. Sara Cohen (1993), who studied ethnography and popular music, discovered rock music was frequently analyzed in terms of the music industry and its networks of production, distribution and marketing, and in terms of technology, mass communication and global culture and capital. Within popular music studies and cultural studies, there has been a recent shift in perspective from the study of the global to local, and from work on

production to consideration of consumption, subjectivity and identity in the context of everyday life (Cohen, 1993).

In the past businesses followed a basic marketing process which consisted of following step by step solutions to aid identifying consumer problems, analyzing market opportunities, and reaching desired audiences. Traditionally businesses invested in displaying advertisements where consumers were most likely to see or hear them including; TV ads, newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio and more. The new marketing model businesses now frequently adopt, encourages active participant engagement and co-creation due to social networking sites ability to channel instantaneous feedback. Nowadays participatory culture gears marketing practices towards the Millennial generation, individuals born within the digital age well-versed in technology, allowing them, the consumer, to be a part of the product development and the entire marketing process (Fromm & Garton, 2010). Digital marketing methods continue to shift efforts towards social media because their target market, millennials, are using social media platforms more often than non-millennial generations, and possess larger networks and influence (Fromm & Garton, 2010).

## **Social Media**

Prior to the term ‘social’ being attributed to technological sense of marketing, traditionally social marketing space was recognized as an essential marketing

practice used like all others to promote selling to consumers. Rather than selling tangible merchandise and products, social marketing space promotes feelings, behaviors, ideologies, and cultural beliefs. As an extension of digital marketing, social media platforms have become the dominant leading communication channel throughout numerous media industries, including music festivals. Social media marketing creates a space for a community of users to interact, discuss, and participate with one another in real-time (Taylor, 2018). These platforms range from Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube to LinkedIn and encourage person-to-person engagement.

Previously noted social media marketing experts, Tracy Tuten and Michael Solomon, define social media as, “the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communications and organizations enhanced by technology advances and mobility” (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Marketing professors Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman (1970), explain that social marketing differs from consumer marketing because it “seeks to influence social behaviors not to benefit the marketer, but to benefit the target audience and the general society” (Kotler and Zaltman, 1970). Kotler and Zaltman (1970), assert that social marketing implements the popular “Four P’s” of marketing- price, promotion, product, and place while additionally contributing four more ‘P’s’ - public, policy, partnership, and purse strings. While the initial “Four P’s” speak for themselves in terms of tangibility, the additional ‘P’s’ signify the importance of community and working together to reach common goals.

Festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity, and continuity (Emeritus, 2010). Music plays a vital role in generating a degree of fluidity that connects various groups together. The foundation of Tajfel and Turner's (2004), social identity theory suggests that individuals have both a social identity, which refers to demographics, organizational, and other such group memberships, and a personal identity that is composed of interests, talents, and abilities (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Furthermore, social identity theory explains that when an individual can identify with a group or organization, they experience a sense of belongingness to the organization.

Music festival attendees connect with values and characteristics of the festival in which they identify. A notable scholar on special events, Donald Getz (1989), explains festival attendance motivators are highly correlated to sharing experiences with others while publicly displaying acts of celebration. Since research indicates attendees prefer sharing the experience with friends, Putnam (2000), explored the role of social networks in regards to culture and art, including festivals. He asserts art brings diverse groups of people together while simultaneously endorsing social well-being; it surpasses social barriers and allows people to make new connections with others they typically identify as different (Putnam, 2000). Similarly, Bowen and Daniels (2005), who studied prominent themes of motivational characteristics in attending music festivals, found social wellbeing a highly ranked priority. Overwhelmingly socialization with friends and family was observed as a leading motivational characteristic. The music, ties to

local culture, and the overall experience were among other notable features contributed to attending a music festival. (Bowen and Daniels 2005). These scholars, among others, note group dynamics affect an individual's festival perception and behavior.

John Desmond, Pierre McDonagh, and Stephanie O'Donohoe, in their work *Counter-Culture and Consumer Society*, rationalize that counterculture understands self-identity in relation to one another (Desmond, McDonagh, O'Donohoe, 2011). They emphasize counterculture is a system of values and norms that differ immensely from that of 'mainstream' beliefs and calls for change that implies a conscious self-awareness (Desmond, McDonagh, O'Donohoe, 2011). Counterculture emerges across large-scale social events, including festivals, marches, and political rallies. It is an amorphous representation of a generational unit (Denisoff and Levine, 1970), characterized by an individual's power to create their own life rather than accepting the principles of social authorities and norms (Goffman and Joy, 2005). Carrie Battan (2016), found typical Coachella attendees will dress the part of a counterculture flower child but do not actively practice the subculture of rejection, subsequently becoming the product of mainstream popular culture instead.

Within the proximity of a festival, attendees are willing to express themselves in a manner they may not usually associate with. David Hesmondhalgh and Leslie Meier (2011), examine how independence has functioned among popular music audiences and within the music industry since the early 1950s.



Hesmondhalgh and Meier claim, “musical independence has been strongly linked to ideas of aesthetic, institutional and political alternatives” (Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2011). They argue independence contributes to the formation of different ways of organizing cultural production and consumption. Identities are pursued characteristics, yet identity theories remain highly debated in the literature.

Andrew Davis (2016), explores four stages of consumer identity formation during a music festival. Phase 1 represents a personal identity attributed to the individual before attending the festival. Phase 2 begins upon arriving at the event; phase 3 displays characteristics of group differentiation; lastly, phase 4 assumes while collective identity weakens, individuals, assess true core emotions and personalities. Davis (2016), claims “helping individuals better accept the event as an extension of themselves allows cognitive, affective and emotional bonds to form with the event and those within it.” Festival attendees seemingly benefit more from an experience similar to their values, beliefs, and behavioral limits due to a level of comfort.

Authenticity is a desired and pursued experience which is presumed to reflect the unedited nature of everyday life within a community (Valee, 1987). It is an intangible commodity mainstream media markets as tangible among mass society. The notion of authenticity remains highly debated among scholars, yet it remains a critical factor in popular culture. Tourism literature places authenticity under four frameworks, objectivity, constructivism, postmodernism, and existentialism (Wang, 1999). In terms of music festivals objective authenticity, which recognizes the event

as genuine (MacCannell, 1973), aligns with participating at an original live event. Constructivist generate multiple meanings of the same event based off of different contextual perceptions. In the context of constructive authenticity scholars agree, there is no absolute origin, tradition is constructed with regard to present context, and lastly authenticity is a result of one's own interpretation (Bruner, 1994; Wang, 1999). Wang (1999), claims postmodern authenticity concerns staged authenticity, or the imitation of an original event. Lastly existential authenticity signifies the act of being true to oneself (Berger, 1973). Music theorist suggest music articulates authenticity in various ways. In particular, scholars John Connell and Chris Gibson in their work "SoundTracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place", assert, "authenticity is derived from musical values and the shift in those values comes from social and cultural origins" (Connell and Gibson 2003).

FoMO, a millennial coined term meaning fear of missing out, is a new leading social factor for attendance at large scale events. Przybylski et al. (2013), characterized FoMO by the desire to stay connected with what others are doing and is associated with higher levels of social media engagement. Social media broadcasts real-time streams, information, and conversations regarding an event which simultaneously induces viewers with sensations of missing out on an exclusive event. If something is not being talked about on social media it has no relevance to nearly an entire generation. Social media and influencer marketing monetize FoMO as a successful marketing technique capable of reaching a large demographic.

Social media channels content created by audiences. Platforms including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc, allow users to publish content shared across various networks. Overtime businesses' use of social media develops relationships with consumers by personalizing advertisements and implementing feedback. Businesses have shifted attention from traditional marketing practices and embrace social media as the leading form of digital advertising in a prosumer era.

### **Space and Place**

Music festivals offer a renowned temporary environment; they create a reputable location supported by brand, authenticity, commitment, and sustainability (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). Physical space is often overlooked within marketing spheres due to current technological advances allowing complete electronic saliency. Although music festivals are transitory events, the specific environment chosen for production is critical and speaks lengths on the essence of the festival itself. Music festivals amplify trends by fostering a mediated public space where media construct experiences of everyday life (Silverstone, 2007). For a few days, each year, music festivals construct their own culture, norms, and entertainment while accommodating masses. The physical space surrounds, facilitates, and embodies music festivals unique characteristics which in turn creates a narrative for current and future attendees.

Victor Turner (1969), in his seminal work, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, expands on Arnold van Gennep's (1960), original ideas concerning

rituals and rite of passage. Van Gennep, claimed a rite of passage consists of three stages; separation - initial transition from one's everyday sociocultural lifestyle; liminality- the threshold between past and present means of existences; re-aggregation- individual returns to everyday mundane life with a new sense of perception and well-being (Van Gennep, 1960). Intrigued by van Gennep's research, Turner (1969), conducted a comprehensive overview of stage two, liminal spaces to prove its significance. For Turner, liminal spaces are a blend of "lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship" (Turner, 1969, pg. 96). He argued these spaces allow individuals to express themselves in different kinds of behavior by suspending social and cultural norms. In contrast, Graham St. John (2009), argued Turner's (1969), liminal space theory wrongly standardizes festival attendees' beliefs and values by implying all attendees possess the same goals of self-expression within the liminal space of the festival. Liminality garners argumentative discourse, but collectively scholars recognize the power liminal spaces present with postponing reality inside a designated site.

When researching festivals, place is of high interest because space which fosters the festival continuously allows individuals to make and remake identities (Quinn, 2013). Music festivals are frequently considered socially constructed areas that mediate influential social practices. Bernadette Quinn (2013) challenges this notion by investigating how social capital, a network of relationships among individuals living in the same place, operates among numerous actors within a 'place-based festival' (Quinn, 2013). Short interviews with festival-goers signified

the festival setting as space which enables attachments, connections, and manufactures a sense of place. Places are created through physical experiences making a 'sense of place' a site instilled with human feelings of attachment and belongingness (Relph, 1976). 'Conceived spaces' are used to develop a conception of space and place that meet the needs of those who create them (Lefebvre, 1991), and are important because they directly impact the on-site layout, flow, organization, and symbolism of the festival subsequently affecting the festival-goers experience. Furthering concepts of liminal and conceived spaces, geographer Doreen Massey's (2005), approach to space and place integrated spatial and temporal dimensions, asserting 'spatio-temporal events' are formed from multiple narratives - stories, memories, perceptions, mediations and more- centralized to specific geographic locations (Massey, 2005). Her concept awards temporary spaces significance per rootedness and connection to the proximal location. Temporary and conceived spaces, therefore, fall under the liminal space umbrella which uniforms expressions of individuals' behavior.

Chris Anderton, a media, arts, and technology professor, notes festival attendees forgo usual routines and behaviors and take on liberated countercultural personas the festival allocates itself (Anderton, 2018). The production of music festivals that return to the same site year after year cultivates a sense of place. Cyclic in nature, festivals accumulate their history, rules, culture, practices, and provisions represented through memory and the media (Anderton, 2018). Anderton categorizes cyclic festival place into four separate groups. The first category

recognizes places are extremely narrative based by connecting to pre-existing meanings of the location. The sense of continuity follows linking individuals own experiences with that of previous site history. The third category distinguishes a virtual depiction of the festival throughout the year mediating constant market exposure. Lastly, Anderton asserts cyclic festivals stimulate a sense of belongingness that contributes to the overarching festival identity by fostering continuity and change (Anderton,2018). These four spheres collectively hold cultural significance for the site of the festival and the attendees.

Scholars John Connell and Chris Gibson (2003), acknowledge spatial fixity, the idea that continuity is valued over change. This idea bonds music to specific places and further establishes links to tradition and local culture (Connell and Gibson, 2003). Festivals create an environment for establishing and negotiating social identity (Connell and Gibson, 2003), and encourage communities to come together in a specified capacity. The overall disconnection from everyday life is prominent upon entering the festival venue. Exploring further into the realm of music festivals, Andrew Davis (2016), in his work *Experiential Places or Places of Experience? Place Identity and Place Attachment as Mechanisms for Creating Festival Environment*, suggests individuals form cognitive and emotional relationships with places which he defines as place attachment theory. Development of these relationships aids overall levels of attendee satisfaction by connecting fleeting emotions to a physical time and place (Davis, 2016). Comparable

to social relationships, as time spent at a specific location increases, the level of attachment an individual possesses will follow in pursuit

Typically located within rural communities, music festivals allow local businesses and residents to garner benefits throughout the entirety of the event—prior to and after. Music festivals notably generate significant revenue and create thousands of temporary jobs. Drawing from social capital, Charles Arcodia and Michelle Whitford attest, festivals enhance the quality of life and revitalize rural and occasionally urban communities through increased tourism infrastructure and the development and deconstruction of the venues (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006). The festival subsequently creates social capital by building multiple community resources. Festivals vastly contrast the everyday lifestyle of the rural landscapes they situate themselves in. Festival creators must acknowledge the existing significance and needs of the location and the overall community in order to produce the sensation of ‘insideness’ (Relph, 1976).

Physical space plays a critical role in the construction of festivals; more than just a location but rather a liminal site which produces social and cultural meaning. Despite their temporary existence, music festivals foster fleeting communities which generate sense of belongingness, attachment, and loyalty. Regardless of proximity the placement of music festivals allows individuals to travel outside their social norms and enter a new realm of reality for a suspended period of time. In a saturated marketplace, location plays a significant role and overall enhances attendance rates (Anderton, 2018).

Scholars have studied various concepts within the digital, social, and physical media marketing spaces produced by festivals, yet they continuously overlook the nature of industry logic which shapes the entire production of popular music festivals today. To date, a media industry studies approach has yet to be applied to the music festival industry. The following case study examines the music festival, Life is Beautiful, and the use of industry lore which frames production and usages.



### Chapter 3: Life is Beautiful

*Enter Rehan Choudhry*

Rehan Choudhry, a festival and event producer, was selected as UNLV's 2015 keynote speaker, two years after creating his first music festival, Life is Beautiful. Choudhry prides his belief of being "uniquely qualified to relate to 18 to 22-year-olds" for his career success. During the keynote address, he admits although he regularly claimed this idea he "never imagined having to get on stage and actually have to relate to 18 to 22-year-olds." Therefore, in preparation of the speech he spoke with a young adult, an intern who worked for him on track to start college in the fall like the UNLV students in the audience, to gain insight into the age groups genuine current interest. Reflecting on questions he asked her like "what do you want to be when you grow up?" and "what do you want to study when you start school?" the familiar story of answers she generated for him induced a deep contemplation inside Choudhry questioning why students are choosing society approved careers rather than pursuing lifelong dreams. Choudhry proceeds to incorporate his own college experience recalling the exhaustive cycle of answering questions like 'what do you want to do after graduation?' and having to produce "rehearsed narratives" about his idealistic future self.

College. A time for young adults to leave home for the first time and make the initial transition into self-sufficient adults. A place to connect with like-minded individuals, try new things, expand worldviews, and learn from mistakes. College furthers education and encourages students to pursue their passions beyond academia. The notion of college weighs heavily on impressionable incoming-freshman who anticipate life-changing experiences. Orientation programs are designed to aid new students preceding the start of the fall school semester. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas offers campus tours, specialized presentations, resource sessions, job fairs and firsthand insights of college experiences specific to UNLV during orientation sessions. Each year as welcome week concludes the university hosts a distinguished individual as a keynote speaker. The speaker is expected to deliver an inspirational speech which sets the tone for the academic year to an audience of roughly 4,000 incoming students.

Choudhry breaks down his recited stories as “rehearsed narratives” into a formula: *Your name + Job + School + Degree = Future Self*. He states this formula is, “50 percent fact and 50 percent total garbage,” resulting in “a version of yourself you do not even recognize.” He claims expertise in the area because he followed these exact steps and reveals to the audience he believes the two biggest mistakes he made during his college career were “believing the story” and that even in the face of overwhelming information proving he was “going down the wrong path.” He chose to believe everyone around him and “stay the course,” eventually graduating with a degree he was completely uninterested in, Computer Information Systems.

By not “believing the story” Choudhry is positioning himself within this audience of millennial influencers he seeks to leverage, understanding their positioning-- ultimately the same move he will make when invoking the allure of his modern music festival as beyond establishment norms, mutually positioning himself and the festival.

At this point in the speech, it is questionable why the university selected Choudhry as the speaker, normally tasked with encouraging incoming students committed to starting their college experience and advocating for the value of a degree and academics. He repeatedly emphasizes his regrets adhering to the “discourse” society forecasts for “millennials” upon entering the academic realm and later professional industry. Further, he contradicts himself by manufacturing a discourse which urges audiences to make a unique way in the world for themselves rather than following a set of guidelines (the subtext emphasizing this being apart from universities and tuition), as he actively characterizes a set of instructions for the audience to adopt.

Perhaps this is Choudhry’s attempt to inform students to take their time finding the career best suited for them by exploring all options college has to offer. However, he presents his idea of “not following course” as if to say either you go to college and have an average job that you may like, or take the road less traveled and find a job you enjoy whether you decide to go to college or not. This appeals to millennials in the audience who desire an unforgettable college experience but debate pursuing their passion in exchange for a higher paying job. Implying passion

drives success, Choudhry defies past moralities of individuals subsiding doing what they love to provide for their families (Marino, 2014), and suggests desires should be the ultimate judge of vocation. In this call echoes the allure of a post-foodist economy merging into an experiential economy that calls for participation, yet includes the trappings of 'free' exploitative labor. Transitioning from his reflection on choosing to follow the traditional path, Choudhry frames his decision to actively participate in changing his life by producing a niche for himself within the music festival industry. The music festival metonymically stands in for the promise of an experiential economy.

Nevertheless, Choudhry continues in this vein, justifying doing more with his time in school than only focusing on academics and his resented career path. He wants everyone to know he had "fun." "College is a great time, and I had a *great* time," as he remarks that the best decision he made in college was taking an opportunity to promote for nightclubs. He details how his life became consumed with nightclub promoting which shifted his long-term "story objective." Narrating the success of his work to the audience, he recalls seeing hundreds of friends arriving at the nightclub night after night and the intensity of music growing louder with great talent and DJs. He states, "the experience of seeing all these people react positively to the experiences we were creating was infectious." Recalling how thoughts of promoting nightclubs and producing events consumed him so much that even after initially following the prescribed job path Choudhry eventually "chose the

second route” and drew from past academic and new industry knowledge and pursued his passion for entrepreneurship.

Wrapping up his college memoir, Choudhry declares there is another way to go through college. He advises the audience to “look at college as four independent years of infinite opportunities to try and figure out who you are as a person and then take the ‘story’ that you created and treat it like a theory that you are trying to prove.” Guru. Thought leader. He continues, explaining that you must take every opportunity to go out and take risks to disprove all other potential career scenarios before settling for something else. Recognizing audience members may find this speech a “colossal waste of time” because they are in college for a purpose they intend on accomplishing, Choudhry argues today’s access to technology and capacity of knowledge allows students to become “engaged participants in education” by contributing as much to your education as you take out of it. He declares the time spent outside of the classroom is more important than ever before then the time you spent in school. Harshly discrediting students who take the “safer route,” following a plan they prepared for, and classifying them as “passive learners” he assures them after college their life is “going to be fine, you’re going to do just fine, you are not going to ruin your life, nothing is going to go wrong.” Choudhry opposes the safe route by insisting other students who take an “active approach,” combining passion and academics become “actively engaged participants” and surpass the once passive learners within professional industries because of this dedication. Choudhry’s portrayal of his similar life experiences not knowing what to do and feeling lost and

confused about the adult life generated positive audience engagement through the power of relatability and credibility. His carefree demeanor, relaxed attire, use of emojis, and generational appropriation captivated the noted target audience, individuals aged 18 to 22; depicting himself further as a cultural guru of the internet, technology and social media.

Culturally recognized as a rite of passage, college, like music festivals promote separation from everyday lifestyles, cultivate a provisional term between past and present reality, and equip individuals with previously unknown sentimental well-being, a liminoid space (Van Gennep, 1960). They both demarcate sites for potentially stepping outside of predominant social norms. Concluding his speech, Rehan Choudhry challenges the audience to embrace everything the university has to offer and dive into college with the sole purpose of finding out who they are and what makes them happy. Assuring the students if they “actively participate in education” then someday the opportunity to “look in the mirror and meet the person you were always meant to become” will present itself. This relationship between college universities and music festivals constitutes Choudhry carrying out a veiled marketing ploy to have millennials endorse his brand-new festival through a college sanctioned event.

### *Cue Choudhry's marketing pitch*

“I was able to quit my job and move to Downtown Las Vegas and start a festival; a festival whose sole purpose is to encourage people to see hope, beauty, and

opportunity in life at times when they need it the most. The festival is called Life is Beautiful.”

Rehan Choudhry charismatically publicized his past mistakes to an audience full of 18-22 year olds; in turn, his portrayed relatability popularized his new endeavor, the music festival. Choudhry manufactures a sense of relatability between himself and audience members who feel trapped in a bleak academic situation eager to pursue new future opportunities. Wrapping up his proclamation of being a successful festival creator and remaining authentic to himself Choudhry addresses the crowd one last time and informs the audience that their enrollment in the university means they are now a part of the Las Vegas community, more importantly, the future of the community. To show the students exactly how important they are and embedding a final sense of community among them, Choudhry announces he will be giving away free tickets to a few select members of the audience. Then after a predetermined, orchestrated bit of theatrics, which includes the University President being consulted to drive up the number of free tickets, suddenly everyone in the building now gets a free ticket to Life is Beautiful, and the crowd literally goes wild, erupting in joy and social media posts. The university acquires social capital and buzz, while the music festival is populated with what it desires--millennial engagement and labor. Individuals are seen celebrating, jumping up and down, screaming in disbelief, embracing each other and initiating conversations about the upcoming event. Students are now enthusiastically anticipating the music festival, and starting the school year

equipped with notorious neon wristbands endorsed by the university, endorsed by a thought leader of the new emergent, experiential economy.

## **Life Really is Beautiful**

Nothing compares to the allure and atmospheric intrigue of Las Vegas; the intricate flower displays found in botanical gardens, the Bellagio fountain spewing water along to a Celine Dion song, a roller coaster, a pirate ship, a Ferris wheel, towering hotels lined next to one another, and endless food and drinks - are among countless other sites to see - eagerly awaits arriving visitors and tourists. It is often recited that Las Vegas is the only place in the world where you can wake up and see the Statue of Liberty before walking across the street to have breakfast at the Eiffel Tower. Rather than constructing an entire music festival in an empty lot filled with impermanent, fleeting structures in a remote destination, Rehan Choudhry placed his festival right in the middle of downtown Las Vegas, Nevada, a renowned transient city recognized for gambling, nightlife, and entertainment. In 2013, the first annual year Life is Beautiful debuted, Las Vegas was in the midst of redeveloping the downtown district. Old Vegas, in particular (adjacent to the downtown Fremont experience), was fit for a revitalizing evolution. The festival is centrally located within nearly twenty city blocks downtown, specifically incorporating the Fremont East Entertainment district. This district is ornamented by renowned street artists' custom murals and large-scale casino hotels;



accompanied by world class bars and restaurants with offerings of delectable cocktails and cuisine.

September 21- 23, 2018, marked the 6th annual three-day Life is Beautiful music festival. Bazzi, RL Grime, Death Cab for Cutie, The Weeknd, Travis Scott, Florence the Machine, Galantis, Foster the People, Tyler the Creator, DJ Snake, and Odesza are the respective night's most anticipated headliners with numerous musical, comedic, and artistic acts in between. Location, not just city, but site, is a significant element in navigating guests to an experience and manufacturing a rhythm or movement for guests to inhabit. Life is Beautiful was the first major ticketed music festival to take over an urban city environment in downtown Las Vegas. Unlike most large-scale festivals, Life is Beautiful intentionally builds in a long amount of time in between performances, allowing attendees proper exploration of the entire downtown area the festival is mapped onto. The downtown district has crafted its image through exclusive offerings of food, for example. Every direction points to food. Restaurants, bars, food trucks, private cooking lessons, the festival is overwhelmed with appetizing aromas of assorted cuisine. Lobster mac and cheese, loaded french fries, mouthwatering burgers and sliders, sizable slices of pizza, dumplings, donuts, sweets and other customized meals are enjoyed by festival attendees in between the photos they take of it to upload on social media. Life is Beautiful could easily be mistaken for a food festival if it wasn't for the massive stage productions spread within the columns of murals, street blocks of bars, and art structures.

There are four main stages at the festival, the Downtown Stage, Huntridge Stage, Bacardi Sound of Rum (Ambassador) Stage, and the Fremont Stage; each located in a particular section of the festival never out of reach from food, drinks, art and other sources of nearby entertainment. Upon entering the festival you are located directly in front of the Lyft Art Park, the rideshare company's typical drop-off zone, consists of regularly rotated flashy artwork that doubles as a charging station and a primary meeting spots for festival attendees who lost track of their friends. Across the street from Lyft on the west-side stands the Kicker Comedy stage featuring emerging talents, well-known, and up-and-coming comedians who produce boisterous laughs from audience members. This stage hosts an intimate crowd filled by primarily single individuals without any definable groups of friends. From here three substantial routes can be taken, continuing east guides crowds towards the container park, a two-level open-air shopping center consisting of restaurants, bars, and boutiques which surround a giant treehouse within a playground that hosts a concert stage located in the far back. Friends sit all along the steps of the container park while others dance atop the roof bars on the upper level. The neon artwork and twinkling lights strung inside makes the perfect backdrop for individuals' brief photoshoot stops. The container park accommodates poetic performances and game shows for sponsored products like Redbull, Bacardi, and Snickers, among many more.

Leaving the container park heading further east resides the Fremont stage. This stage is located relatively in the middle of the festival and produces crowds

flowing far beyond the charted dance areas, well into the street filled by food trucks and diverse groups of individuals enjoying the music. The Fremont Stage hosts popular electronic dance music DJs who amplify the festival with deafening beats and display colorful bright lights illuminating the dark tent that shelters the audience. Crowd members are shoulder to shoulder jumping and throwing their bodies towards the stage. After the performance, the audience quickly evacuates the tent eager for the cooling night breeze. The primarily outside festival unexpectedly grants attendees fresh air-conditioning and inside bathrooms in the building located directly next to the Fremont Stage. Presenting an arrangement of custom artwork festival-goers can escape the heat and roaring crowds outside and wander through the first of eight-unique art gallery. Neighboring the stage and art exhibit manifests more options for food and drinks. Popular bars including Atomic Liquors, Oak & Ivy, Bin 702, and the Downtowner are among the twenty total alcoholic venues scattered throughout the festival site. Further down and across the street on the northeast end of the festival the Bacardi Sound of Rum Stage sits. Hosting mainly alternative bands, the stage speakers produce bass capable of shaking the ground in front of it, radiating vibrations throughout the entire crowd. The area dedicated to this stage is vast stretching towards the end of the festival limits neighboring actual residents' homes who can be seen watching the music festival from the solitude of their apartments.

Advertisements and branding tactics capitalized on the existing Downtown Project aesthetics, leaving the original billboards and neon signs intact, adding only

building murals to supplement the old-school vibe that predated the festival.

Lighting became relatively darker adventuring towards the northwest area of the music festival while the Bacardi Sound of Rum Stage, container park, and Fremont Stage hum in the background. As groups traveled along the streets to and from stages it wasn't until a burst of light came from the left far corner at the end of a hidden passage that illuminated the Huntridge Stage. The discrete passageway is made from the back of two buildings across the street from one another, both portraying large-scale colorful intricate murals which entertain a multitude of both men and women attempting to get the perfect photo to enhance their social media grids.

South of the Huntridge Stage resides the Craft Beer Garden where groups of friends are found lounging on the floor or standing in small circles awaiting the next performance. A small-scale rendition of Meow Wolf, an interactive art gallery originally located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, welcomes viewers as they yield away from the Huntridge Stage. The most notable transition traveling stage to stage is the journey towards the Downtown Stage. This stage is the overall mainstage of the music festival and is located the furthest north, closest to the end of downtown nearing the highway and train tracks. In order to get to the stage, you must walk through an underground parking garage filled with couches, beer pong tables, skateboarders, flashing lights, hookah circles, and a hazy cloud of smoky replicating what an old-school underground rave would stage. The structure of the garage is spooky almost as if it were from a scary movie, but in a sense, represents the entire

atmosphere of Downtown Las Vegas both inside and outside of the music festival. Exiting the parking garage upon approaching the Downtown Stage a neon Ferris wheel gleams off to the side of featured VIP tents.

The Downtown Stage fosters the largest house for crowds to dance and sing along to the headlining performances. The festival venue sustains boundless experiences for attendees to enjoy throughout the duration of the festival while simultaneously promoting after parties on the nearby Fremont Experience and the Las Vegas Strip. A festival branded to promote positivity and inspiration amongst attendees, Life is Beautiful enhanced the perception of connectivity between festival-goers by strategically marketing to desired demographics. Life is Beautiful was designed to be more than a music festival, presented as a liminal site for understanding the current turmoil of our era; encouraging active participation in social movements impacting generations far into the future.

### **Making a Music Festival**

Local to Las Vegas, Choudhry was equipped to build networks with routines, measurements and other materials to ensure Life is Beautiful maintained a durable impact (Maguire & Matthews, 2012), beyond his accomplishments and personal industry expertise. He utilized his relationships and connections in the community to advance production and generate appropriate revenue to maintain a long prosperous life for the festival. The production team was granted offices located on

the University of Nevada, Las Vegas main campus within the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs building. Greenspun is home to the vast majority of media products held on UNLV; editing and filming rooms and the radio and news stations can all be found here. Rehan Choudhry and his Life is Beautiful executive employees were provided offices on the UNLV campus; and in conjunction with the university Choudhry hosted an on-campus seminar entitled “How to Make a Festival.”

Life is Beautiful was the first music festival Choudhry created, however; since its creation in 2013, Choudhry developed a multi-marketing media company, A Beautiful Perspective (ABP). The company is responsible for creating and producing Life is Beautiful - an annual three-day music festival, and Emerge - an impact music festival. While both Life is Beautiful and Emerge promise an immersive experience, the impact music festival puts emphasis on social justice and activism movements. Much like its predecessor Life is Beautiful, A Beautiful Perspective cultivates cutting edge approaches to attract the millennial audience. The media company is home to website articles and links referencing popular culture as well as hard news topics. By channeling ‘experience journalism,’ A Beautiful Perspective, encourages audiences to be inspired and get involved with current events. Their new journalistic style strives to reach the target audience, millennials, where they notably spend the most time - social media platforms and live events. The company, derived from original intentions of the Life is Beautiful music festival, fosters a site for transformative creations of art. Portrayals of lived-

experienced post-event online welcomes a new life cycle for the memories to be celebrated beyond the festival with networks of friends and family.

“I throw parties for a living, and I am pretty decent at it,” Choudhry declared, beginning the UNLV sponsored seminar. He immediately launched into a description of *A Beautiful Perspective* as the “hybrid medium live messaging company” Choudhry envisioned and created. Almost as an aside, Choudhry nonchalantly offers to the audience the opportunity to stop by their office to shadow a day in the life of a festival executive and welcomes the notion of interns, vaguely alluding to future job opportunities. He claims the premise of his company “goes against what is working in media,” as he explains his view of media industry logic as companies working to, “find out what you (the consumer) hate and scratch that out as much as possible, because that is what creates loyalty,” declaring these business practices are wrong and that he “can do it better.” Choudhry enlightens the audience by sharing industry knowledge misperceived as “secret when the reality of what we do is very, very basic tactical practices of the nuts and bolts of producing events.” A glimpse into the constructed backstage Choudhry continues to leverage. Choudhry even goes so far as to outline the history of music festivals recounting Woodstock, touring festivals, and the return to the “single weekend, single venue, multiple stages” model. Markedly, Choudhry notes that success does not necessarily affect the impact of an event, comparing Woodstock’s fiscal failure to its’ salient popularity throughout time. He forecasts in the next ten years the music festival industry will concentrate on “social impact festivals,” events inspired by or

aligned with a cause. He argues that the most significant festival to date is indeed not Coachella, but rather the Women's March which hosted talents, performances, speeches, and millions of people in attendance, announcing his company is putting all efforts into this prediction in an attempt to become the leading producer in the market.

Choudhry advises students to view a festival like a start-up company, a company working to solve a problem where the solution is not obvious and success is not guaranteed (Blumenthal, 2013), noting the most common mistake among failed festival is treating the event like a party rather than a functioning business. He explains the company must first figure out what they are selling, identify the problem within the market space, create a solution other people have not thought of, and then market. Leaving the audience with an ambiguous outline of what is to come in the lecture, Choudhry cuts himself off mid-thought and refocuses his attention to the importance of attending classes and workshops that the university has to offer, satisfying the evident understanding between UNLV and Choudhry to make connections back to academia. Choudhry advocates working for an established company because "there is a tremendous amount of value applicable to your own start-up." Similar to the keynote address in 2015, Choudhry details his regrets in college and elaborates on his career success following the initial decision to quit his job and become an entrepreneur. He worked on marketing strategies for Caesar Entertainment before moving to Las Vegas to start his own company, but was postponed after being offered a job as head of entertainment at the



Cosmopolitan. At the time the Cosmopolitan was six months away from the grand-opening and had no entertainment plan, Choudhry credits himself with “designing their entire marketing strategy, creating the grand opening, and producing their entertainment agenda.” He eventually moved on to create Life is Beautiful, implementing calcified knowledge passed down to him throughout his professional career. All the while assuring members in the audience that every background story is different and there is “no playbook” on creating successful events.

Although equating a music festival to a startup company, Choudhry quickly pivots to ‘reveal’ from the backstage of industry lore “the difference between a startup and a festival is you are going to have to solve the ‘problem’ via the festival, which is really unique” (Choudhry even uses air quotes when saying the word ‘problem’), revisiting this concept he explains every music festival observed in history had a problem it was trying to solve. Acknowledging Woodstock facing the age of counterculture, promoting peace in the face of war generating celebrations of a new culture; Coachella was constructed in the far off desert because the saturated market LA market absorbed popular performances; Choudhry manufactured Life is Beautiful as a platform for talent to be able to share their stories working through social issues like depression, sexuality, isolation, and more to “make attendees feel like they are not alone,” instilling a sense of relatability. He contends the problem the festival was destined to fix was inclining suicide rates in individuals ages 14-35; the festival was designed as a site for understanding hopelessness and offer support among attendees. While it is still important to book bands, performers, chefs,

artists, etc it is more important for the festival to “mean something so when people are attending your event they feel like they are part of a community.”

Switching gears, Choudhry leads the seminar in discussion of market opportunity, the “not sexy” part of the business model. Reiterating basic marketing strategies like the need for an audience that is interested in the idea and is capable of paying the amount necessary to follow through executing content production. Choudhry explains he spent months categorizing different audience profiles to market music festivals to the first being the “standard Millennial” he characterizes this festival goer as the attendee who has attended multiple events and is very familiar with the experience, “the entrepreneur,” the business man trying to stay socially dialed in extracting value from other festivals, the “young family” who comes early and brings their kids likely to leave before any headliners reach the stage, the “afternoon executive,” typically a senior person in the organization or a leader in the community that is going for networking purposes. The overall marketing concern being who is the event produced for, how big is the audience, how much are they willing to spend, and what do they like and dislike?

Choudhry describes the greatest moments of his life was watching the Killers closeout the second night of Life is Beautiful, recalling, “hometown boys, close out mainstage collecting the largest crowd downtown Las Vegas had ever witnessed, and I am able to say that my team created that.” Contradicting his previous remark which recognized failed festivals for acting as if they are throwing a party rather than running a business Choudhry concludes his seminar by telling the

audience to “find a cause that you are interested in and create a party, find a way to celebrate, and they will be forever loyal to you.”

## **Digital Marketing and Social Media**

This section examines traditional digital marketing efforts and further explores the social interactions on site of the Life is Beautiful music festival and online social media sites including Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook. Observations of the Life is Beautiful executive production team and exploratory on-site research were conducted. Attending various lectures and presentations on campus, and drawing upon business reports, company websites, social media - Instagram, Twitter, Facebook - popular journal articles, and press releases, aided in uncovering emergent industry logic possessed by festival executives. Using a critical media industry studies approach, I was able to understand and acknowledge industry lore implemented throughout the entire production of the event.

Flyers, stickers, and logoed merchandise promoting the music festival proved to be not obsolete but rather resonated with the downtown district culture of Las Vegas filled by street performers handing out flyers to individuals passing by local or tourist. The bright neon colors used in the festival emblem enhance these traditional marketing strategies making the flyers and stickers recognizable from afar. As an emerging music festival Life is Beautiful presented guests with outstanding offerings of a never before music festival located in a popular urban

district, and with years of industry experience, Rehan Choudhry recognized the best method to generate revenue within the first startup years was to partner with well-known brands to enhance content marketing. Each collaboration made between Life is Beautiful and distinguished brands aligned with the lifestyles and experiences of theoretical consumers on and off-site of the event. While traditional marketing endeavors were limited, only exhibiting brand partnerships and distributed logoed music festival content, the leading advertising channel for Life is Beautiful music festival became social media platforms.

Social media included content created by Life is Beautiful, or influence marketers and any tagged Life is Beautiful content distributed across social media platforms, primarily examining Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook usage. Emphasizing the personal side of the business to followers, displaying community outreach efforts rather than only displaying promotional messages manufactures positive brand awareness. Encouraging user-generated content provides audiences fresh first-hand content which they can relate to and therefore imagine themselves in similar experiences. Consumer engagement is perceived as crucial for building relationships with large-scale audiences.

On-site of Life is Beautiful at all times festival goers are encouraged to take photos of themselves, friends and food with vibrant backgrounds striving to produce unparalleled content to upload across social media space. Snapping the perfect picture has become an extreme sport, friends lay on the floor to assure impeccable lighting compliments the glowing Ferris wheel constructing the idealistic photo

background. Giant art structures act as props framing trendy visual content consistent with Life is Beautiful brand themes. Social media is about creating interactive networks among a vast amount of users in real-time, to maintain consumer interest it is important to create a community for the audience where they feel welcome. Gathering opinions, sharing information, liking a posting user-generated content on the official festival page were all tactics implemented by Life is Beautiful to manufacture a sense of belonging and community within the festival venue.

Life is Beautiful came alive with brand partnerships, the official Life is Beautiful website refers to the partners as the “DNA of the marketing agency, the heart of the music festival.” In 2018, Life is Beautiful’s primary partnerships were held with Bacardi, Lyft and Doritos. Internal program strategies constituent optimal levels of brand and agency expressed before, during, and after integrating partnership between the festival and Bacardi. Collaborating with Bacardi delivered on-site event production of pop up performances, an official After-Party Series was developed with popular performers including Marshmello, ASAP Ferg, St. Vincent and NGHTMRE throughout Las Vegas post-festival, noting over 30 million total impressions were added after onboarding specific influencers. Uniting with Lyft, a dominant rideshare company, the festival delivered a “round-trip experience” with offerings of discount codes in ticketing packages. Doritos partnership with the festival produced an exclusive Life is Beautiful pre-party for Super Bowl LII, the advertisement campaign was completely offsite and digital collectively producing

creative content strategies for social engagement. Other notable brand partnership included Dutch Bros Coffee, Snickers, Chipotle, New Era, White Claw, Zappos, Yahoo, Titos, Chef Works and more, a variety of entertainment, food, and beverage companies working together to create significant value to target audiences.

### **Physical Media Marketing**

Location plays a vital role in producing a music festival, not only will it host the site which will evolve into an elaborate festival but it is home to a community of residents before, during, and after the production of the festival. Connecting to site location, knowing, and respecting the community in which the festival is built will generate considerably higher measures of positive brand awareness and subsequently increase local interest encouraging attendance. Music festivals fail when they think they are better than the community and disregard local members contributing to the flow of society. As a local Las Vegas music festival, Life is Beautiful collaborated with community outreach program, Lighting Hope Project, in an effort to position themselves as making a lasting impact on the Las Vegas community, and in turn constructed advanced degrees of social capital. Justin Weniger, Choudhry's partner and acting CEO of Life is Beautiful states, "it is important to give back to the community that has embraced and accepted our festival with open arms since its inception," he explains the objective behind partnering with local charities is "to create a better future for Las Vegas residents

through empowering seminars, art projects, employment and further resource opportunities.” After courting the endorsement of the surrounding area and members in the community, Life is Beautiful ultimately leveraged the support necessary to assemble a long-lasting sustainable site to host the music festival annually.

On-site of Life is Beautiful assorted representations of ritual performances are on display by attendees. Dances, outfits, meeting new people, eating and drinking, and the general enjoyment of music performances all frame past and present narratives of rituals exhibited within liminal spaces festivals provide. Preserving old traditions like sitting atop of friend’s shoulders to reserve a spot above the crowd as headlining acts supply audiences with extraordinary performances, while simultaneously fostering new portrayals of rituals appropriated to modern phenomena of dance. Groups of individuals mimic prevailing dance moves commonly observed in other media platforms like music videos and video games. Enthusiastically throwing their bodies around to the overwhelming roar of music as friends encourage behavior unusual in other aspects of life, but ultimately accepted within the festival venue. Being a transient city, Las Vegas, is home to an array of populations, amenable to Life is Beautiful because there is no substantial pattern of festival-goers in comparison to other popular music festivals. While festival fashion is continuously evolving, Coachella is particularly recognized for embodying bohemian free-spirited fashion while raves like EDC display revealing flashy neon apparel, however, Life is Beautiful

attendees portrayed no dominant stylized fashion. Outfits ranged from casual street clothes to extravagant club attire generally observed in nightclub settings.

Audience enthusiasm over general performances and the overall experience has become a ritualized component of music festivals. Groups of friends possess different rituals, while some eagerly rush towards the front of the stage, others prefer to linger towards the back of the crowd where there is more space available for dancing and socializing. The most prevalent ritual performance detected in the music festival is the use of cellphones documenting performances to be remembered at a later date rather than living in the moment and embracing the incredible creation of culture framed by Life is Beautiful. The space adopted by Life is Beautiful established a site which framed marketing strategies and maintained an emerging substantial three-day music festival over the course of five years.

Thus, after examining textual materials and conducting exploratory research on-site of the Life is Beautiful music festival I contend three substantial industry lore collectively emerging and read through this music festival include; millennials, experience economy, and influencers as participatory culture unpacked in greater detail in the next chapter.



## Chapter 4:

### Conclusion

Conducting a critical media industry study which observed the creation and marketing strategies of the Life is Beautiful Music and Arts Festival presented three significant articulations of lore practiced in the music festival industry. These calcified logics, deemed successful by previous industry executives and workers, are applied in the creation of content specific to the music festival industry. Millennials, the experience economy, and influencers as participatory culture are particular extensions of industry lore with singular and collective attributes framing the production and consumption of music festivals.

Cultural intermediaries manage material practices involved with cultural production and consumption. Maguire and Matthews (2012) define three principal responsibilities cultural intermediaries hold: framing, expertise, and impact. Rehan Choudhry founder and creator of Life is Beautiful, acts as a cultural intermediary framing how consumers engage with goods, services, commodities, ideas, and attitudes at music festivals, by actively interacting with festival attendees and implementing perceptions of the desired event. As cultural intermediary, one emergent narrative proffered by Choudhry is the extent to which he envisaged himself as different from other industry executives. He is a seasoned entertainment industry executive having been the Director of Marketing at Caesars Palace and the Director of Entertainment & Special Events at the Cosmopolitan, in Las Vegas,

Nevada before creating *Life is Beautiful*. Choudhry exudes influence through claims of expertise, articulating his industry knowledge by identifying target audiences, brand and market mechanisms, aesthetic potentials, and fundamental financial matters. Cultural intermediaries frequently get criticized for lacking ‘real’ professions (Maguire & Matthews, 2012), however, Choudhry polices this boundary, constantly solidifying his professional credibility.

In chapter three, Choudhry portrayed himself as an expert entrepreneur, confidently assuring crowds of UNLV students. In an era filled with uniform goods and services, his festival would surpass all doubts and emerge as an innovative event capable of connecting audiences through stories of resilience. Choudhry tamped down any potential skepticism the audience might have held towards him by awarding all students in attendance free three-day passes to attend *Life is Beautiful*. Thus, as the producer of symbolic value (Cronin, 2004), he successfully cultivated impact by framing his music festival as desirable and worthy of consumer attention.

Rehan Choudhry consciously and unconsciously invoked industry lore by using past marketing expertise learned from working in established companies within the entertainment industry to frame the production of *Life is Beautiful*. Choudhry’s calls are replete with potential contradictions. For example, he states established businesses assemble beneficial values substantial for modeling a new concept but claims current industry production and consumption methods are faulty and he can do things better (Choudhry, 2018). Choudhry declared music festivals

fail when producers act like they are throwing a party rather than running a business (Choudhry, 2018), yet asserts his skill for throwing parties led him to a career in event production. He frequently contradicts his claims of ineffective techniques used by other music festival creators by implementing the same business methods in the creation of Life is Beautiful. Although Choudhry articulates his capacity in creating a one-of-a-kind event as unique, he habitually relies on established industry logic.

## **Millennials**

“Never having known a world without digital technology, Millennials are the first “digital natives” and experience the world in a completely different way than previous generations. They recognize the power and importance of social networks and utilize the Internet as a trusted source and a platform for self-expression.” (Marketing to Millennials, 2010)

“Millennials are plugged-in and synced across their devices, and this division of attention can actually prove to benefit strategic ad campaigns.” (Forbes, 2018)

“Reaching millennials can be challenging because traditional brand building doesn’t always work. But once you get their loyalty, they’re an audience that will respond to your brand with real loyalty and passion.” (Forbes, 2017)

A central foundation of media industries is the audience; media is designed to reach particular demographics because advertisers desire certain kinds of consumers. There are two notable versions of audiences, ‘real audiences,’ individuals who show up to the event, and ‘constructed audiences,’ characteristics, likes, and dislikes assumed by creators and the media industry while constructing media (Havens & Lotz, 2012). Constructed audiences are partially created from

knowledge of past audience behaviors, but primarily based on industry logic and perceptions of what audiences will find attractive. Subsequently, constructed audiences drive the creation of media products (Havens and Lotz 2012). This articulation of industry lore investigates the music festival industry's strategies and conceptualization of marketing specifically aimed towards the millennial generation.

Gumpert and Cathcart (1985) theorized, in a vein of technological determinism, that the media environment of a person's youth might influence the outlook and values of every generation. Serazio (2013), however, shows that whether or not this is indeed the case, “*marketers* subscribe to such a thesis in characterizing their millennial targets as digital natives” (602, emphasis in original). It is marketers, in practice, that produce a narrative of “digital natives,” or individuals, explicitly millennials, born in the age of digital and interactive media. Given how marketers have accumulated mass knowledge regarding millennials' technological comprehension, Serazio inquired how cultural producers create “media logic” (Deuze 2007) emerging in the marketing industry about today's youth. By analyzing promotional content directed towards millennials and conducting select interviews, Serazio (2013) determines the advertising industry has modernized to fit this generations' needs. This analysis complements Serazio and other critical media industry studies approaches, but directly applies the construction of the millennial to the music festival industry, exploring how

marketing practices have been adjusted to appeal specifically to the millennial generation.

For Serazio, marketers “court digital natives in two main ways that simultaneously exploit those developmental necessities and technological capabilities: soliciting self-expression and cultivating community” (608). The positioning of the millennial generation as “digital millennials” by marketers and the prioritizing of experiential life events in comparison to past generations, makes them the ideal target (audience) for the music festival industry. Rather than settling down with a house and family, millennials are reportedly choosing a life of leisure and adventure in a quest to find their own identity and purpose in the world (Fromm & Garton, 2013). In 2017, for the first time, millennials surpassed all other generations and accounted for 38% of tourists visiting Las Vegas, reporting they gambled less and spent more time exploring innovative restaurants, attending concerts, partying, and shopping (Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 2018), collecting memories instead of poker chips. Seeking to attract “18-22-year-olds,” Choudhry produced an event for a millennial audience by placing the festival in the middle of a picturesque bar district of downtown Las Vegas. He engaged target attendees with musical performances by popular mainstream artists, acclaimed culinary offerings, interactive displays of art, cutting edge stand-up comedy acts, and overall magnified social media outreach.

Strategic partnerships with millennial endorsed brands became the “heart of the music festival” (Choudhry, 2018). He brands messages about partying, native to

millennial dialogue, depicting his relative coolness to attract attendees based primarily off his suggested reputation. Choudhry appeals to the millennial audience by actively articulating his curiosity about their interests and passions. The speech and performance at UNLV was a way to graft the millennial audience into the fabric of the festival, both as cultural and social capital and as labor to populate downtown Las Vegas. In turn he interprets audience desires and exhibits them throughout the music festival. Adopting Serazio (2013), Choudhry's presentation of industry logic suggests the music festival industry has modernized to meet the needs of the millennial generation.

### **Experience Economy**

“The newly identified offering of experiences occurs whenever a company intentionally uses services as the stage and good as props to engage an individual. While commodities are fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are memorable. Buyers of experience value being engaged by what the company reveals over a duration of time.” (The Experience Economy, 1999)

The quote above, from Pine and Gilmore's work, *The Experience Economy* (1999), entails the shift in consumer and business demand from goods and services to now experiences. They argue for businesses to shift from the “delivery-focused” service industry of high quality offerings to the “staged-experience” service industry which creates memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Although still developing and augmenting, the experience economy claims to change the market foundation to higher valued-offerings. This purported new trend demands executives to design goods that enhance the consumer's overall experience, in this

case exclusively music festivals. With experiences prioritized over products the growth of the experience economy has framed new social norms, rather than staying at home listening to music, consumers are enticed by live experiences such as music festivals which produce shareable memories. This shareable, branded identity connects with the formation of the aforementioned “digital millennial.” Within the music festival industry experiences are typically categorized by entertainment, culinary offerings, and art.

Choudry’s “How to Make a Festival” seminar presents the predominantly millennial audience, step by step guidelines on building a festival from start to finish, alluding that everyone in the room could become a music festival creator. He reassures the audience, “you can find people to build a brand, build walls and stages, figure out electrical and pyrotechnics, and get over short-term financial requirements, because all the other stuff will work itself out,” but insists the hardest part of creating a festival is getting over personal insecurities and getting the idea started (Choudhry, 2018). Choudhry casually introduces these elements as if the general public has easy access to them, challenging his notion that anyone can create a music festival, but rather suggesting that indeed industry connections are necessary to produce the experience consumers crave.

Choudhry presents festival production as his professional calling; he perceives himself as a cultural guru; therefore, the festival, as an extension of himself stages a cultural phenomenon. Tapping into the experience economy by emphasizing reasons consumers should attend the festival, he develops a discourse

which urges millennial audiences to create an exceptional path for themselves recognizing their collective struggles with identity and future aspirations.

### **Influencers as Participatory Culture**

“Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands. Not all participants are created equal. Corporations—and even individuals within corporate media— still exert greater power than any individual consumer or even the aggregate of consumers. And some consumers have greater abilities to participate in this emerging culture than others.” (Jenkins, 2006).

In the passage above Henry Jenkins (2006), questions the different levels of power and implications accompanying the new age of participatory culture. Jenkins (2006) defines convergence culture as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.” Jenkins underscores how convergence is an old concept, but it takes on new meaning in a digital age where the tools of participation are democratized. This democratization invariably empowers both consumers as active audiences and marketers buying into the discourse of “empowered” consumers in the form of influencer marketing. Brands are increasingly turning to social media to engage with consumers and gain insight and even further towards influencers within social media. This section depicts the music festival industry’s use of influencers as participatory culture, a primary marketing technique that attracts consumers.



Influencers, ordinary social media users who generate a large audience following through textual and visual representations of their day-to-day affairs are considered micro-celebrities (Senft, 2008). They are paid for advertising their personal assessments of good or services provided to them, and appeal significantly to a niche group of individuals both digitally and physically (Abidin, 2018). Instagram and other social media platforms progressively adopt new algorithms which only allow 10% of an individual's followers to see their posts; favoring users, primarily influencers, who actively engage with followers or regularly post content within the app. Millennials feel entitled to express their opinions and have their voices heard, part of a discourse of empowerment, especially in online settings, generally social media networks (Stein, 2013). Influencer culture is sustained by individuals' active participation in society and cultural trends; today anyone can become an influencer, but there remains a fine line between essentially free labor and the agreed upon social media posts or other disclosed arrangements. Abidin's (2018), concept of 'perceived interconnectedness,' observes consumers feeling a sense of familiarity with influencers due to the abundance of updates they post across multiple social media platforms throughout the day depicting minuscule elements of their everyday endeavors.

Rather than focusing solely on employing numerous influencers to advertise the music festival on social media platforms before the event, Choudhry went a step further and embedded the influencers within the festival itself and the design of the festival. He created a stage at Life is Beautiful for talent to share personal stories of

prevailing social issues the audience could relate to in an attempt to manufacture 'real' interconnectedness. Extending his initial exploitation of influencers as a small subsection of music festival performances, Choudhry uses his multi-media marketing company, A Beautiful Perspective, to promote the production of his modern music and impact festival, Emerge. The festival was designed to converge traditional festival elements like music and art with components of social justice. Influencers as talent at the festival inspire individuals to engage within the community through shareable experiences.

Rehan Choudhry's offerings of industry knowledge ultimately suggest the prevalent use of strategies appealing to millennials, supporting the experience economy, and justifying influencers as a participatory culture are current industry lore.

## Chapter 5: Future of Festivals

Nothing is ever the way it was, and no two people will ever experience something the same way; proving valid within the music festival industry. As the industry continues to progress into the future of manufacturing unseen and unheard of innovative experiences, more often than not people bring up past triumphs throughout a festivals life. ‘Remember last year when this happened,’ or ‘how about when they performed this song,’ are common verbal examples of highlighting the past rather than anticipating the future. But what is the future? Is it Fyre Festival fraud that can convince an entire generation to spend thousands of dollars on a mere lived experience? Or potentially a new age of music festivals completely distributed and accessed by live streaming through music and gaming industry collaborations? Throughout history society has been presented with several representations of music festivals; however recent catastrophic failures and extraordinary collaboration developments speak great lengths for the future of music festivals.

Influence marketing has recently become a lucrative business as today’s youth culture exudes technological confidence and harbors excessive materialism (Abidin, 2018). Unsurprisingly, when abundant neon orange photo-squares uploaded by a multitude of leading influencers flooded various social media platforms with no further explanation than a simple hashtag #FyreFestival, fueling

consumer engagement and overall enthusiasm. The overwhelming number of popular influencers' partnerships with Fyre Festival including Kendall Jenner, Bella Hadid, Hailey Baldwin, Emily Ratajkowski, multiple Victoria Secret angels, and other popular entertainment icons exponentially boosted levels of interest towards the mysterious event with the festival's page reaching over 300 million views in less than 24 hours (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). The nearly empty company page presented consumers with only one option, the promotional video. Bright blue ocean water spans across the frame as tropical beaches furnish the distant background, famous models party on private boats, beaches come alive during the day sunbathers and bonfires extending into the night, and musical artists perform on stage with guests singing and dancing to the loud beats, a weekend full of celebrations. Fyre Festival's marketing team gave the audience exactly what they wanted, an exclusive weekend with like-minded people and friends qualified to convey prestige notoriety across multi-media marketing platforms.

Billy McFarland, aforementioned creator of the failed Fyre Festival, under investigation for numerous counts of fraud, accessed every ounce of marketing knowledge taught and passed down to him throughout his life collectively, and presented audiences with what was supposed to be a transformative weekend on a private island fueled by an immersive music festival with mainstream headlining musical performances. Despite failed endeavors to produce the actual event in time and the backlash live-updates via social media platforms generated, the marketing

team effectively reached an entire generation of target consumers, millennials, by employing past successful industry logic.

Influence marketing predominantly contributed to getting people to purchase tickets and travel to a secluded island for an unknown music festival, speaking great lengths of the power influencers hold over audiences. Enlisting social media influencers to collectively display disguised advertisements promoting the festival assembled a cohort of consumers unquestionably willing to invest in an enigmatic business. Influencers advertise a new higher quality of life because of the material goods and services provided to them. Because millennials routinely consume content produced by influencers, the Federal Trade Commerce regulates strict guidelines requiring influencers to announce the products being promoted as advertisements to avoid misleading consumers. The Fyre Festival failed because Billy McFarland acted unethically, not because of influencer marketing. This case is vital for considering the future of festivals because it proves to build a concept and marketing for a music festival can be done based on industry lore, however; the manual labor and physical construction of the event venue must be taken seriously within a proper time frame in order to pull off a successful music festival.

Fortnite, a global eSports gaming phenomenon featuring battle royale survival matches between 100 players, was created in 2017 and has reached over 200 million gamers worldwide within its' short lifespan. ESports stands for electronic sports and is a subsection of the gaming industry; it hosts organized competitive video games among digital players. Fortnite recognizably produces

popular culture; dance moves performed by characters in the game are now regularly imitated by members of society. The dances found on traditional platforms like television shows and commercials, popularized by dramatic professional athlete celebrations, and witnessed universally in real-life as the moves continually overwhelm social outings. Supplementary to the game itself, individuals can live-stream professionals and other gamers' matches to follow along with tactics used to defeat opponents of various skill levels. Twitch, a digital community of content creators owned by Amazon, is the leading live-streaming platform with more viewers in 2018 than Hulu, Netflix, HBO, and ESPN combined (Latta, 2018).

Recently Fortnite and Twitch extensively promoted a new collaboration between the game and trendy recording DJ, Marshmello. In anticipation of the contemporary concert, Fortnite released various new costumes, also known as skins, for characters in the game to resemble the DJ who disguises his entire face with an oversized marshmallow mask. Establishing a concert venue, playing recognizable Marshmello songs as background music, and making periodic announcements within the game and on live-streaming platforms advertised for the never before live-stream music festival within a live video-game. On the day of the concert 10.7 million players experienced the music festival within the game, and over 27 million recapped the game on YouTube following the event (Perraudin, 2019). During the concert, all players had their weapons disarmed, and normal game controls only permitted culturally salient dance moves. The collaboration between the music industry and the gaming industry presents audiences an honest glimpse into the

future of music festivals and illustrates further progression within the streaming and influencer industry.

The eSports and music festival industry collaboration between Fortnite and Marshmello was a defining moment framing new potential usages of culturally accepted music festival norms. Following the industries presenting the initial partnership, eSports worked together with Wacken Open Air Music Festival to help generate a fantasy world for attendees (Long, 2019), characters in Fortnite released mini-musical albums (Mickunas, 2018), and additional alliances between Universal Music Group and ESL, the largest eSports branch, were made to promote new music during gaming tournaments and trending live-streams (UMG, 2018). South Korea sets the agenda further into the future by manufacturing a unique ‘concept group’ consisting of six female singers who collectively produce music and participate together as a competitive eSports team (Fitzgerald, 2018). Live music festivals are a fundamental pillar of popular culture, but with roughly 560 billion minutes of live streams viewed on Twitch in 2018 (Iqbal, 2019), entertainment consumption trends are currently transforming. ESports joint venture with the music festival industry produces new platforms for artists and talent to perform on, providing more channels of entertainment to in-game players and audiences following live streams around the world (Sphar, 2018).

Trends come and go as new generations assume mainstream market control. As the future of festivals unfolds potential alternative industry lore emerge such as

influence marketing, eSports and gaming, and Generation Z could shape how music festivals will be produced and consumed for a new leading target audience.



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## Curriculum Vitae

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Las Vegas, Nevada  
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### Education

- 2019                    **M.A. Journalism and Media Studies**  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV  
(Candidate for Graduation: Spring 2019)
- 2017                    **B. S. (Hon): Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism Management**  
New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM  
Triple Minor: Business Admin, Marketing, and Management
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### Professional Experience

- 2018- Current        **Graduate Teaching Assistant**  
Journalism & Media Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- 2018                    **Public Relations Intern**  
Wicked Creative PR, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2018                    **Graduate Research Teaching Assistant**  
Tourist Safety & Crowd Science (TSCS), University of Nevada,  
Las Vegas
- 2017- Current        **Assistant Golf Professional**  
Spanish Trail Country Club, Las Vegas, Nevada
- 2015-2016            **Board Member**  
ASNMSU Board of Special Events, New Mexico State University
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### Research Experience

- 2018                    **Tourist Safety & Crowd Science**  
Department of Criminal Justice, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Graduate Research Assistant and acting Marketing Manager for the following research projects:
- Tactical Medical Response to Mass Casualty Incidents
  - Ultimate Fighting Championship Security
  - Spectator Violence
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### Independent Study

- 2018                   **Festival and Event Management**  
 Guided by Dr. Yen-Soon Kim
- Organize, research, coordinate and promote special events and festivals for Las Vegas hospitality industry
- 2017                   **History of the American Press**  
 Guided by Dr. Gregory Borchard
- Reviewed existing text for *History of the American Press* and developed rough drafts of chapters based on existing material

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**Publications**

- 2016                   **Edgmon, M.** (2016, Spring,). *Themis.*, 6-7.  
 International Women’s Fraternity quarterly magazine
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**Leadership**

- 2016-2017           **Historian- Reporter**  
 Zeta Tau Alpha, Las Cruces, NM
- Proposed and developed original content, that resulted in a mark traffic increase to ZTA’s social media sites
  - Reported chapter news to *Themis*, Women’s International Fraternity quarterly magazine
- 2016-2017           **Director of Philanthropy**  
 Zeta Tau Alpha, Las Cruces, NM
- Successfully planned and executed two new philanthropic events per semester resulting in increased attendance of 500+ students and community members
  - Provided strong administrative leadership skills, transformed limited budgets into profit, and managed 3 assistants
- 2016-2017           **Apparel Chair**  
 Zeta Tau Alpha, Las Cruces, NM
- Managed organization and distribution of vendor sales and payments
  - Worked with several departments within chapter to determine needs for resale items (recruitment, social, PR, philanthropy, intramurals, etc.)
- 2015-2016           **House Manager**  
 Zeta Tau Alpha, Las Cruces, NM
- Handled, prepared, and filed various legal contracts, releases, insurance forms, etc.



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**Honors & Awards**

2018	<b>Maury Stevens Graduate Scholarship</b> Academic Excellence, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
2014-2017	<b>Order of Omega</b> Greek Honor Society, New Mexico State University
2014-2017	<b>National Society of Collegiate Scholars</b> Honor Society, New Mexico State University
2013-2017	<b>NMSU Crimson Scholar</b> Dean's Honor Roll, New Mexico State University
2014-2015	<b>4.0 GPA Academic Award</b> GPA recognition awarded for Fall & Spring Semester, New Mexico State University
2016-2017	<b>Kimberly Ming Endowment</b> \$410 awarded to outstanding HRTM senior, New Mexico State University
2013-2017	<b>NMSU Regent Success Scholarship</b> \$4000 per academic year, New Mexico State University
2013-2017	<b>State of New Mexico Lottery Scholarship</b> Percentage of tuition per academic year, New Mexico State University
2013- 2017	<b>Pell Grant &amp; LEAP Grant</b> Covered remaining cost of tuition and fees, New Mexico State University

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**Volunteer**

2013- 2017	<b>The Big Event</b> Annual community service project hosted by ASNMSU, Las Cruces, NM
2013- 2017	<b>Greek Day of Service</b> Campus-wide community service project hosted by Greek-life, Las Cruces, NM
2013- 2017	<b>Pink Up the Pace</b>

NM Annual philanthropic 5k hosted by Zeta Tau Alpha, Las Cruces,

2016- 2017 **Capture the Crown**  
Annual capture the flag philanthropy event held by Zeta Tau  
Alpha, Las Cruces, NM

2015-2017 **American Cancer Society**  
*Making Strides Against Breast Cancer*, El Paso, TX

2016 **Casa de Peregrinos**  
Emergency Food Program, Las Cruces, NM

2013-2015 **Susan G. Komen**  
*Race for the Cure*, El Paso, Texas

2013- 2014 **Striking out Cancer**  
Annual softball philanthropy event hosted by Zeta Tau Alpha,  
Las Cruces, NM

*Numerous other intra-fraternal campus wide philanthropy events & community  
service hours*

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**Certifications**

IRB  
Red Cross ® CPR and First Aid Certified  
Techniques of Alcohol Management ® Certified  
Food Handler Safety ® Certified

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**Skills**

- Systematic and organized
- Event planning and coordination with knowledge of risk management
- Strategic planning, marketing campaigns, and public relations writing
- Membership training, development, and leadership guidance
- Computer program knowledgebase; Microsoft Office, SPSS