

Instagram as a Digital Touchpoint for Music Festival Participation: Understanding Generation Z Audiences through @thesoundsproject

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of social media has transformed the way Generation Z accesses, interprets, and engages with information, including information related to music festivals. Instagram has emerged as one of the most widely used platforms due to its ability to deliver information in a visual, fast, and interactive manner. This study aims to examine and analyze the role of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject in fostering Generation Z's enthusiasm for participating in music festivals and to explore the contribution of Instagram as a social media platform in shaping such enthusiasm. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving Generation Z informants who follow music festival Instagram accounts. The findings reveal that Instagram serves as a primary source of information for Generation Z when seeking information about music festivals. The visual content presented on the platform generates enthusiasm and shapes audiences' initial expectations of festival experiences. Instagram is also utilized as an evaluative tool in the decision-making process regarding festival attendance. The study concludes that Instagram functions not only as a promotional medium but also as a space for meaning-making that bridges digital enthusiasm and actual participation among Generation Z in music festivals.

Keywords: Instagram, Music Festival, Generation Z, Enthusiasm, Participation

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way individuals communicate, access information, and participate in social and cultural activities. The emergence of social media platforms has created new communication environments in which users are no longer passive recipients of information but active participants in producing, sharing, and interpreting content. Within this digital ecosystem, social media has become an integral part of everyday life, particularly among younger generations who rely heavily on digital platforms for information, entertainment, and social interaction. As a result, social media has evolved beyond its original function as a communication tool and has become an influential medium capable of shaping perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025; Subiantoro, 2025; Valkenburg et al., 2021).

One sector that has experienced significant transformation through digital communication is the music industry, particularly the organization and promotion of music festivals. In recent years, music festivals have become increasingly popular in Indonesia and have emerged as important cultural and creative industry events. Beyond serving as entertainment venues, music festivals function as spaces for cultural expression, social interaction, and community engagement. The growing number of music festivals across Indonesia reflects the increasing public interest in live music experiences and highlights the important role these events play

within the country's creative economy (Hinandra & Pandrianto, 2025; Indrawan et al., 2026; Munawaroh & Nurjanah, 2023).

The success of contemporary music festivals is closely linked to their ability to communicate effectively with audiences through digital media. Social media platforms provide festival organizers with opportunities to disseminate information rapidly, interact directly with audiences, and maintain audience engagement before, during, and after events (Brown et al., 2019; Danielsen & Kjus, 2019). Unlike traditional media, which primarily facilitates one-way communication, social media enables two-way interactions that allow audiences to actively participate in conversations surrounding an event. Through this process, social media contributes not only to information dissemination but also to the construction of meanings, expectations, and emotional connections among audiences (Hudson et al., 2015; Llopis-Amorós et al., 2019).

Among the various social media platforms available today, Instagram has become one of the most influential communication channels, particularly among Generation Z. Instagram is a visual-based platform that allows users to share photographs, videos, stories, reels, and other forms of multimedia content. Its emphasis on visual communication makes it highly attractive to younger audiences who prefer concise, interactive, and visually engaging information. The platform's features also facilitate user interaction through comments, likes, direct messages, and content sharing, creating opportunities for continuous engagement between content creators and audiences (Najmussahar & Yuliana, 2025; Stanković et al., 2026).

The increasing popularity of Instagram has significantly influenced how music festivals communicate with potential attendees. Festival organizers frequently utilize Instagram to announce event schedules, introduce performers, promote ticket sales, share behind-the-scenes content, and build excitement surrounding upcoming events. Through carefully curated visual content, Instagram enables organizers to create digital experiences that stimulate audience curiosity and anticipation long before a festival takes place. Consequently, Instagram has become an important component of contemporary music festival marketing and audience engagement strategies (Novida et al., 2022; Stanković et al., 2026).

This phenomenon is particularly relevant when examined in relation to Generation Z. Generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, Generation Z is often characterized as the first generation to grow up entirely within a digitally connected environment. Unlike previous generations, they have been exposed to smartphones, internet technologies, and social media platforms from an early age. This extensive exposure has shaped their communication patterns, information-seeking behaviors, and social interactions. For Generation Z, social media is not merely a supplementary communication channel but an essential component of daily life (Bascha, 2011; Dangmei & Singh, 2016; Hakim, 2024; Tulgan, 2013).

Several studies have demonstrated that Generation Z relies heavily on social media for obtaining information, following trends, expressing identities, and participating in social activities (Anter & Kümpel, 2023; Kim et al., 2021; Ramli et al., 2023). The visual and interactive characteristics of Instagram make it particularly appealing to this generation. Rather than relying on traditional sources of information, Generation Z often turns to Instagram to discover events, evaluate experiences, and make decisions regarding participation in various activities. In the context of music festivals, Instagram functions as a primary information source

through which audiences obtain updates regarding performers, schedules, venue arrangements, ticket availability, and festival atmospheres (Stanković et al., 2026).

The role of Instagram in shaping audience behavior extends beyond information dissemination. Social media platforms contribute to the formation of enthusiasm, which can be understood as a psychological condition characterized by excitement, interest, motivation, and emotional engagement toward a particular activity or event. Enthusiasm often emerges when individuals encounter content that resonates with their interests, aspirations, or personal identities. In digital environments, visual content can stimulate emotional responses that encourage users to develop positive expectations regarding an event. Therefore, enthusiasm can be viewed as an important intermediary process between media exposure and audience participation (Kusuma et al., 2024; Rietveld et al., 2020).

Within the context of music festivals, enthusiasm is reflected in audiences' eagerness to seek information, follow event-related content, engage with online discussions, and anticipate participation in upcoming events. Social media content that effectively communicates the atmosphere, uniqueness, and value of a festival may contribute to the development of such enthusiasm. Through repeated exposure to festival-related content, audiences gradually construct meanings regarding the event and develop expectations concerning the experiences it may offer (Blaži, 2025; Kim et al., 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of social media in influencing audience engagement and participation. Sukarni et al. (2021) for example, found that Instagram content significantly influenced audiences' interest in attending music festivals. Their findings demonstrated that visually appealing content can positively affect perceptions and intentions regarding festival attendance. Similarly, Evelina (2022) showed that Instagram-based branding strategies effectively enhanced audience engagement and strengthened the identity of music festivals among younger audiences.

Research conducted by Ramdani & Sudarto (2024) further revealed that Generation Z demonstrates higher levels of social media engagement compared to previous generations. Instagram and TikTok were identified as the primary platforms utilized for entertainment, information seeking, and self-expression. These findings suggest that social media platforms play a central role in shaping Generation Z's everyday experiences and decision-making processes. Meanwhile, Sinaga & Nindi (2023) demonstrated that digital marketing strategies implemented through Instagram successfully guided audiences through various stages of attention, interest, information search, action, and content sharing. Likewise, Mirayani et al. (2025) emphasized the role of Instagram in enhancing audience attraction and participation through visually engaging communication strategies.

Although previous studies have established the importance of social media in audience engagement, several gaps remain. Existing research has predominantly focused on marketing effectiveness, branding strategies, promotional communication, or audience interest in attending events. Relatively limited attention has been given to understanding how Instagram contributes to the development of enthusiasm among Generation Z and how such enthusiasm influences participation in music festivals. Furthermore, little research has specifically examined local music festival accounts as communicative spaces where audiences construct meanings, evaluate experiences, and form intentions regarding participation.

This research seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the Instagram account @thesoundsproject, one of Indonesia's prominent music festival accounts. Unlike studies that

primarily examine promotional effectiveness, this research explores how Instagram functions as a communicative environment that shapes enthusiasm and influences participation among Generation Z audiences. Specifically, the study investigates how Instagram content is interpreted by followers, how it contributes to the formation of expectations regarding festival experiences, and how it supports audiences' decision-making processes related to festival attendance.

To explain these dynamics, this study employs Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT) developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur. The theory posits that individuals become increasingly dependent on media when media fulfill important informational, orientation, and entertainment needs. The greater the dependency on media, the stronger the potential influence of media on individuals' cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. In contemporary digital environments, social media platforms often serve as primary sources of information and interpretation, particularly for younger audiences who rely extensively on digital communication (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

From the perspective of MSDT, Instagram can be understood as a media system upon which Generation Z depends to obtain information, interpret social realities, and evaluate opportunities for participation. Through continuous exposure to festival-related content, audiences acquire knowledge, develop emotional connections, and construct meanings regarding music festival experiences. These processes may subsequently influence behavioral outcomes, including the decision to participate in festivals. Consequently, Instagram serves not only as a promotional platform but also as a meaningful social environment that bridges digital engagement and offline participation.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine and analyze the role of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject in fostering Generation Z's enthusiasm toward music festival participation. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how Instagram contributes to shaping enthusiasm, expectations, and decision-making processes among young audiences. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on Instagram as a meaning-making space rather than merely a promotional tool, as well as its application of MSDT to explain the relationship between digital engagement, enthusiasm, and participation within the context of Indonesian music festivals. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of digital communication studies and provide practical insights for music festival organizers seeking to engage Generation Z audiences more effectively.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the role of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject in fostering Generation Z's enthusiasm toward music festival participation. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, interpretations, and meanings regarding their interactions with Instagram content and its influence on their enthusiasm for attending music festivals. Rather than measuring causal relationships or testing hypotheses, this research aimed to explore how Generation Z interprets and responds to digital content related to music festivals.

The study was guided by MSDT, which explains how individuals rely on media to fulfill informational, entertainment, and orientation needs. Through this perspective, Instagram was examined as a communication platform that provides information and experiences capable of

influencing audience enthusiasm and participation. The participants consisted of five Generation Z individuals who actively follow the Instagram account @thesoundsproject and have attended The Sounds Project music festival at least once. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed relevant experiences related to the research topic.

The selection criteria included: (1) belonging to Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2010; (2) actively using Instagram; (3) following the Instagram account @thesoundsproject; (4) interacting with the account's content through activities such as liking, commenting, viewing stories, or sharing posts; and (5) having previous experience attending The Sounds Project festival. These criteria ensured that participants were familiar with both the Instagram account and the festival experience, enabling them to provide rich and relevant information.

Data were collected between August 2025 and February 2026 using three complementary techniques: non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher conducted non-participant observation of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject. Observation focused on the types of content uploaded, including photographs, videos, reels, stories, artist announcements, ticket information, promotional materials, and festival documentation. In addition, audience engagement indicators such as comments, likes, shares, and user responses were examined to understand how the account communicates with followers and stimulates audience enthusiasm.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants. This interview format provided flexibility for participants to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to maintain consistency across interviews through predetermined guiding questions. The interviews explored four main areas: (1) participants' perceptions of visual content shared by @thesoundsproject; (2) forms of interaction and engagement with the account; (3) factors contributing to enthusiasm and interest in attending music festivals after exposure to Instagram content; and (4) the role of Instagram in participants' decision-making processes regarding festival attendance. Each interview was recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The interviews provided detailed insights into how participants interpreted Instagram content and how those interpretations influenced their enthusiasm toward music festival participation.

Documentation was used to complement observation and interview data. The collected materials included screenshots of Instagram posts, comments, stories, reels, promotional content, and other digital artifacts related to @thesoundsproject. These documents served as supporting evidence for understanding communication patterns and audience responses within the platform.

The research was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher identified the research problem and reviewed relevant literature concerning social media, Generation Z, music festivals, and MSDT. Second, participant selection was carried out based on predetermined criteria. Third, data collection was conducted through observation of the Instagram account, interviews with participants, and documentation of relevant digital content. Fourth, all collected data were organized and analyzed systematically. Finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature to generate conclusions regarding the role of Instagram in fostering enthusiasm among Generation Z.

The study employed the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, organizing, and simplifying information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. During this stage, irrelevant information was removed while significant themes related to enthusiasm, information seeking, expectation formation, and participation were identified. Following data reduction, the data were presented in descriptive form to facilitate interpretation. Interview excerpts, observational findings, and documentation were organized according to thematic categories that emerged during the analysis process (Miles et al., 2014). The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions. The researcher interpreted patterns and relationships among the data sources to understand how Instagram contributes to the development of enthusiasm and participation among Generation Z. Conclusions were continuously reviewed throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency and accuracy (Miles et al., 2014).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed. Information obtained from interviews was compared with observational findings and documentary evidence collected from the Instagram account. By examining data from multiple sources, the researcher was able to verify the consistency of participant statements and strengthen the validity of the findings. The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation enabled a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and enhanced confidence in the study's conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Instagram as the Primary Source of Information for Generation Z in Seeking Music Festival Information

The findings indicate that Instagram functions as the primary source of information for Generation Z when searching for information related to music festivals, particularly The Sounds Project. Based on observations of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject and interviews with five informants, Instagram is not merely perceived as a social networking platform but as an integrated information ecosystem that provides real-time updates, visual experiences, and opportunities for interaction. The platform's visual-oriented features, including feeds, Stories, Reels, Highlights, and short-form videos, enable festival organizers to communicate information efficiently while simultaneously creating audience engagement.

All informants reported using Instagram on a daily basis and considered it their primary channel for obtaining updates regarding music festivals. Information concerning artist line-ups, ticket sales, venue announcements, event schedules, and festival-related activities was typically accessed through Instagram before any other source.

As explained by IF:

"Every day I use Instagram for many things. Usually, I start by scrolling through Reels, looking at interesting posts, and also searching for event information. Sometimes I use it to refresh myself when I feel tired from work." (IF, November 19, 2025)

Similarly, NA emphasized the accessibility of Instagram:

"I usually use Instagram to see updates from friends, look for inspiration, and entertainment. Besides that, I often use it to search for event information, including music festivals, because it is easy to access." (NA, November 23, 2025)

These statements suggest that Instagram has become deeply embedded within the daily media consumption patterns of Generation Z. Rather than actively searching through websites or traditional media channels, users rely on Instagram because information appears directly within their everyday digital routines.

The visual nature of Instagram was also identified as an important factor influencing information acquisition. Informants argued that festival-related information is more attractive when presented through visual content rather than long textual descriptions. The platform allows organizers to communicate not only factual information but also emotional and experiential aspects of the event.

According to IF:

"Instagram is perfect for sharing festival information because it combines photos, videos, Reels, Stories, and countdown features. Everything can be presented in an attractive way." (IF, November 19, 2025)

Likewise, KDA stated:

"Instagram is easier than having to read information from a website. It immediately shows the atmosphere of the event through visuals. Updates also appear quickly and in real time." (KDA, November 30, 2025)

The findings demonstrate that Instagram serves both informative and interpretive functions. Users do not merely receive information; they use visual content to evaluate the quality, credibility, and attractiveness of a festival before deciding whether to attend.

From the perspective of Media Dependency Theory, these findings reveal a strong cognitive dependency on Instagram. The platform functions as a central information system that shapes users' knowledge and understanding of music festivals. Because Generation Z relies heavily on Instagram to obtain relevant information, the platform significantly influences how audiences perceive and evaluate festival-related experiences.

3.2 Visual Content in Shaping Generation Z's Enthusiasm toward Music Festivals

Another significant finding concerns the role of visual content in generating enthusiasm among Generation Z audiences. The results reveal that visual content posted on @thesoundsproject contributes substantially to audience excitement, anticipation, and emotional engagement with the festival.

The observations show that The Sounds Project consistently utilizes visually appealing content, including teaser posters, line-up announcements, aftermovies, countdown posts, crowd documentation, and artist performances. Such content is carefully designed to create anticipation and encourage users to imagine themselves participating in the event.

IF described the impact of teaser content as follows:

“What makes me excited is when they upload something that looks important, like line-up teasers or ticket announcements. Sometimes even the colors and design already make me curious.” (IF, November 29, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that visual design elements such as colors, typography, and layout communicate meanings beyond the information itself. The aesthetics of the content become indicators that signal the significance of upcoming announcements.

NA also highlighted the emotional impact of visual content:

“The quality of the photos and videos is really good. They are clear, colorful, and attractive. Just from the content, I can already feel the energy of the festival.” (NA, November 23, 2025)

The ability of visual content to evoke emotional responses is particularly important. Although audiences have not yet attended the festival, they begin to imagine the atmosphere, crowd excitement, and overall experience through visual representations. In this sense, Instagram functions as a platform that allows users to experience a symbolic version of the festival before physically attending it.

Furthermore, visual content contributes to building perceptions of professionalism and event quality. ABP noted:

“Good photos and videos show that the event is serious and professionally organized.” (ABP, November 26, 2025)

This finding suggests that visual content serves not only promotional purposes but also credibility-building functions. High-quality content is interpreted as evidence that organizers are capable of delivering a high-quality event experience. The emotional influence of visual content was particularly evident in aftermovie and recap videos. KDA explained:

“Usually, teaser aftermovies make me want to attend again. Even though they are only a few seconds long, they make me curious and excited for the next update.” (KDA, November 30, 2025)

Similarly, RK indicated that visual content often motivates social interaction:

“Usually I share the posts with friends, especially when there is a band we like. My excitement becomes something I want to share.” (RK, November 30, 2025)

The findings suggest that visual content stimulates not only personal excitement but also social engagement. Users actively share information with peers, thereby extending the reach of promotional messages through interpersonal networks.

In relation to Media Dependency Theory, these findings illustrate the affective dimension of media dependency. Instagram becomes a source of emotional gratification by providing excitement, anticipation, and enjoyment. The more users depend on visual content

for emotional experiences related to music festivals, the greater the platform's influence on their attitudes and interests.

3.3 Transformation of Enthusiasm into Actual Participation

One of the most important findings of this study is the transformation of digital enthusiasm into actual festival participation. The results reveal that Instagram does not merely generate interest; it also influences behavioral outcomes, including ticket purchases, festival attendance, and active involvement in festival-related activities.

All informants described a gradual participation process beginning with online engagement and progressing toward offline attendance. Initial forms of participation included liking posts, commenting, sharing content, and reposting information through Instagram Stories.

As IF explained:

"Usually I start by liking, commenting, or sharing posts with friends. If the content is really interesting, then I continue by attending the festival itself." (IF, November 19, 2025)

This indicates that online engagement serves as an early stage in a broader participation process. Social media interactions provide opportunities for users to express interest before making larger commitments.

NA similarly described how Instagram influenced her decision-making:

"After seeing the content, I usually like it or share it with friends. If the content is really attractive, then I buy tickets and attend the festival." (NA, November 23, 2025)

The findings suggest that Instagram plays a significant role in reducing uncertainty. Through continuous exposure to content, audiences gather sufficient information to evaluate whether the event aligns with their interests and expectations.

ABP explained how observing other participants encouraged attendance:

"When I see people really enjoying themselves in the content, I immediately feel like I want to be there too." (ABP, November 26, 2025)

This demonstrates the importance of social proof. Seeing other people enjoying the festival creates a desire to experience similar emotions and social interactions.

KDA emphasized the unique value of offline participation:

"I want to experience the music directly, not just watch videos online." (KDA, November 30, 2025)

She further explained:

"Jumping together, singing together, and feeling the sound system directly are experiences that Instagram can never replace." (KDA, November 30, 2025)

The distinction between online and offline participation emerged consistently throughout the interviews. While Instagram successfully creates anticipation, actual attendance provides sensory, emotional, and social experiences that cannot be fully replicated through digital media.

RK offered an even broader perspective by discussing volunteer participation:

“Online participation is only a form of support. Being there directly, especially as a volunteer, provides a much stronger emotional connection.” (RK, November 30, 2025)

These findings reveal that Instagram serves as a bridge connecting digital engagement and physical participation. Through repeated exposure to information and visual content, audiences gradually develop stronger levels of involvement that culminate in offline participation.

From the perspective of Media Dependency Theory, this reflects the behavioral effects of media dependency. Instagram influences not only how users think and feel about music festivals but also how they behave. The platform becomes an important factor in shaping attendance decisions and encouraging real-world participation.

3.4 Media Dependency and the Sustainability of Interest in Music Festivals

The final theme emerging from the findings concerns the role of Instagram in maintaining long-term interest and participation in The Sounds Project. The interviews indicate that users have developed a substantial dependency on Instagram as a source of continuous engagement with the festival.

IF explained:

“Without the Instagram account, it would be difficult to find information. Instagram is the center of information. It makes the festival feel alive and closer to young people.”

(IF, November 19, 2025)

This statement highlights the extent to which Instagram has become integrated into audiences’ perceptions of the festival itself. The platform does not merely provide information; it sustains the festival’s presence within users’ daily lives.

NA similarly stated:

“Their posts help me build realistic expectations about what I will experience at the festival. Without the content, I would not have such a clear picture.” (NA, November 23, 2025)

ABP described Instagram as a source of motivation:

“Sometimes it makes me excited while waiting for the event. When I am tired from university, their content reminds me that there is something fun coming.” (ABP, November 26, 2025)

KDA reported actively monitoring the account:

“Sometimes I refresh their account just to see the latest updates, especially when the festival is getting closer.” (KDA, November 30, 2025)

Meanwhile, RK observed:

“The closer the festival gets and the more content they post, the more excited I become.” (RK, November 30, 2025)

These findings indicate that Instagram supports sustained engagement by continuously providing information, reminders, anticipation-building content, and emotional stimulation. The platform maintains audience attention long before the festival takes place.

Viewed through Media Dependency Theory, this represents cognitive, affective, and behavioral dependency simultaneously. Cognitively, users depend on Instagram for information; affectively, they depend on it for excitement and anticipation; behaviorally, they depend on it as a guide for participation-related actions. Consequently, Instagram occupies a strategic position in maintaining Generation Z's ongoing relationship with The Sounds Project and contributes significantly to the festival's continued popularity and audience participation.

3.5 Instagram as a Music Festival Information Source for Generation Z

The findings of this study demonstrate that Instagram has become a central information source for Generation Z in obtaining information related to music festivals. This finding reflects the changing media consumption patterns among younger audiences, where social media platforms increasingly replace conventional media and even official websites as primary sources of information. For Generation Z, Instagram is not merely a platform for entertainment and social interaction but also a space where information is discovered, interpreted, and evaluated.

The participants consistently reported using Instagram as their primary source of information regarding The Sounds Project festival. Information concerning line-ups, ticket sales, event schedules, venue details, and promotional activities was primarily obtained through the Instagram account @thesoundsproject. This finding confirms previous studies suggesting that Instagram has evolved beyond a photo-sharing application into a multifunctional information platform capable of disseminating real-time information efficiently (Hakim, 2024).

The prominence of Instagram among Generation Z can be understood through the platform's visual-centered design. Unlike websites that often require deliberate searching and navigation, Instagram delivers information directly through users' feeds, stories, reels, and explore pages. This mechanism enables audiences to encounter festival-related content effortlessly during their daily social media activities. Consequently, information consumption becomes integrated into routine media use.

The findings also indicate that Instagram's effectiveness lies in its ability to combine visual attractiveness with informational value. Participants emphasized that photos, videos, reels, countdowns, and interactive stories made festival-related information easier to understand and more appealing. Such characteristics align closely with Generation Z's communication preferences, which favor concise, visually engaging, and immediately accessible content.

From the perspective of MSDT, these findings illustrate a strong cognitive dependency relationship between Generation Z and Instagram. Media dependency occurs when individuals rely on a particular medium to fulfill important needs related to understanding their social environment (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In this study, Instagram fulfills informational needs by providing comprehensive and up-to-date information regarding music festivals. As a result, users increasingly depend on the platform to make sense of festival-related opportunities and experiences.

The findings further reveal that Instagram functions not only as a source of information but also as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty. Before deciding whether to attend a festival,

participants actively monitored Instagram content to obtain information regarding performers, venue conditions, crowd management, ticket availability, and previous festival experiences. Such information helped them evaluate potential risks and benefits associated with participation. This process reflects the role of media in guiding audience orientation and decision-making processes, as suggested by MSDT.

Moreover, the findings support previous research by Sinaga & Nindi (2023), which found that Instagram contributes significantly to audience engagement in music festivals through visual and interactive communication strategies. However, this study extends prior findings by demonstrating that Instagram's role extends beyond engagement and promotion. Instagram also serves as an informational infrastructure that shapes perceptions, expectations, and eventual participation decisions among Generation Z.

Therefore, Instagram can be understood as a highly influential communication medium within the contemporary music festival ecosystem. Its effectiveness stems not only from its technological features but also from its compatibility with the information-seeking behaviors and media consumption habits of Generation Z. As a result, Instagram occupies a central position in connecting festival organizers and audiences, making it an indispensable component of modern festival communication strategies.

3.6 Visual Content as a Catalyst for Generation Z's Festival Enthusiasm

A major finding of this study is the significant role of visual content in stimulating enthusiasm among Generation Z audiences. The visual materials shared through @thesoundsproject including teaser line-ups, promotional posters, aftermovies, audience documentation, artist announcements, and festival highlights were consistently identified by participants as major sources of excitement and anticipation.

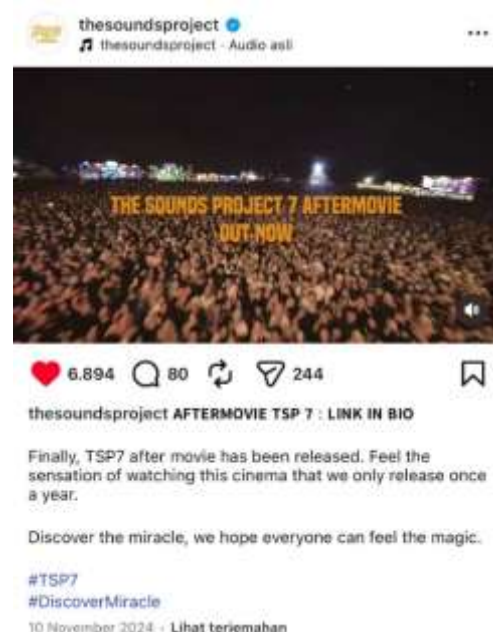


Figure 1. *Aftermovie Teaser from The Sounds Project*

Visual communication has become increasingly important in digital environments because audiences are often exposed to vast amounts of information within limited periods of attention. Consequently, visual content functions as an effective mechanism for attracting attention and creating memorable impressions. According to Ideoworks (2021), visual content communicates information through images, videos, illustrations, animations, and other graphical forms that enhance audience engagement and understanding.

The present findings reveal that visual content operates on multiple psychological levels. At the cognitive level, visual content provides information about festival attributes, including performers, venues, schedules, and festival identity. Participants indicated that visually appealing content facilitated their understanding of festival offerings and reduced informational complexity. Rather than reading lengthy descriptions, audiences could quickly comprehend essential information through carefully designed visual materials.

At the affective level, visual content plays an even more significant role. Participants repeatedly described feelings of excitement, curiosity, anticipation, and emotional attachment after viewing festival-related content. Images depicting enthusiastic crowds, spectacular stage designs, artist performances, and joyful social interactions allowed participants to imagine themselves within the festival environment. Such emotional responses emerged even before actual attendance occurred.

This finding supports Walter & Gioglio's (2014) argument that visual content possesses a stronger capacity to attract audience attention and evoke emotional responses compared to text-based communication. The emotional dimension of visual content is particularly relevant within music festival contexts because festivals are inherently experiential events. Audiences are not merely purchasing access to musical performances; they are investing in anticipated emotional experiences and social memories.

The findings also reveal that visual content contributes significantly to perceived credibility and trustworthiness. Participants frequently interpreted high-quality visuals as indicators of professional event management. Well-produced posters, videos, and aftermovies were perceived as evidence that organizers were serious, competent, and capable of delivering high-quality festival experiences. Consequently, visual content reduced uncertainty and strengthened audience confidence regarding attendance decisions.



Figure 2. The Sounds Project Post in Instagram

This finding aligns with previous research conducted by Hanindharputri & Pradnyanita (2021), which demonstrated that consistent visual branding contributes to stronger audience attachment and festival identity formation. In the case of The Sounds Project, visual consistency appears to create recognizable aesthetic characteristics that reinforce audience familiarity and trust over time.

From the perspective of MSDT, visual content influences cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously. Cognitively, audiences acquire information and knowledge. Affectively, they develop emotional attachment and enthusiasm. Behaviorally, these emotional and cognitive responses eventually motivate concrete actions. This multidimensional influence explains why visual content functions as a powerful catalyst for participation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that visual content encourages social interaction among Generation Z audiences. Participants frequently reported sharing festival-related posts, reposting stories, discussing line-ups with friends, and recommending events to peers. Such behaviors demonstrate that visual content stimulates not only individual enthusiasm but also collective excitement within social networks. Through sharing practices, audiences become

active participants in the communication process rather than passive recipients of promotional messages.

Consequently, visual content should be understood as more than a promotional tool. It functions as a mechanism for creating emotional engagement, fostering social interaction, building trust, and ultimately stimulating participation. These findings reinforce the notion that successful music festival communication increasingly depends upon the strategic use of visual storytelling capable of connecting audiences emotionally with anticipated festival experiences.

3.7 Instagram as a Platform for Expectation Formation, Experience Visualization, and Festival Evaluation

Beyond its informational and promotional functions, Instagram plays a broader role in shaping audience expectations and decision-making processes. The findings reveal that participants actively used Instagram to construct expectations regarding festival experiences, visualize potential participation, and evaluate event quality before committing to attendance.

Expectation formation emerged as a particularly important process. Before attending The Sounds Project, participants consumed various forms of content, including line-up announcements, countdown posts, venue previews, artist promotions, audience testimonials, and festival recap videos. These materials collectively contributed to mental representations of what the festival experience would entail.

According to Oliver (1980) individuals develop expectations prior to consuming products or experiences. These expectations subsequently influence satisfaction evaluations after actual consumption. The present findings suggest that Instagram serves as a primary source through which festival-related expectations are formed. Consequently, the platform indirectly influences future satisfaction by shaping pre-event perceptions.

Instagram also functions as a visualization tool. Participants reported that visual materials enabled them to imagine festival atmospheres before attending. Through photos and videos showing audience interactions, stage performances, lighting effects, and festival environments, users developed mental simulations of anticipated experiences. These simulations reduced uncertainty and increased psychological readiness for participation.

This finding is consistent with Chung et al. (2017), who found that Instagram facilitates expectation formation through visual exploration and information seeking. While their study focused on tourism destinations, similar mechanisms appear applicable to music festivals. In both contexts, users rely on visual representations to anticipate future experiences and assess their attractiveness.

Another important finding concerns Instagram's evaluative function. Participants did not consume content passively; instead, they actively assessed festival quality using available information. Recap videos, testimonials, audience comments, and visual documentation served as evaluation tools that helped participants determine whether a festival was worth attending.

This evaluative behavior reflects a sophisticated form of media use among Generation Z. Rather than accepting promotional messages uncritically, audiences engage in active interpretation and comparison processes. They examine evidence provided through Instagram and use that information to assess organizational professionalism, crowd management, venue quality, safety conditions, and overall festival value.

The findings suggest that Instagram facilitates a form of digital risk assessment. Before investing time and money in festival attendance, participants used Instagram to evaluate whether the anticipated benefits justified potential costs. Through this process, Instagram functions as an intermediary between promotional communication and consumer decision-making.

Importantly, the evaluative role of Instagram extends beyond pre-event decision-making. After attending festivals, participants continued using Instagram to compare their experiences with content representations. This ongoing process contributed to the reinforcement or revision of perceptions regarding festival quality and authenticity.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Instagram performs multiple interconnected functions throughout the festival participation journey. It informs audiences, stimulates enthusiasm, shapes expectations, visualizes experiences, facilitates evaluation, and supports decision-making processes. Such findings highlight Instagram's role as a comprehensive communication ecosystem rather than a simple promotional platform.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that Instagram has become deeply embedded within the music festival experiences of Generation Z. The platform influences how audiences discover festivals, interpret information, imagine experiences, evaluate opportunities, and make participation decisions. These findings reinforce the importance of social media as a meaning-making space where digital interactions shape real-world cultural participation. In the case of The Sounds Project, Instagram serves not only as a communication channel but also as a bridge connecting digital enthusiasm with actual festival attendance among Generation Z.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of Instagram, particularly the @thesoundsproject account, in fostering Generation Z's enthusiasm and participation in music festivals. The findings demonstrate that Instagram functions as more than a promotional platform; it serves as a primary information source, an expectation-building medium, an evaluative tool, and a catalyst for audience participation. Through its visual, interactive, and real-time communication features, Instagram enables Generation Z to access festival-related information efficiently while simultaneously developing emotional connections with festival experiences.

The findings support MSDT, which suggests that individuals become increasingly dependent on media systems that effectively satisfy their informational and social needs. In this study, Generation Z demonstrated a strong reliance on Instagram for understanding, evaluating, and engaging with music festival content. Instagram not only provided cognitive benefits through information acquisition but also generated affective responses such as excitement, curiosity, and anticipation. These emotional responses subsequently influenced behavioral outcomes, including content sharing, ticket purchasing, and direct festival attendance.

Another important finding is the significant role of visual content in transforming digital enthusiasm into actual participation. Visual elements such as line-up announcements, promotional posters, audience documentation, and aftermovies enabled participants to imagine festival experiences before attendance. These visual representations contributed to expectation formation, reduced uncertainty, and strengthened confidence in attendance decisions. Instagram therefore functions as a bridge connecting online engagement and offline participation among Generation Z music festival audiences.

This study also highlights Instagram's role as an evaluative platform. Participants actively used festival-related content, audience testimonials, comments, and recap videos to assess festival quality, safety, accessibility, and overall value. This finding suggests that Generation Z audiences are not passive consumers of social media content; rather, they actively interpret and evaluate available information before making participation decisions.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved only five informants, limiting the generalizability of the findings to the broader Generation Z population. Second, the research focused exclusively on followers of the Instagram account @thesoundsproject, which may not fully represent audiences who obtain festival information through other channels or social media platforms. Third, the study adopted a qualitative approach that emphasized participants' subjective experiences and perceptions. While this approach provided rich and in-depth insights, it did not allow for statistical measurement of the magnitude of Instagram's influence on participation behavior. Finally, the study examined a single music festival context, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other cultural events or festival settings. These limitations provide opportunities for future research. Subsequent studies may employ quantitative methods to examine the relationship between visual content exposure, audience engagement, purchase intention, and festival participation on a larger scale. Comparative studies involving different social media platforms, such as TikTok, X, or YouTube, may also provide a broader understanding of how digital platforms shape audience behavior in contemporary music festival environments. Additionally, future research may investigate different festival contexts to explore whether similar patterns of media dependency and participation emerge across diverse cultural and entertainment settings.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media, audience engagement, and festival communication by demonstrating how Instagram operates as a strategic communication ecosystem that shapes knowledge, emotions, expectations, evaluations, and participation among Generation Z audiences. The findings underscore the importance of visual social media platforms in connecting digital experiences with real-world cultural participation in contemporary society.

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