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Measuring the dimensions of event experiences: applying the Event Experience Scale to cultural events

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ABSTRACT
This paper applies the Event Experiences Scale (EES) to seven cultural events in different countries with the aim of identifying generic dimensions of event experience. Exploratory factor analysis indicated the presence of four experience dimensions: cognitive engagement, affective engagement, physical engagement and novelty. These broadly reflect the four dimensions found in the original EES study [de Geus, S., Richards, G., & Toepoel, V. (2016). Conceptualisation and operationalisation of event and festival experiences: Creation of an event experience scale. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, *16*(3), 274–296]. In the cultural events analysed here, the cognitive dimension is strongest, followed by affective engagement, novelty and finally physical engagement. The experience dimensions are shown to vary significantly between visitor groups (particularly in terms of age) and by event location or context. Analysis of social media use shows that experiences also vary significantly through the stages of the 'event journey', with affective engagement being particularly prominent during and after the event.

KEYWORDS
Events; experiences; experience engagement; event visitors; event journey; social media

Introduction

Many studies have placed experiences at the core of events. Not only are experiences seen as the major output of events themselves, but the growing number of events is also taken as one sign of the rise of the experience economy. However, determining what the experience of events is, or how different participants experience events, is more complex. Experiences themselves are multifaceted, and the way in which individuals experience things is personalised. Not surprisingly, therefore, many previous studies of event experiences have tended to treat the experience itself as a black box, concentrating on the outcomes of experiences, such as satisfaction and intention to return (Richards, 2019). This paper argues that it is important to try and open up the black box of event experiences to better understand what experiences are, how different people experience events, and what effects these experiences have on visitor behaviour.

In order to shed more light on these issues, the Association for Tourism and Leisure Research and Education (ATLAS) Event Experiences Project was established in 2015 (2019). The basic aim of this project was to develop measuring tools that would facilitate

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the analysis and comparison of event experiences across different types of events and between different locations. The project now incorporates 23 researchers working across 19 countries. Studies of visitor experiences have been conducted at 12 events, yielding a total of almost 3700 surveys. In most cases, the analyses of these data have been based on individual events (Barrera-Fernández & Hernández-Escampa, 2017; Barrera-Fernández, Hernández-Escampa, Morales-Basaldú, & Hernández Gómez, 2019; Coetzee, Lee, & Faisal, 2019; Lee & Coetzee, 2017). These studies have indicated that the EES instrument can be useful for studying experiences of visitors to both cultural and sporting events.

Some work has also been done to compare different events using the EES. For example, Richards (2017) analysed events from four countries (Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, and the U.K.), and found that each event had a distinctive 'experience footprint' that emphasised different dimensions of the visitor experience. For example, Carnival in Brazil scored highest on affect, related to emotional excitement, whereas an arts festival in Mexico scored highest on the cognitive dimension. Levels of active involvement also varied greatly, with Carnival scoring relatively low and an e-gaming event in the U.K. scoring highest. This reflects the role of most Brazilian carnival-goers as spectators of parades. Carnival also scored low in terms of novelty, related to the regular celebration of carnival among the respondents. This indicates that the experience will not only depend on the personal characteristics of the visitor, but also the context provided by different types of events.

In this paper, we develop the analysis of experiences across different cultural events in more detail, in particular, considering how event experiences are shaped by the event context as well as the characteristics of visitors. We also consider how the experience of the event may differ across the temporal phases of the event, as reflected in the communication of event visitors via social media. The analysis seeks to address the following research questions:

(1) Can generic experience dimensions be identified across a range of cultural events?
(2) What are the roles of event context and event antecedents in event experiences?
(3) How does the event experience vary between different phases of the visitor event journey?

Literature review

The literature review examines previous studies that have attempted to measure event experiences quantitatively, in terms of approach and the different types of event contexts in which they have been applied. We then consider the issue of developing a more generic approach to experience measurement, drawing on previous studies that have used the Event Experience Scale (EES).

Experiences are at the core of special events, because the experience of being there is essentially what drives attendance (Getz, 2008). As de Geus, Richards, and Toepoel (2016) and Richards (2019) suggest, however, the actual experience that visitors have during an event is relatively rarely examined in detail. Usually, the experience itself is treated as a 'black box', and the research focusses on the antecedents of the experience (who attends and why) or the outcomes (satisfaction, intention to return, etc.). But in order to better understand the experiences visitors have during events, it is important to study the core of the event experience itself. This is a major challenge because of the complexity of event experiences, and the fact that it is often difficult to collect data from event visitors during the core experience. This has led to a search for adequate experience measurement tools for events, including a number of qualitative approaches (e.g. Holloway, Brown, & Shipway, 2010; Van Winkle & Bueddefeld, 2016) as well as the development of a number of scales for measuring event experiences.

The majority of the measurement tools that have been developed use surveys containing measurement scales, and these surveys are usually implemented at one specific type of events. These include sporting events (Aicher, Karadakis, & Eddosary, 2015; Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Assollant, & Kada, 2011), culinary events (Smith & Costello, 2009a; 2009b), and community events (Ayob, Wahid, & Omar, 2013). Such quantitative approaches have also been widely used to assess the perceived quality of experience (Tkaczynski & Stokes, 2010) or events as a whole (Armbrecht, 2019). Such studies add to our understanding of event experiences in specific contexts, but have not been used to compare the experiences of different types of events or the experience of similar events in different places.

Many previous studies have concentrated on the antecedents of event experiences, particularly in terms of the role of motivations in influencing event attendance.

For example, Pegg and Patterson (2010) analysed the relationship between visitor motivations and the desired experience at the Tamworth Country Music Festival in Australia. Significant differences were found in terms of the motivations of visitors and the satisfaction with the festival experience. Interviews with attendees also indicated that the variety of content and the atmosphere of the event were important factors increasing satisfaction. In other cases, however, studies examining the motivations of event visitors have concentrated on motivations without linking these to any measurement of experience dimensions (e.g. Lee, Kang, & Lee, 2013; Scott, 1995).

In many other studies, researchers have tried to link antecedents such as motivations with outcomes such as satisfaction, but without analysing actual experiences that link these two (e.g. Dickson, Darcy, Edwards, & Terwiel, 2015; Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Kirkup & Sutherland, 2017; Lee, Reisinger, Kim, & Yoon, 2014; Savinovic, Kim, & Long, 2012; Smith & Costello, 2009a; Smith, Costello, & Muenchen, 2010). These studies adopt what de Geus et al. (2016) refer to as the 'black box' approach to experiences – trying to link experience antecedents and outcomes without analysing the core experience itself.

Relatively few studies have therefore been able to link the antecedents, experiences, and outcomes of events. Wong and Tang (2016) tried to account for the role of event experience in linking motivation and loyalty. Their findings show a partial mediation of event experience between motivation and loyalty. However, their operationalisation of experience was not very developed. They only measured atmosphere, uniqueness and satisfaction as dimensions of event experience, and in placing satisfaction as an aspect of experience, they seem to have mixed experience and experience outcomes.

This review suggests that few measurement tools have yet been developed for comprehensively analysing experiences across different event contexts. Arguably, what is needed is a generic measure of event experiences, and this in turn should be based on a sound understanding of the nature of event experiences. To this end, we have drawn from a body of recent work on the nature of event experiences, as well as more general work on visitor experiences, to develop a measurement framework.

In the area of visitor studies, Packer and Ballantyne suggested (2016, p. 133) that the visitor experience has four defining characteristics:

(1) inherently personal and subjective (not directly observable);
(2) responsive to (influenced or triggered by, but distinct from) external or staged activities, settings, or events;
(3) bounded in time and space; and
(4) significant to the visitor (noticeably different from everyday life).

On the basis of these characteristics, Packer and Ballantyne's (2016, p. 133) definition of visitor experience is 'an individual's immediate or ongoing, subjective and personal response to an activity, setting or event outside of their usual environment'. This definition seems to fit the event context, particularly as the 'special' nature of events is often emphasised (Axelsen, 2006; Getz, 1989; Jackson, Morgan, & Laws, 2018). Packer and Ballantyne's approach is useful in recognising the experience as 'noticeably different from everyday life'. Because the event experience is seen as 'special', we need to understand not just the event experience itself but also the context in which it is produced. This implies knowing about the characteristics of the event, but also what the event visitor themselves contributes to the event experience in terms of their knowledge, previous experience, or who they are socialising with at the event (de Geus et al., 2016). Because the experience of each visitor is different, it is important to understand how experiences affect the outputs or consequences of the experience as well. As Packer and Ballantyne (2016) put it:

> To understand the nature and process of the visitor experience it is necessary to first conceptually isolate the visitor experience from its antecedents (both external and internal) and consequences (psychological, social, behavioral, economic, and environmental), and then systematically examine the links between them. (p. 136)

In the current study, we also attempt to address the challenge posed by Packer and Ballantyne (2016) by using the EES as a tool to examine the antecedents and consequences of actual event experiences in different contexts.

In the current study, we concentrate on the experience of cultural events, which are important in terms of the externalities they generate, not only in terms of cultural policy and creativity, but also in generating social cohesion, economic impacts and image effects (Richards & Palmer, 2010). Understanding the experience of cultural event visitors is therefore important for cities and regions in maximising such impacts and effects.

Background to the EES

In their original application of the EES, de Geus et al. (2016) identified the three 'classic' dimensions: cognitive engagement, physical engagement (conative), and affective engagement dimensions, which have previously been widely recognised in the literature (see review by Getz, 2008). In addition, they found a 'novelty' dimension of event experience, which they attributed to the special setting of events outside the everyday life of visitors.

The importance of novelty in experiences has also been identified at visitor attractions (Lee & Crompton, 1992), and Mitas and Bastiaansen (2018, p. 99) argue that 'novelty is somehow fundamental to the experience of tourism'. In the case of events, the experience of novelty can relate to the event content, whether new elements are incorporated into the event design, programme or setting, but also to the visitor, and their previous experience and knowledge of the event. This also underlines, as Packer and Ballantyne (2016) argue, the importance of measuring the entire 'visitor journey' from the antecedents of the visit, through the event experience, to their satisfaction and sharing of the event afterwards (outcomes).

de Geus et al. (2016) developed the original EES through a literature review, expert review, and testing with a consumer panel. The resulting scale was first tested by Geurtsen (2014) in an event setting in a study of the 'multi-phase' nature of event experiences. She found that the four factors identified by de Geus et al. could be identified. She also measured the variation in the strength of experience dimensions at different stages in the event 'journey', which covers the total event experience over time in terms of (a) an anticipation, (b) travel to the site, (c) the on-site activity, (d) return travel, and (e) recollection.

Following the initial development of the EES, the measurement instrument was field tested at a number of events in different countries by members of the ATLAS Events Group (Barrera-Fernández & Hernández-Escampa, 2017; Barrera-Fernández, Hernández-Escampa, & Arista-Castillo, 2016; Coetzee et al., 2019). These studies indicated that the four basic dimensions of event experiences measured by the EES have some general validity, and that the scale can be used across different types of events. So far, however, few comparisons have been made of EES results in different contexts. Comparing visitor experiences across different types of events and locations is therefore one of the main aims of the current paper.

Methods

Following the methodology of the previous EES research, the current study takes a quantitative approach to analysing visitor experiences, since this is considered to be appropriate for comparing different events. This study is based on data collected via the standard EES questionnaire, which includes the 18-item EES (de Geus et al., 2016). The questions on which the EES is based are indicated in Table 2. In addition to the experience scale, the surveys included questions on event experience antecedents and outcomes, covering reasons for attending, information sources used, use of social media, previous visits to the event, overall evaluation of event and satisfaction, expenditure, and socio-demographic profile (age, education, occupation, and media use). The antecedents of the event experience were operationalised through questions on visitor background, including gender, age, and education. The experience outcome addressed in the current study is the visitor use of social media. Visitors were asked whether they had shared any information about the event they had visited either before, during, or after the event. They were also asked to specify which media they had used from a list of major social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube). This allowed the effects of the event experience on information sharing to be assessed in terms of the anticipation of the event, the live event experience, and the sharing of memories and impressions after the event.

Table 1. Profile of ESS survey events.

Country	Date	Event	Cultural content	Number of surveys
Mexico	2015	Festival Internacional Cervantino, Guanajuato	City arts festival including opera, music, dance, theatre, street spectaculars, visual arts, film and literature. https://www.festivalcervantino.gob.mx/	230
Brazil	2016	Carnival, Recife, Pernambuco	Carnival celebrations in the city of Recife with street parades, music and dancing. http://www.programacaocarnavalrecife.com.br/	255
U.S.A.	2016	John Coltrane International Jazz and Blues Festival, High Point, North Carolina	Jazz and blues music festival based on the works of John Coltrane. https://coltranejazzfest.com/	272
Portugal	2016	Gastronomy events, Minho Region, Northern Portugal	Gastronomic events in different towns and villages, with food tastings, music and popular culture displays. https://www.facebook.com/feiradoporco	223
Romania	2016	Folk festivals in Bucovina (North East Romania)	Egg Painting Festival in Ciocanesti and the Folk Dance Festival in Frasin. https://explorebucovina.com/the-national-festival-of-painted-eggs/	98
Bulgaria	2016	International Festival of Masquerade Games 'Surva', Pernik	Show of carnival masquerade groups from Bulgaria and abroad, with music, dancing and parades. http://en.surva.org/	71
U.K.	2016	B-Side Arts Festival, Portland, Dorset	Arts festival that explores the relationship between people and place in a rural setting. https://b-side.org.uk/	109
Total				1258

The EES was implemented by members of the ATLAS Events Group at seven cultural events in Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, U.K., and the U.S.A. (see Table 1). The events varied in type from music festivals to heritage and arts events, giving an opportunity to examine visitor experiences in different event contexts. There are large differences between the events in terms of content (music, theatre, parades, etc.) and also in terms of physical setting. Carnival in Recife is located in the centre of a large city, but

Table 2 . EFA and dimensions of event experience.

	Cognitive engagement	Affective engagement	Physical engagement	Novelty	Communalities
I was thinking	0.750				0.645
I used my intellect	0.779				0.745
I learned something	0.811				0.765
I acquired new knowledge	0.767				0.689
I was active	0.534				0.442
I was excited		0.673			0.642
I got emotionally recharged		0.758			0.648
I experienced intimacy		0.695			0.523
I felt a sense of adventure		0.676			0.569
I was aware of my own values		0.665			0.517
I wanted to relive this later (talk about it/show pictures)		0.566			0.526
I did not actively participate			0.841		0.717
I was not being creative			0.845		0.729
This event was different from others				0.734	0.623
I was outside my 'normal life'				0.736	0.613
I thought this was unique				0.701	0.577

most of the events surveyed are in smaller cities or rural areas. Some of the events, such as Carnival or the Masquerade Festival, are based on festive celebration and parades, whereas the Jazz Festival, the food festivals, and the B-Side Arts Festival have a more singular focus on a specific form of content. These contextual factors are expected to have a significant influence on the visitor experience.

Visitors were predominantly surveyed in person at the event itself, although at a few sites email addresses were also collected for visitors to complete a web survey after the event. In order to ensure consistency of data collection as far as possible, a set of standard instructions were developed for the fieldwork teams. These included instructions on selection of respondents, conduct of the surveys, and instructions to provide to respondents on completing the survey.

The limited time available for data collection at the events meant that a convenience sample of event visitors was taken on exiting each event, with the 'next visitor to leave' method being used to select respondents. By surveying immediately after the event, the effect of memory-based bias was reduced. At most events, data collection was undertaken by survey staff using paper versions of the EES survey. Where needed, the surveys were translated into local languages, and pilot surveys were conducted to ensure the legibility and comprehension of the questions. No significant issues in this regard were reported by the survey staff. Missing data were examined to ensure that the dataset was adequate for analysis, and no evident pattern in the distribution of missing values was discerned.

Data analysis

The data analysis included reliability testing of the EES, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify latent experience dimensions and analysis of variance to test differences in the resulting factors across different event contexts and between visitor groups. These analyses enabled us to address the question of whether there were generic experience dimensions across different events, and to relate these to event antecedents and outcomes.

The reliability of the EES was tested using Cronbach's alpha for the full 18 item scale. The alpha score of 0.878 was indicative of internal consistency. The analysis indicated little improvement in Cronbach's alpha if items were deleted, so all 18 items were initially retained for further analysis. An EFA was then undertaken on the scale elements to identify the underlying experience dimensions emerging from the initial data collection (Table 2). Principal components factor analysis was used with an oblique rotation because it was believed that the dimensions were somewhat distinct, but not completely independent of each other. The initial EFA indicated two items ('I reflected on ideas that I got and discussed this with others', 'I was interpreting things for myself') that loaded on more than one dimension, and these were eliminated. The EFA with the remaining 16 items had a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of 0.870 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also good (Chi-Square = 4564.2, df = 105, sig. = 0.000). The rotated component matrix indicated a four-factor solution, equating to four experience dimensions. These four dimensions accounted for 62% of the variance. We labelled these factors as cognitive engagement (Factor 1), affective engagement (Factor 2), physical engagement (Factor 3), and experiencing novelty (Factor 4). These factors closely reflect the solution developed by de Geus et al. (2016).

Across all survey events, the average reported scores were highest for cognitive engagement (5.34), followed by novelty (5.22), affective engagement (5.11), and finally physical engagement (4.44) (Table 3). The importance of the cognitive dimension was not the result expected on the basis of recent studies underlining the key role of affective engagement in experiences (Bastiaansen et al., 2019). However, in the case of cultural attractions, cognitive processing, and particularly, in terms of learning, has long been seen as one of the building blocks of cultural experiences (Richards, 2001). The generic importance of learning is perhaps reflected in the finding that there was no significant difference in learning as a motivation between the events. The high scores for experience novelty might be expected in the case of events, which are often designed to provide new and innovative experiences. This also links with the finding of de Geus et al. (2016) that novelty was a distinct element of event experiences. Interestingly, it emerged from the analysis that the novelty dimension is scored significantly higher by repeat visitors than first-time visitors. This reflects the findings of Richards (2017) that novelty tended to be less important for first-time event visitors, becoming more intense after two or three visits to the same event. There were also no differences in the experience of novelty for local residents and those visiting the area of the event.

Table 3. Sample composition and experience dimension scores by visitor background and country of event location.

	n	Affective engagement	Cognitive engagement	Physical engagement	Novelty
Gender					
Male	534	5.09	5.28	4.53	5.22
Female	589	5.19	5.25	4.30	5.12
F		1.49	0.11	4.71	1.22
Sig.		0.22	0.74	0.03*	0.27
Education level					
Primary school	53	5.05	4.96	4.18	5.39
Secondary school	131	5.25	5.45	4.00	5.44
Further education	264	5.20	5.26	4.25	5.13
Bachelor degree	546	5.18	5.23	4.56	5.11
Postgraduate	161	4.92	5.35	4.40	5.16
F		1.303	1.567	3.252	1.662
Sig.		0.267	0.181	0.012*	0.157
Age group					
15 or younger	15	5.03	5.22	4.67	4.67
16–19	75	4.98	5.25	4.61	5.39
20–29	374	5.28	5.40	4.58	5.34
30–39	262	5.29	5.16	4.01	5.13
40–49	166	4.97	5.10	4.31	4.98
50–59	142	5.00	5.27	4.63	5.02
60 or over	116	4.95	5.31	4.21	5.14
F		2.215	1.498	3.560	2.190
Sig.		0.039*	0.176	0.002**	0.042*
Event location					
Portugal	223	4.77	4.92	3.83	4.96
Brazil	255	5.45	4.78	4.12	4.82
Mexico	230	5.52	5.69	4.70	5.42
U.K.	109	4.71	5.44	4.95	5.34
U.S.A.	272	4.88	5.38	4.62	5.04
Romania	98	5.35	5.22	3.68	5.35
Bulgaria	71	5.84	5.40	4.93	5.67
F		13.88	11.96	12.19	5.78
Sig.		0.00***	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

These findings may indicate that each edition of an event can provide new experiences, even for those who visit more regularly.

The analysis of the experience dimensions across visitor groups indicated some significant differences. For example, levels of cognitive involvement increased with higher education levels, indicating a greater desire for learning and new information among the more educated. Conversely, levels of physical involvement were lower for those with professional or managerial positions and significantly higher for manual workers and service and sales personnel. This indicates that the higher socio-economic groups tend to have less physical involvement, but more cognitive involvement.

There were significant differences in the scores across all the experience dimensions according to the location of the event. Respondents in Bulgaria and Mexico score significantly higher on the affective dimension than other respondents, whereas respondents in Portugal report the lowest score for affect. Cognitive engagement is scored highest in Mexico and the U.S.A., and the novelty dimension scores highest in Bulgaria. Looking at the types of events in each location, there is clearly an effect of the type of event. Arts events, such as the Coltrane Festival in the U.S.A. or the Cervantino Festival in Mexico, have a high level of cognitive engagement. Both of these events also have a high level of affective engagement, in contrast to the more abstract artistic content of the B-Side Festival in the U.K.

The analysis of social media use at different stages in the 'event journey' also shows that the sharing of information is related to the event experience. Those sharing information before the event accounted for 22.3% of all visitors, those sharing during the event 30.8% and those sharing on social media after the event 15.5%. This seems to suggest a concentration of social media sharing during the event, which might be generated by the 'peak experience' (Quan & Wang, 2004) of the event. The importance of 'being there' at the event, coupled perhaps with a desire to emphasise their presence to those who are not, seems to drive a peak of communication during this phase. However, social media use before the event is related to higher experience scores than during the event, but scores then increase again for those using social media after the event (Table 4). In the pre-event phase, all experience dimensions score significantly higher for those using social media to share information before the event than those who did not. Those using social media during and after the event only scored higher for affective engagement. This suggests that affective engagement is the most important experience aspect of events as far as social media communication is concerned. Those who report higher levels of affective engagement tended to communicate at all phases of the event, whereas those who are more cognitively engaged or experiencing novelty are only more likely to use social media in the pre-event phase. This may indicate a difference between the anticipation of the event, which is related to all aspects of the event

Table 4. Experience dimension scores and social media use before, during and after the event.

	Affective engagement	Cognitive engagement	Physical engagement	Novelty	Total engagement score
Before	5.55***	5.54***	4.62**	5.34*	21.06
During	5.38***	5.19	4.35	5.17	20.09
After	5.67***	5.37	4.44	5.38*	20.85

Note: Total engagement score calculated as the sum of the scores on each experience dimension.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

experience, whereas use of social media during the event is only significantly related to affective engagement, and after the event to affective engagement and novelty. The total experience scores are highest for those sharing information in the pre-event phase, falling for those sharing during the experience itself and finally rising again for those sharing after the event. These patterns suggest a strong influence of anticipation on the form of engagement in the event experience, with all experience dimensions being involved in stimulating communication. Once at the event, affective engagement becomes the most important in terms of sharing with others, but after the event reflection on the experience may highlight memories not just emotionally, but also a reflection on the novel aspects of the event experience.

We also found significant differences in the scores on the experience dimensions according to the specific social media used to communicate about the event (Table 5). The highest scores on all four dimensions of experience were recorded by users of Snapchat and Instagram, which are both rapid, visually orientated media. In contrast, there were no significant differences in the scores across experience dimensions for Facebook and YouTube. Twitter users tended to score significantly higher on the affective dimension of experience, whereas LinkedIn, which tends to be used more for business networking, scored significantly lower in terms of cognitive engagement and had the lowest total engagement score.

Discussion and conclusions

This analysis of experiences across a range of different event contexts confirms the generic nature of four dimensions of experience. The strength of these dimensions varies according to the characteristics of the visitors and the specific context and content of the event. These results match the suggestion made by de Geus et al. (2016) and Packer and Ballantyne (2016) that visitor experiences comprise both individual, personal aspects of engagement as well as elements related to event context. In spite of the variations noted in the strength of the different experience dimensions between events, the EES did provide a generic picture of the event experience, with the same four dimensions emerging as in previous research (Coetzee et al., 2019; de Geus et al., 2016). This suggests that the EES can provide a useful tool for measuring event experiences across different types of events and different event locations.

However, the strength of the different experience dimensions did not match our expectations on the basis of the literature review. Much recent research has underlined the importance of affective engagement in experiences, but this was not the experience

Table 5. Experience dimensions by social media use.

	Affective engagement	Cognitive engagement	Physical engagement	Novelty	Total engagement score
Snapchat	5.76**	5.45	4.74*	5.46	21.37
Instagram	5.63***	5.28	4.50*	5.30	20.71
Twitter	5.53***	5.38*	4.26	5.06**	20.22
Facebook	5.38	5.30	4.37	5.15	20.21
YouTube	5.16	5.40	4.26	4.84	19.66
LinkedIn	3.58***	4.16*	4.75	3.62**	16.12

Note: Total engagement score calculated as the sum of the scores on each experience dimension.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

element that made the strongest impression on cultural event visitors. Instead, the cognitive engagement dimension of experience scored highest, followed by novelty. The importance of cognitive experience seems to stem from the desire of visitors to cultural events to learn new things and acquire new knowledge. Inducing learning effects and generating new ways of looking at things are also often important policy aims of event programmes (Richards & Palmer, 2010). This may also explain the strong role of novelty in cultural event experiences, since the processing of cognitive information will often provide the basis for visitors to determine if an experience is novel for them. Although affective engagement did not produce the highest experience scores, it was important in differentiating the experiences of individual visitors. This emphasises the individual basis of event experiences, and the fact that similar cues provided by the event context will produce different emotional reactions in members of the audience. We also found that affective experiences were most likely to generate outcomes in terms of social media postings. This may be important to consider in researching cultural events, since these results suggest that even though cognitive engagement levels are higher than affective engagement, the latter is more important in affecting outcomes.

The results also support the argument that cultural event experiences are influenced both by the individual characteristics of the visitor, and the context of the event in terms of factors such as content, programming, and physical setting. A comparison of different cultural events shows that the type of cultural content and the way in which this is presented will influence the eventual experience of visitors. For example, in this study, arts events had higher levels of cognitive engagement than those related to popular culture, whereas popular culture events tended to score higher in terms of affect. This seems to indicate that the type of cultural content is important, as well as the way in which audiences are engaged in and connected to local culture.

We also found indications that event experiences tend to vary throughout the event journey. However, our findings contrast to those of Geurtsen (2014). She found that affective engagement was most significant before and after the event, and cognitive engagement during the event itself. In our study, cognitive engagement was just as important as affective engagement in social media activity in the pre-event phase, and affective engagement was more strongly related to communication during and after the event. These differences may, however, be a result of using data collected at the event itself, rather than the longitudinal approach adopted by Geurtsen (2014).

In terms of the research questions posed in this paper, we can derive the following answers. The presence of four experience dimensions broadly similar to those identified by de Geus et al. (2016) suggests that there are generic elements of event experience that are present across a range of events (see Table 2). These can broadly be linked to cognitive, physical, and affective engagement, which are also broadly identified in the literature on event and tourism experiences. In addition, we can confirm the finding of de Geus et al. that novelty is also an important dimension of event experiences. In response to the second research question regarding the contribution of event context and visit antecedents to the event experience, we find clear evidence of both factors having an important influence. Table 3 shows that there are significant differences in event experience according to the antecedents' gender, education level, and particularly age. Table 3 also shows that the experience varies according to the context of the events in different locations. This suggests that it is important to take account of audience composition, previous experiences, and event type in assessing visitor experiences. Finally, the answer to the third research question on the relationship between experience and different phases of the visitor event journey is more complex. We find that affective engagement is important in distinguishing the social media communications of visitors at all stages in the visitor journey (Tables 4 and 5), indicating that emotions are stimulated by anticipation in the pre-event stage, by excitement during the event itself and by memorable experiences post-event.

On the basis of this research, we can identify some implications for policy and event practice. The finding that different event contexts generate different levels of experience engagement suggests a need for places to develop event portfolios or eventful city policies that combine a range of events offering different experience opportunities. Given that the experience has also been shown to vary between visitor groups, a varied portfolio is also likely to increase overall levels of visitor satisfaction. The findings related to social media use show that this has a significant relationship to the visitor experience, and event practitioners should therefore encourage visitors to communicate their experiences at different stages of the visitor journey and via different media. The fact that communication before the event is shown to generate higher levels of cognitive and physical engagement indicates that stimulating visitors to communicate before the event may be an effective strategy.

We have to recognise that there are a number of limitations attached to this research. It is based on a convenience sample of events and of visitors to those events. As Gelissen (2016) notes, convenience sampling means it is difficult to generalise to the event audience as a whole, or in this case to generalise for all cultural events. The full post-event period could not be covered in the current study, because the surveys were mainly carried out during or at the end of the events themselves. Although some respondents did complete Internet links after the event, it is not possible to ascertain the exact time lag between event attendance and survey completion. The sample of events contains different types of cultural content, which makes for interesting comparisons, but which makes it difficult to determine the extent to which observed differences relate to the event content, or to other features of the event itself. We recognise the need for more structured research designed to examine specific aspects of visitor characteristics and/or event context. We hope that more widespread application and development of the EES measurement tool might be useful in this regard. The EES is also a quantitative methodology, which is useful for comparisons between events, but provides little depth of analysis in terms of visitor feelings and motivations. Qualitative research comparing visitor experience in different event contexts could be useful in this context.

Given these weaknesses and the findings of this paper, we can also suggest a number of possible areas for future research. More detailed information on the experience at different stages in the visitor journey could be generated by longitudinal surveys that directly measure visitor reactions before, during and after the event. This has already been attempted in a limited context by Geurtsen (2014), but research on different types of events and with different groups of visitors could be revealing. More detailed comparisons of events with similar content and context (such as music festivals, for example) could also throw more light on the variations in visitor experience caused by other contextual factors (such as event location, scale or setting, duration and programming style). As previous research has indicated variations in visitor experience according to visitor group size and composition (de Geus, Richards, & Toepoel, 2013), it would also be interesting to explore this issue in more depth across a series of events. This research could examine the relationship between different experience dimensions and group size and composition, analysing the ways in which groups of people experience events. This information could be very useful for event managers seeking to influence the event practices of different groups of visitors, as suggested by Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, and Beth Gouthro (2013).

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