

Here comes the fun: Mapping the journey from experience to loyalty in music festivals

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ABSTRACT

Music festivals have become complex experiential platforms that generate not only entertainment but also social, cultural, and emotional engagement. This study investigates the journey from music festival experience quality to loyalty and focusing on the role of festival satisfaction and image. This research employed a quantitative method using an online survey that was distributed to music festival attendees in Indonesia. A total of 381 the collected valid responses were examined through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS). The findings showed that festival experience quality has a significant positive effect on festival satisfaction and festival image. Moreover, festival satisfaction enhances both festival image and festival loyalty, while the festival image further strengthens festival loyalty. These results indicate that bringing high-quality experiences, fostering satisfaction, and cultivating a strong festival image are crucial strategies for building loyalty. From the managerial perspective, the study also focuses on the dominant student segment by tailoring music festival concept or design and creating marketing strategies to their preferences. Nevertheless this study is limited by its diverse festival contexts making the future studies are recommended to investigate specific or single type of music festivals, distinguish between the first-time and repeat visitors.

Keywords: *Festival Experience Quality, Festival Image, Festival Satisfaction, Festival Loyalty, Music Festivals*



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INTRODUCTION

Music festivals have become a global phenomenon that not only serve as a form of entertainment but also as a complex and multidimensional form of experience consumption. In recent decades, the growth of the music festival industry has shown a significant trend, both nationally and internationally. Music festivals offer more than just musical performances—they provide a social, emotional, and cultural space capable of creating an emotional bond between attendees and the event itself (Yang et al., 2022). In the post-pandemic era and with rapid digitalization, festivals aren't just seen as a one-time activity; they've evolved into an experiential journey that lasts from the first attendance until attendee loyalty is formed (Li, Liu, & Su, 2023).

The experience of attending a festival includes various elements, such as the quality of the music presented, the supporting atmosphere, the location's layout, and the social interaction dimension that allows for active attendee engagement. The quality of this experience plays a crucial role in shaping attendees' perceptions and emotional responses (Ciki, Öğretmenoğlu, & Huang, 2024). When this experience is perceived positively, attendees will build a strong perception of the event's identity, known as festival personality. This concept explains how a festival is perceived like an individual with certain values, styles, and characteristics that attendees can associate with (Goolaup & Nunkoo, 2023). When there's a match between the festival's character and an attendee's personal values, the emotional connection and attachment to the festival become stronger (Kargöz & Ramkissoon, 2023).

Besides shaping identity and emotional closeness, the festival experience also impacts the formation of the overall festival image. Festival image is the mental picture or general perception attendees have of the quality of the organization, the values it promotes, and the uniqueness of the event. A positive image can increase trust and enthusiasm, and it also strengthens attendees' intention to return and recommend the festival to others (Dalgic & Birdir, 2020). In this regard, attendee satisfaction plays a vital role as a direct indicator of the experience's success. When attendees feel satisfied with all aspects

of the festival—from entertainment and comfort to social interaction—they're highly likely to intend to return and share positive impressions (Wu & Ai, 2015). The connection between experience, festival personality, satisfaction, and image culminates in the formation of loyalty. Attendee loyalty to a festival reflects the intention to return, form long-term preferences, and voluntarily promote the event through electronic word-of-mouth (Kim, 2022). This loyalty isn't formed instantly; rather, it's the result of a series of psychological processes that occur during and after an attendee's participation in the festival (Yang et al., 2022). Thus, it's crucial to understand that every element of the experience, formed from the very beginning, can determine long-term attachment.

Conceptually, the relationships between these variables can be analyzed through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework. In this framework, experience quality and the perception of the festival's character act as a stimulus that influences the attendees' internal conditions, such as satisfaction and image perception (the organism), which ultimately results in loyalty as the response (Li et al., 2023; Kim, 2022). This approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how attendees' cognitive and affective interactions are formed in the context of music festivals. This research aims to examine the journey of music festival attendees' experiences from their initial involvement to the formation of loyalty, focusing on the roles of experience quality, festival personality, satisfaction, and image. This research aims to provide contributions to the advancement of literature in the fields of tourism experience, consumer behavior, and event management, while also providing practical implications for festival organizers to design more focused, sustainable, and relevant experience strategies for the preferences of today's generation of attendees.

Hypothesis

Festival quality is one of the drivers of satisfaction, this is corroborated by the result of a study by Aulia & Artanti (2021) that as the quality of a festival increases, so does the satisfaction felt by attendees. Service quality is defined as the gap between a customer's reality and their expectations of the services they receive (Parasuraman et al., 2013). Festival quality is an extension of the service quality variable developed for the service sector, specifically for festivals (Aulia & Artanti, 2021). The quality of a festival is not just about the services provided by the organizer to attendees; event promoters also compete to create the best festival quality by developing several supporting dimensions (Aula & Artanti, 2021). Program content and facilities are important dimensions of experience quality that can increase satisfaction and loyalty intention, which implicitly shows that experience quality influences the perception of a festival's personality or character (Ho et al., 2022).

H1: Festival Experience Quality Increases Festival Satisfaction

A study by Dalgiç & Birdir (2020) investigated essential success elements of festivals: festival experience (both emotional and cognitive), festival image, and loyalty. The analysis indicated that festival experience and festival image both had a positive and significant influence on festival loyalty. Furthermore, festival experience and festival image acted as mediators between key success factors and attendee loyalty. Music festival experiences provide a shared space where both festival and social experiences are built, facilitating a sense of connection among attendees (Wang et al., 2023). The festival experience strongly influences attendees' psychological and sensory conditions (Brown et al., 2019). Specifically, according to Lee et al (2008), a festival's scape is largely shaped by seven key environmental dimensions, which can influence the experiences of festival attendees including the festival program's perceived quality, the quality of staff service, food offered's quality, the quality and supporting facilities' availability, ease of access, information availability, and the souvenirs offered. Therefore, a positive festival experience, including both tangible and intangible components, plays a crucial role in satisfaction and is associated with a positive image as well as the willingness to pay, the desire to return, and even recommending the festival because it has a good reputation among attendees (Wang et al., 2023).

H2: Festival Experience Quality Increases Festival Image

Festival image is defined as the overall impression of a festival that is formed through various types of information gathered before visiting the location or through direct experience when attending the festival (Cheon, 2016). This image serves as an essential factor in determining the result of a festival, as it reflects awareness and likability, which can then be broadly interpreted as a basis for distinguishing

one festival from another. For attendees, a festival's image can be seen as a criterion for choosing an event; if the image is positive, the festival has strong sales and competitive power (Cheon, 2016). The image, or post-visit image, is updated by experience and the evaluation of the results (including satisfaction), so satisfaction plays a role in forming loyalty and is closely correlated with the post-visit image (Li et al., 2021). A study by Xanthopoulos & Kefallonitis (2024) linked the evaluation of the festival experience and attendee satisfaction to the strengthening of the image. The research by Cheon (2016) showed that the more satisfied festival attendees are with their experience, the more positive the festival image becomes.

H3: Festival Satisfaction Increases Festival Image

Satisfaction with a music festival is a state where the overall expectations and standards of the audience for the music festival experience are met. Satisfaction is used to measure the overall consumer experience (Choo et al., 2016). Satisfaction has been found to be capable of increasing consumer loyalty (Kruger & Saayman, 2017). The satisfaction of music festival attendees can be used to evaluate the overall music festival experience, such as the performers' performance and the festival's atmosphere as perceived by consumers (Ciki et al., 2024). As part of behavioral intention, overall satisfaction with a music festival impacts a consumer's desire to attend similar music festivals in the future (Savinovic et al., 2012). Music festivals that can provide satisfaction have also been found to influence consumers to recommend the festival to friends and family, telling them that the concert they attended was very interesting (Hosany et al., 2016). The level of concert-goer loyalty can be seen in whether the attendees have the desire to recommend the music festival to others (Van-Dunem et al., 2023). The satisfaction felt by attendees develops through the music, performances, and positive experiences (Hsu, 2013) they gain while attending the music festival. This is what influences the development of a loyal attitude among attendees. Satisfaction is a critical component for ensuring that music festival attendees continue to attend festivals in the future. Therefore, this study believes that music festival attendees who are satisfied with their viewing experience will develop a loyal attitude toward that music festival.

H4: Festival Satisfaction Increases Festival Loyalty

Image serves as a supporting factor in the decision-making process, and thus, it plays a vital role in an event's sustainability (Dalgic & Birdir, 2020). Image theory posits that image has potential to influences behavior (Beach & Mitchell, 1987) due to the information and emotions recalled in connection with an activity. Image can positively increase attendees' loyalty for the event (Dalgic & Birdir, 2020). A study by Zhu et al. (2025) used the SOR framework and found that a personally perceived sense of authenticity, or existential authenticity (the feeling of being oneself), as part of the festival's image, significantly increased loyalty through the attendees' perceived experience and value. Festival personality, as a manifestation of the festival's image, directly strengthens loyalty through satisfaction, especially when attendees have a high level of involvement (Karagoz & Ramkissoon, 2023).

H5: Festival Image increased Festival Loyalty

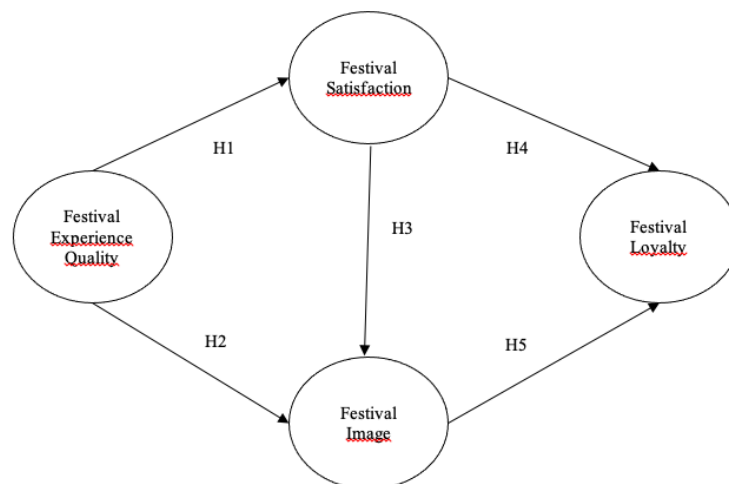


Figure 1 - Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach to assess the relationships among the variables of festival quality experience, festival satisfaction, festival image, and festival loyalty. The variables were measured using a Likert-type scale with a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for respondents were that they had to be at least 18 years old and had attended at least one music festival in Indonesia within the last year. The study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for data processing. The steps included: Outer Model Analysis: This involved assessing the measurement model, which included convergent validity and discriminant validity tests. Reliability Test: This was conducted to ensure the consistency of the measurements. Hypothesis Testing: This was performed using path coefficients to test the relationships between variables. Then, Inner Model Analysis: This involved testing the structural model to evaluate the overall model fit.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaires were distributed through social media from March 10 to June 15, 2025. The survey collected responses from 381 participants. Respondents were grouped according to gender, age, most recent education, occupation, average monthly salary, and information on respondent behaviour specifically related to work.

Table 1 – Average Variance Extract

Variable	AVE
Festival Experience Quality	0,556
Festival Image	0,535
Festival Loyalty	0,601
Festival Satisfaction	0,629

Results from the statistical processing showed that every loading factor value was above 0.6 and the AVE value of all variables above 0.5, implying that all items utilized in the study were valid and that each variable had a high convergent validity. The results show that all indicators for each variable demonstrated a higher value than the other variables' cross loading value. As a result, each indicator utilized in the study showed high discriminant validity.

Table 2 – Fornell Larcker Criterion

Variable	Festival Experience Quality	Festival Image	Festival Loyalty	Festival Satisfaction
Festival Experience Quality	0,908			
Festival Image	0,746	0,893		
Festival Loyalty	0,879	0,872	0,845	
Festival Satisfaction	0,877	0,732	0,776	0,793

The discriminant validity test using the Fornell Larcker Criterion demonstrated that each construct in the study had a higher value compared to other variables. Furthermore, the result of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for each construct were greater than 0,7 indicating that all constructs employed in this study were reliable.

Table 3 – Cronbach Alpha dan Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Festival Experience Quality	0,876	0,898	Reliable
Festival Image	0,855	0,890	Reliable
Festival Loyalty	0,834	0,883	Reliable
Festival Satisfaction	0,970	0,835	Reliable

The results indicated that the respondents were predominantly women with a total of 229 individuals, while men accounted for 152 respondents. In terms of occupation, the largest proportion

came from private employees with 152 respondents, followed by students or university students with 84, government employees with 79, entrepreneurs with 41, and freelancers with 25 respondents. Regarding income, the majority earned between IDR 3,000,001 and IDR 5,000,000 with 126 respondents, and between IDR 5,000,001 and IDR 8,000,000 with 119 respondents, while 97 respondents reported earning less than IDR 3,000,000 and 39 respondents reported earning more than IDR 8,000,000. Concerning festival preferences, We The Fest was the most attended with 316 respondents, followed by Pestapora with 183, and the Djakarta Warehouse Project with 95 respondents, while other festivals received lower participation. In terms of companionship, most respondents attended with friends totaling 189 individuals, followed by 117 with partners, 43 who attended alone, and 32 with family members. These findings suggest that music festivals are primarily enjoyed by young working individuals with middle income, and are most often experienced as social activities shared with close peers or partners.

Table 4 – R-square dan R-square Adjusted

Variable	R-square	R-squared Adjusted
Festival Image	0,849	0,848
Festival Loyalty	0,816	0,815
Festival Satisfaction	0,769	0,769

Based on the analysis results, the festival image variable had the greatest R-Square value of 0.849. All variables had a value greater than 0 which indicated that the structural model in the study was good and relevant or had good predictive relevance.

Table 5 – Path Coefficient

Hypotheses	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard deviation	t statistics	p value	Description
H1: festival experience quality → festival satisfaction	0,623	0,626	0,059	10,500	0,000	Accepted H1
H2: festival experience quality → festival image	0,877	0,876	0,023	37,371	0,000	Accepted H2
H3: festival satisfaction → festival image	0,654	0,651	0,068	9,657	0,000	Accepted H3
H4: festival satisfaction → festival loyalty	0,325	0,321	0,060	5,440	0,000	Accepted H4
H5: festival experience quality → festival loyalty	0,274	0,277	0,069	4,007	0,000	Accepted H5

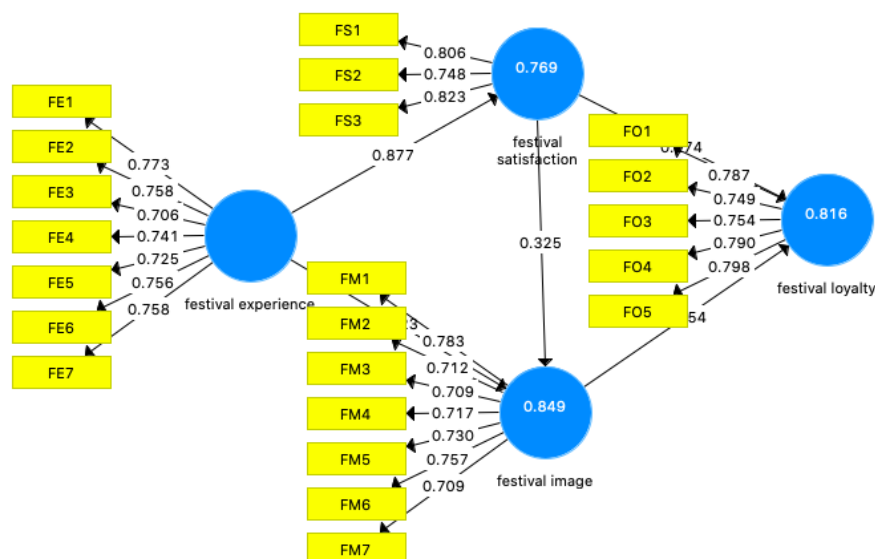


Figure 2 – Structural Model

Based on the results of hypothesis testing in table 5, the coefficient value is 0,623 with a significance value of 0,000 ($p < 0.05$). This showed that festival experience quality had a positive and significant effect on festival satisfaction. This was in line with research that was conducted by Dalgic & Birdir (2020).

Festival Experience Quality increased Festival Image

Based on the hypothesis test result in Table 1, the coefficient value of 0.623 with a significant level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) further supports these findings. This indicates that in the context of festivals, the overall quality of the experience plays a significant role in shaping visitor perceptions and behaviors. A positive and well-rounded festival experience not only enhances immediate satisfaction but also encourages repeat attendance and long term-loyalty. In other words, when visitors perceive that a festival delivers high-quality programs, services, and facilities, they are more likely to associate the event with positive emotions and favorable image, which ultimately strengthens their intention to return and recommend the festival to others.

Festival Experience Quality increased Festival Satisfaction

Based on the hypothesis test results presented in Table 1, the coefficient value of 0.877 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) confirms a strong and significant effect of festival experience quality on festival satisfaction. This finding indicated that the better quality of programs, content, and facilities provided, the higher the satisfaction felt by visitors. The results support Aulia and Artanti (2021), who found that festival quality is a key driver of visitor satisfaction, and align with Parasuraman *et al.* (2013), who define service quality as the gap between customer expectations and actual performance. In line with Ho *et al.* (2022), this study further demonstrates that essential dimensions of festival experience not only enhance satisfaction but also contribute to building loyalty intentions.

Festival Satisfaction Increased Festival Image

Based on the hypothesis test results presented in Table 1, the coefficient value of 0.325 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) confirms a strong and significant effect of festival satisfaction on festival image. This indicates that the more satisfied visitors are with their festival experience, the more positive the image of the festival becomes. The results support Cheon (2016), who explained that festival image reflects the overall impression shaped by both prior information and direct experiences, and Li *et al.* (2021), who found that satisfaction plays a key role in shaping post-visit-image. Consistent with Xanthopoulos and Kefallonitis (2024), this study confirms that visitor satisfaction strengthens the festival image and contributes to its competitiveness.

Festival Satisfaction increased Festival Loyalty

Based on the hypothesis test results presented in Table 1, the coefficient value of 0.274 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) shows a positive and significant effect of festival satisfaction on festival loyalty. This indicates that visitors who are satisfied with their overall festival experience are more likely to return to similar events in the future and to recommend the festival to others. The results are consistent with previous studies (Choo *et al.*, 2016; Kruger & Saayman, 2017; Savinovic *et al.*, 2012) which highlight satisfaction as a key driver of loyalty, both through repeat attendance and positive word-of-mouth.

Festival Image increased Festival Loyalty

Based on the hypothesis test results in Table 1, the coefficient value of 0.654 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) shows a positive and significant effect of festival image on festival loyalty. This finding suggests that a favorable festival image encourages visitors to return and recommend the event to others. The result supports Dalgic and Birdir (2020), who emphasized the role of image in sustaining event success, and aligns with Zhu *et al.* (2025), who found that authenticity as a part of festival image significantly enhances loyalty through positive experiences and perceived value. Similarly, Karagoz and Ramkissoon (2023), highlight that festival image, manifested through festival personality, strengthens loyalty particularly when visitor involvement is high.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate how important festival experiences are in determining the loyalty of attendees in terms of quality, satisfaction, and image. Through a survey of the literature, the study was able to determine the concept and the questions to measure the variables, which were subsequently subjected to empirical analysis. The following is a summary of the findings. Additionally, there are statistically significant effects of participation satisfaction on the music festival's image. Stated differently, greater happiness with participation has a favorable impact on the festival's image. The study's conclusions have a number of administrative and practical ramifications for those in charge of planning music festivals, including organizers, marketers, and the larger music business. The entire festival experience, including the music, sense of escape, novelty, and social interaction, can be the focus of marketing tactics for branding and promotions. Planners, organizers, and industry stakeholders can get important insights from a greater understanding of festivalgoers' experiences, perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty. However, as attendees are always looking for better experiences and higher-quality services, allegiance to music festivals is not fixed. This makes it difficult for festival organizers to continuously produce top-notch events while preserving the interest, involvement, and contentment of the audience.

Based on the respondents characteristics, the majority are students, this finding is beneficial for festival organisers as it allows them to focus more on promoting or designing the music festival concept that aligns with this segment. The results show that for this specific segment they differentiate one event to another by building emotional connections that encourage repeat attendance. Together, these results confirming creating memorable and high-quality festival experiences, ensuring visitor satisfaction, and cultivating a strong festival image are critical strategies for sustaining a long-term success of festivals.

As in every research, there are some limitations in this study. First, that the sampled respondents attended a wide range of music festivals, it also offered diverse experiences, which could bring affect to the perspective or understanding of the festival experience. Second, it also recognised that the sample size is comparatively small and a larger sample would improve the generalisability of the research.

Although this study provides valuable insights into the relationships among festival experiences, several opportunities remain for future research. First, future studies could customize the success factors according to the main theme of music festivals. It means the impact of the festival can be evaluated from different perspectives such as festival visitors, participants, organisers, local people and culture. Second, the behaviors between first time and repeat visitors or festivalgoers can be compared, thus could provide a more detailed result and framework.

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