

“I didn’t want to promote it with a white girl”: marketing practices and boundary work at popular music festivals

Marketing
practices and
boundary work

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore how music festival organisers negotiate diversity and inclusion in marketing and promotion practices through symbolic and social boundaries.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on semi-structured interviews with 18 festival organisers in Rotterdam and participant observation with six festival photographers I show that symbolic and social boundaries are employed in three areas: (1) boundaries in festival format (i.e. [partially] free or ticketed), (2) boundaries in distribution partners and technologies and (3) boundaries in promotional content.

Findings – Symbolic and social boundaries are intentionally used by festival organisers to build and delineate festival audiences. Implications are drawn on current understandings of the accessibility of music festival spaces, arguing that festival research should move beyond within-space dynamics to grasp the negotiation of diversity and inclusion at festivals more fully.

Originality/value – While music festivals are often marketed as celebratory spaces that are “welcoming to everyone”, few studies have investigated diversity and inclusion nor marketing and promotion practices at music festivals. This study shows how festival audiences are shaped through marketing and promotion practices.

Keywords Event marketing, Music events, Diversity, Symbolic boundaries, Social boundaries

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Everyday understandings of music festivals often celebrate them as spaces where diverse groups of people gather and that are “welcoming to everyone”. Over the past decades, diversity and inclusion have been put firmly on the agenda of the cultural and creative industries, and the music festival industry specifically. In Rotterdam, for example, the arts council has made it a policy spearhead, including public events, symposia and a general increase in attention for diversity and inclusion (Berkers *et al.*, 2018). Festivals have come to be seen as sites of “good governance”, meaning that they are expected to offer some kind of “moral guidance” in terms of the negotiation of diversity and inclusion (Woodward *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, research on diversity and inclusion in events management literature is

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scarce (Calver *et al.*, 2023) and usually does not include the perspective of music festival organisers (Laing and Mair, 2015).

In this paper, I aim to explore how music festival organisers negotiate diversity and inclusion in marketing and promotion practices for two reasons. First, the discourse that festivals are “for everyone” is often perpetuated in their branding narrative (Laing and Mair, 2015; Nunes and Birdsall, 2022). While academic research has started to question the extent to which festivals can actually be considered spaces for “everyone”, especially within critical events studies (Daspher and Finkel, 2020), research on festival marketing and promotion is missing. I understand music festival marketing and promotion as processes through which audiences are created and monetised, including promotional and advertising practices (Meier, 2015; Powers, 2013; Vince, 2022). How festival marketing is done could therefore provide insights with regard to the underlying processes that make-up festival communities and who is considered to be “in” or “out of” place. Second, marketing and promotion have become a crucial part of the festival organisation process, especially with festivals becoming entrenched by commercialism and increasing competition over the past decades (Davies, 2021; Meier, 2015). Nevertheless, focus on the management side of festivals in general (Clarke and Jepson, 2011; Daspher and Finkel, 2020; Laing and Mair, 2015), let alone on marketing and promotion practices, remains limited.

In this paper, I apply theoretical work on symbolic and social boundaries to marketing and promotion practices of popular music festivals. As I will further argue below, this perspective helps to uncover the underlying processes related to the negotiation of diversity and inclusion at music festivals. Namely, the way in which boundaries are employed (so-called boundary work) can show who is considered to be “in” or “out of” place: who is perceived to belong to the festival audience and who is not. Moreover, a focus on the underlying processes helps to shift away from individual diversity and inclusion strategies to exploring how common practices within the music festival industry may systematically reproduce social inequalities. The limited range of research that exists on music festival organisation and diversity and inclusion mostly focuses on those strategies that are focused on making a festival more diverse and/or inclusive (see for example Laing and Mair, 2015). While some researchers have started to question these individual strategies (see for example Daspher and Finkel, 2020 on dietary requirements), the actual engagement with how inclusion and exclusion are systematically reproduced remains limited. I therefore include the discursive curatorial process behind festival marketing and promotion in its entirety, including ticket prices, (media) partners and distribution technologies as well as promotional content. This is important because “positive social change is likely to necessitate synergies between elements of the entire marketing process” (Livas, 2021, p. 454).

To understand the marketing process and how it relates to the negotiation of diversity and inclusion, I combine previous research and theoretical insights from popular music studies, media and marketing studies, as well as cultural sociological work in the cultural and creative industries. I draw on qualitative interviews with 18 music festival organisers based in Rotterdam as well as participant observation with six festival photographers at festivals. Extended fieldwork between 2020 and 2022 showed the importance of both sets of actors in what the marketing process, and the included promotional material, looked like. I find that boundaries are employed through marketing and promotion in three areas: (1) boundaries in festival format, (2) boundaries in distribution partners and technologies and (3) boundaries in promotional content. The findings show how symbolic and social boundaries are intentionally used by organisers to build festival audiences.

Literature review

This paper is built on the premise that there is power behind marketing and promotional strategies (Clarke and Jepson, 2011), as they place some people outside of the spectrum of potential visitors, while (implicitly) inviting others in. This is due to the main goal of marketing and promotion strategies, which is focused on reaching specific audiences (Bose,

2005; Järvekülg and Wikström, 2022; Rastegar, 2009), relating closely to the concept of segmentation. Segmentation has a long-standing research tradition within the field of marketing (Ritter and Lund Pedersen, 2024). It is concerned with the delineation of relevant audience groups and captures “existing differences and makes them applicable” (Ritter and Lund Pedersen, 2024). This means that organisers would create segments of potential audience groups “out there”. Considering that segments are socially constructed (which is discussed briefly by Ritter and Lund Pederson, 2024), segmentation may also (inadvertently) reproduce or even further aggravate societal differences, depending on the view of the organiser. In this paper, I therefore consider that marketing and promotion practices closely relate to processes of representation, which involves the “active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping; not merely the transmitting of an already existing meaning, but the more active labor of making things mean” (Hall, 2005, p. 60). Marketing and promotion are often used to share values and ideals, meaning that organisers are selective about the reality they choose to represent (Livas, 2021; Powers, 2013). In this sense, even though the reality that many music festivals aim to represent seems to reproduce a discourse that entails the broader message of being “welcoming to everyone” (Nunes and Birdsall, 2022), the logic of targeting specific audiences through promotion inherently limits who “everyone” is (Vince, 2022). These practices could therefore “reproduce socially constructed inaccessible spaces” and should therefore be studied as such (Benjamin *et al.*, 2021, p. 298).

Previous research focusing on marketing, promotion and advertising has shown that it can be used to communicate social justice goals, while it can also produce stereotypical imagery (McDonald *et al.*, 2021; Yoon and Kelly, 2023). For instance, previous research has shown that advertising in varying industries present stereotypical gendered and racialised images (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; Livas, 2021; McDonald *et al.*, 2021; Yoon and Kelly, 2023) or leave people with disabilities out of pictures completely (Benjamin *et al.*, 2021). Vince (2022) also found evidence for this in the case of an LGBTQ + film festival in London and indicated that: “Flare posted more than 250 tweets with visual representations [...] in which the most represented subject is the white, young, able-bodied, muscular, and gay cisgender male figure” (p. 12). Promotional content and advertising could thus show visible evidence of how marketing practices can reproduce discrimination and inequalities (Yoon and Kelly, 2023), while it can also spread more inclusive messages. Moreover, while promotional strategies and distribution technology may be used for social justice goals, “processes of commodification” may “empty identity formations of radical intent and use the shell for profitable marketing” (Rastegar, 2009, p. 489; Sobande, 2019; Yoon and Kelly, 2023). Here, it is important to consider that the extent to which festivals are embedded in commercial structures could affect their marketing and promotional strategies. As Davies *et al.* (2023, p. 54) for example describe, “public sector and NFP [not-for-profit] are more focused on the promotion of tourism, community cohesion and public good (often via outreach activities), whilst the corporate sector pay attention to the provision of entertainment and making a profit”. These differences in festival formats could also affect marketing and promotion strategies and how different types of festivals relate to diversity and inclusion goals.

In this paper, I move away from only considering the promotional content that is the outcome of marketing and promotion practices, and instead consider how varying parts of the marketing and promotion process could shape festival audiences (Livas, 2021). To do so, I will focus on the way in which symbolic and social boundaries are employed within marketing and promotion practices. As these boundaries are employed to define who belongs and who does not (Vandenberg, 2023), they could be argued to shape the underlying process through which discrimination and inequality operate. In other words: the study of how these boundaries are employed in practice can show us who is (implicitly) invited in and who is not. Symbolic boundaries are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 168). This means that they are

(cognitively) employed to distinguish one set of objects, people, practices, from another set. While these boundaries may be enacted within festival spaces (Bennet and Woodward, 2014), for example through clothing, hairstyles and dancing, I argue that these boundaries can be expressed through marketing and promotion practices too. Promotional material, for example, tends to differ for varying subcultures: “flyers for drum and bass nights differed from those promoting UK garage nights in the use of colour and images, paper quality and typeface, thereby hinting to a variety of other style differences associated with the respective nights and their scenes, such as dress codes” (Bose, 2005, p. 432). Medeiros *et al.* (2020) similarly found that within advertisement of the Rock in Rio music festival, organisers would adhere to symbols related to the festival’s music genre. They thereby appeal to pre-existing cultural scripts that may be recognisable and attractive to certain groups of consumers.

Previous research has also shown connections between symbolic boundaries and social categories of race, gender and class, with Schaap and Berkers (2019) for example showing that rock music is constructed as a mainly white and male genre. Similarly, related to promotion practices, Bose (2005) suggests that the way in which “difference” is constructed within promotion material can also be connected to racial-ethnic categories “such as ‘black nights’ or ‘Asian nights’, which served as a contrasting category to ‘student nights’” (p. 433). These symbolic boundaries can take the form of social boundaries, which can be defined as “objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities” (Lamont and Molnár, 2002, p. 168). This means that the boundaries drawn between different groups of people, based on music genres and varying socio-demographic categories for example, could result in broader social inequalities and social stratification. In the case of this paper, this would for example include marketing and promotion practices that (implicitly) make festivals (and perhaps leisure more broadly) more difficult to access for some than for others.

Methodology

This paper draws on data from semi-structured interviews with 18 music festival organisers from 13 Rotterdam-based popular music festivals (see Table 1), and participant observations with six festival photographers at two of these festivals. The selection of festivals represents the variety of music festivals present in Rotterdam, in which I sampled following the diverse-case method (Gerring, 2008). The selection was based on five criteria: (1) pricing (paid or unpaid), (2) genres (multi or focused), (3) scale (large, medium, small), (4) maturity (number of editions) and (5) diversity goals (Cudny, 2016; Paleo and Wijnberg, 2006). The fieldwork was conducted between January 2020 and August 2022. Due to the continuously shifting circumstances, as the festival field and the research process were affected by COVID-19, I decided to embrace the iterative approach as part of the qualitative research process. A couple of steps in the research process can therefore be observed. First, between January 2020 and June 2021 interviews were conducted with festival organisers from music festivals in Rotterdam. These interviews indicated the relevance of marketing and promotion practices in the negotiation of diversity and inclusion. Moreover, during the summer of 2020 several observations were conducted at alternatives to festivals taking place at the time, to familiarise myself with the new, continuously shifting context. Both the interviews with organisers and casual conversations with photographers during those observations indicated the importance of the photographers’ work in terms of representation and promotion, as I will describe in the findings below. I therefore decided to conduct additional fieldwork in the summer of 2022, when festivals could take place again, in which I focused on festival photography specifically. The inclusion of both sets of actors was deemed necessary to provide further empirical depth to the marketing process and the discursive curatorial process behind promotional content.

Festival	Type	Format	Genres	Scale	Maturity (N editions in 2022)	Diversity goals	Number of interviewees
Baroeg	Metal	Paid	Focused	Medium	13	No	1
Blijdorp	Urban	Paid	Focused	Medium	7	No	2
	Eclectic/ EDM						
Boothstock	Urban	Paid	Focused	Medium	9	No	1
	Eclectic/ EDM						
Confetti Fest	Urban	Paid	Focused	Small	2	Yes	1
	Eclectic/ EDM						
Eendracht	Street/ Public	Free	Multi	Medium	10	No	2*
	Festival						
Expedition	Urban	Paid	Focused	Medium	3	No	1
	Eclectic/ EDM						
Festival Downtown	Urban	Free/ Paid	Focused	Small	8	No	2*
	Eclectic/ EDM						
Magia	Non- Western Music	Free/ Paid	Focused	Small	3	No	1
	Festival						
Metropolis	Rock	Free	Multi	Medium	33	No	4*
	Festival						
Motel Mozaïque	Indie/Arts	Paid	Focused	Medium	20	No	3*
	festival						
Rotterdam Unlimited	Street/ Public	Free	Multi	Large	35	Yes	2
	Festival						
Zomercarnaval	Techno	Paid	Focused	Medium	6	No	2
Toffler	Urban	Paid	Multi	Medium	6	No	1*
Vrije Volk	Eclectic/ EDM						

Note(s): *Interviewees working for multiple festivals in this selection

Source(s): Author's own creation/work

Table 1.
Festival types and
number of interviewees

Data gathering was part of a larger qualitative study, in which I interviewed 31 music festival organisers from popular music festivals in Rotterdam about their work before, during and after the festival (Swartjes and Berkers, 2022). In this article, I only include interviews with the 18 organisers who were responsible for or related to the promotional and marketing strategies for their festival. Their roles can range from business to artistic direction, to being employed in the role of marketing or communication professional. As festival teams are usually small and roles often overlap, it could be that those who describe themselves as “programmer” also take up tasks that are related to marketing and promotion. All interviewees were involved in the festival for several years. While the interviews were conducted with broader themes related to work before, during and after the festival in mind, the questions related to ticket sales and marketing and promotion strategies are most relevant to this article. This part of the interview started out with the broad question: “Could you tell me about what shapes your marketing and promotion strategy? What are important considerations?”. Usually, organisers would already describe their strategy in detail

following this first question, but more details were prompted when necessary. These could for example entail questions about ticket prices, their social media strategies, media partners as well as their branding strategies (in terms of image, logo's, colours, etc.). Consent was verified before starting, including stipulating that in publications the name of the festival they organised as well as their role in it would be mentioned. Interviews usually lasted between 1 and 3 h, with most interviews lasting around 90 min. All interviews were conducted in Dutch and quotes were translated after coding. Afterwards they were transcribed verbatim and coded in Atlas.ti as part of the larger qualitative study in three rounds. First, I aimed to find central themes in the data, by coding the first 10 interviews inductively, resulting in low-level codes that captured specificities of marketing and promotion practices (including for example "need for diversity" and "audience-media partners connection"). Secondly, these codes were organised in themes and applied to the same 10 interviews, including the three major themes that structure the findings as described below: (1) festival format, (2) partners and distribution technologies and (3) promotional content. Lastly, I used these organising themes to code all interviews while including new codes when deemed necessary.

As mentioned above, the fieldwork conducted in the summer of 2020 as well as interviews with music festival organisers stipulated the importance of festival photography in the negotiation of diversity and inclusion. Especially the role of the festival photographer in marketing and promotion seemed to be significant and, following initial review of the literature, an underdeveloped area within festival studies and cultural sociology more broadly. I therefore decided to conduct additional fieldwork on festival photography in the summer of 2022, where we would be able to see photographers conduct their "business as usual". Still, because of time constraints and the highly uncertain context these festivals were still operating in, I could do observations at only two music festivals with the six photographers hired by the festival organisation itself. This is crucial in terms of marketing and promotion strategies as at some festivals many more photographers are present, but they are not necessarily hired by the festival organisation. Following photographers who were hired by the festival organisation gave me the chance to explore how processes of representation are affected by different actors, as I will show in the findings below.

At both festivals a minimum of two observers were present, to ensure consistency of observations. During the festival we closely followed festival photographers while they worked. For one festival, this also included a team briefing with the marketing professional and the three photographers present at the festival. We focused on technical work and tasks undertaken by photographers, possible interactions with audiences, artists and other workers at the festival, and more generally facial expressions and body language. During breaks and when walking around the festival field, we would ask questions about their work, why they took certain photos and more generally about the way in which diversity and photography are related. Festival photographers were informed about the research before the festival day, including being notified by the marketing professional from the related festival and a personal message from the main researcher. Verbal consent was reified on the festival day itself, where the photographers were made aware of the observers present and informed about the research and its' goals again, including the specific focus on diversity and inclusion. A report was made on the observation notes immediately following the observation. These reports were then uploaded in Atlas.ti and coded in two rounds, focusing on photography practices and audience demographics. These findings were then used to compare and contrast the analysis of marketing and promotion practices from the perspective of music festival organisers, as I will further outline below.

Findings

Programming is considered the primary way to attract varying groups to a music festival by organisers. Nevertheless, marketing and promotion practices also play a significant role.

As the marketing professional from Toffler stated: “I think by programming diversely and doing broad promotion that you-yeah you’re just sort of open to everyone and you welcome everyone”. Although many organisers share more specific notions of varying audience groups at their festivals, others also shared a fairly generic notion of building audiences for their festivals, including communicating their festival’s “open-mindedness” and generally being “welcoming to everyone” (Nunes and Birdsall, 2022). Still, I argue that marketing and promotional practices include a considerable effort and intentionality in terms of audience group formation through boundaries. This should be understood in the context of the festival format, as organisers’ considerations with regard to ticketing show both which audience groups organisers are trying to target while ticketing also shapes the marketing process itself (section 1). Additionally, boundaries are intentionally created through distribution partners and technologies (section 2) and promotional content (section 3).

Section 1: boundaries in festival format

Festival formats, being either free or (partially) paid, shape both the socio-demographic backgrounds of groups organisers consider to be their audience, while they also affect the promotional process more broadly. Organisers mostly relate the free festival format or lower ticket prices to young, non-white or lower SES demographic categories. Previous research has noted how ticketing is often related to audience groups’ presumed financial status (see for example Davies *et al.*, 2023) and is often seen as a way to reach perceived marginalised communities (Laing and Mair, 2015). The categories mentioned by organisers, however, contain broader socio-demographic categories that do not necessarily have to relate to financial status (such as age and racial-ethnic background). Discussing their audiences, the Artistic Director of Rotterdam Unlimited [free] stated: “People with a migration background, first, with as a sub target audience from underprivileged neighbourhoods. And that’s also why [...] it’s a free event”. The marketing professional at Eendracht [free] and Downtown [partially free] similarly shared: “So we try to [...] with our free accessibility of Eendracht Festival [...] That everyone-income high, low, music taste, background, residence, that everyone could [...] could go there and have a nice day.” He argues that they apply a similar rationale for Downtown, which is partially free and has relatively cheap ticket prices. In this way, they aim to subvert or lower social boundaries that make festivals more difficult to access for some than for others. At the same time, organisers from ticketed events realise that their festival formats also delineate who their potential audiences are. The marketing professional from Blijdorp festival for example shares: “everyone [visiting the festival] has a nice income and that is-that is something you can see, otherwise of course it’s more difficult to pay for a festival day.”

Even though many organisers reflect on the relationship between ticketing and accessibility of their festivals for varying socio-demographic groups, we should not take this reasoning at face-value. For example, lowering prices is not only done for reasons of accessibility but also has to do with the longevity of festivals. As the business director of Motel Mozaique argues:

We looked at in what ways we could work with discounts so that the threshold would become lower for students to experience the festival sometime. Because if you’ve been once and have a good experience, then you come back the next year.

Many organisers initially discuss strategic reasons, such as competition from other festivals, estimations of what audiences are willing to pay and the characteristics and costs of their program. For example, when first asked the question of why they stick to these festival formats, the marketing professional from Eendracht and Downtown, quoted above, shared:

Eendracht is free because we also see it as a showcase [festival]. [...] the artists that are at Eendracht are not getting paid [...] and also because they're artists that are just starting out, we want to keep the accessibility high [...] so that people walk in easily and in that way get to know the bands. And with Downtown we also spend some on the program so you partially have that you also want to earn that back

Here, accessibility does not necessarily seem to refer to perceived marginalised groups per se but a more general "ease to access". Moreover, he argued, having some parts of the event free is also used to tempt potential audiences to buy tickets for paid parts of the program. First considering strategic reasons may then also be due to festivals being at high financial risk (Davies *et al.*, 2023).

The festival format also affects what the marketing process looks like more broadly. One marketing professional who works for a ticketed [Motel Mozaique] as well as a free festival [Metropolis] for example reflected on differences in promotional content:

At Motel Mozaique I of course have to do it [marketing] based on content. Like "such a nice festival", tempt people to buy the ticket- be interested in buying a ticket first. With Metropolis I can just [break] hand it out- I can put anyone on the guestlist

The festival format may thus affect the extent to which varying audience groups are consciously targeted through marketing and promotion practices: where free festivals may have a broader base in marketing, the promotional process of ticketed events would rely (even) more on targeting specific audiences. The symbolic (and perhaps even social) boundaries between those who are (implicitly) invited in and those who are pushed out would then be more explicit for ticketed events compared to festivals with a free format. This also means that there is an interaction between different parts of the marketing and promotion process of festivals (Livas, 2021), which should be considered in terms of the negotiation of diversity and inclusion.

Section 2: boundaries in distribution partners and technologies

In processes of audience group formation, organisers also consider *where* promotional material is presented. As Bose (2005) already suggested this is "a crucial indication of the envisaged or preferred 'crowd' or 'scene' at a particular night" (p. 431). Organisers for example categorise partners, media outlets and digital technologies in terms of the socio-demographic backgrounds and music genres they connect to, thereby drawing boundaries between who they do and do not aim to invite into their festival spaces. This is done in relation to working with (1) partners, (2) media outlets and (3) digital technologies. First, working with partners is considered of importance because all these partners have different networks, relating to specific audiences: "they [partners] all have their own networks, their own website, their own newsletter, their own social media, you know [...] If you coordinate that well you can use all of that for your event-just have more reach" [Magia, Festival Director]. The festival director of Eendracht corroborates: "Because we're working with those hosts-you know the jazz-host they're reaching a jazz audience and the drum- 'n-bass host is going to reach a drum-'n-bass audience." Thus, this organiser observes the symbolic boundaries as they relate to specific programming and media partners, which he uses to reach audiences connected to those partners. While this can be used on the one hand to draw many different audience groups in, it can also be used to further delineate who gets to see promotional content and who does not.

Secondly, organisers consider through which media they share their events. The Artistic Director from Rotterdam Unlimited, which is shared widely because of their broad audience base, for example stated:

An act like Erdogan I would put somewhere different marketing-wise than a Noche de Las Chicas- cause Noche de Las Chicas I put on FunX and they are partnering with Open [Rotterdam]. For Aktas Erdogan I would do it through the website, I would do it through etnomedia.

Here, this organiser connects a radio station that mainly focuses on urban music (FunX) to specific parts of the program, thereby further establishing boundaries between music genres and connected audience groups. At the same time, there may be certain media outlets festivals do not work with. As the marketing professional from Metropolis for example considers:

We're always having a bit of trouble with that, that they say "yeah but you're free". You know, that makes it less interesting for NRC or Volkskrant

I: yeah? Why is that? The free?

Yeah I just think it's less exclusive. [...] but that's [Metropolis] for everyone, something like that. That might just not be something their audience is waiting for, such broad events.

This organiser thus uses his interpretation of these media outlets, delineating them based on symbolic (or even social) boundaries, to decide whether they would be a match with the festival he organises.

Thirdly, digital changes affect how boundaries are employed in social media, for example through targeted advertisement. Organisers continuously consider where potential target audiences will be and how they could reach them best, potentially helping them to broadly advertise their festival: "the older target audience is going to facebook [...] and the younger target audience is on Instagram. [...] We're constantly monitoring where our target audiences are" [Rotterdam Unlimited, Artistic Director]. The tools provided by social media platforms are also used to find new audiences. This process of online targeting works through symbolic boundaries. As the marketing professional at Blijdorp for example stated:

Imagine we're creating a persona for campaign X for example. We want that person to have liked Dekmantel on Facebook, liked By the Creek and the shoebrand Nike, just saying something. [...] And then a persona comes from that [...] and in the end you have the diversity of those groups of people together

On top of that, through distribution technologies on social media, organisers can broaden their audience base to groups that fit the already existing audience: "you can make some sort of copy of the audience you already have, some sort of replica" [Confetti Fest, Festival Director]. Distribution technologies are thus used to delineate and put boundaries to who is perceived to belong to the festival audience and who gets to see festival promotion online.

Section 3: boundaries in promotional content

Finally, boundaries are employed in promotional content. This is mostly concerning who or what is shown as well as how things are communicated. In other words: how boundaries are employed through bodies (section 3.1) and graphic design and text (section 3.2).

Section 3.1: boundaries through bodies. Some festival organisers clearly stipulate the use of promotion material that privileges certain bodies over others. While some bodies may be seen as a representation of the (desired) festival's community, others are not (showing similarities with arguments by [Campt, 2012](#) on representation in photography). Organisers may use photos from previous festival editions, hence pertaining to audience members who were previously present within the festival space but can also develop a marketing campaign that does not use photos from the festival itself. Nevertheless, both could be said to signal a similar thing: who the organiser sees as part of the festival community and who they want to attract through visual communication. One organiser, from a festival that is specifically focused on diversity (wanting to be the most "colourful" event in Rotterdam with the slogan "we don't blend, we mix"), for example shares his considerations with regard to one of their "outings" in the previous year:

One of our most important outings last year was a girl eating watermelon. [...] internally I have discussions with people about what skin color that girl should have. [...] now it's a girl that's sort of a bit of a mix. Because I didn't want to promote it with a white girl, but I think that a black girl makes it too difficult. Just very honestly. But commercially I wouldn't get my target audience- so those are your considerations [Confetti Fest, Festival Director]

Casual conversations with a photographer during earlier observations also stipulated the preference for people who look racial-ethnically "mixed", because they have an "urban" character. Nonetheless, using gendered and racialised categories, this organiser clearly describes the way in which visual identity markers are intentionally used to attract target audiences through promotional material. Similarly, another organiser shares the difference between the campaign for a festival he organises focused on the LGBTQIA + community and a festival that is taking place on a Dutch national holiday:

That's the marketing I think, the campaign, this year we had those posters, those posters all across the city I think with [...] for example two chicks making out, two guys kissing each other, a dark guy and a Chinese guy and that's the campaign. And for Kralingse Bos it's programming, yeah that's just very diverse, everyone is standing there. And the campaign there is also kind of direct and big and blatant so that has to speak to everyone [Vrije Volk, Programmer]

Clearly, where the first festival which is focused on the LGBTQIA + community does not have to "speak to everyone", the second festival is aimed at a broader audience. This is intentionally reflected in the promotional material. Again, this organiser mostly refers to gendered and racialised categories, stipulating the importance of visual identification markers in marketing. Another category that is mentioned by some organisers focuses on age. For example, the marketing professional from Metropolis and Motel Mozaïque shares:

With Metropolis [...] you also want to show that- for kids there's also a lot to experience- kids jumping rope on the field you know. And the audience of Motel Mozaïque [...] to say it crudely, they don't want kids at the festival. [...] with Metropolis you can show a very different audience- in which the potential audience recognizes itself

Discussing Motel Mozaïque later on, he stated: "with images you try to attract younger people-yeah they recognise themselves in younger people". This means that promotional content that focuses on bodies is consciously used, at least by some organisers, to draw boundaries with regards to who they (do not) see as their preferred audience.

When using pictures from the festival itself, one should consider that the photos shared online are not necessarily a "true" or "real" representation of the festival audience. This was also suggested by the festival director of Magia, discussing a festival he does not organise: "In their reporting of the festival colored people are in the picture a lot, so that gives the impression that they are very diverse, but in reality that's a very small group". Often, when walking across the festival space with photographers, they mention that they "capture moments" and people who "stand out". Standing out seems to either mean people that for example dress in bright colours, have fun hairstyles or people who seem to be "out of place" in particular ways. This can for example be noted in this observation excerpt from one festival:

Walking across the festival field with one of the photographers she discusses what she's already been taking pictures of. What stands out to her is that she's seeing a lot of the "rock and roll"-types. She has also taken some pictures of kids and young people because [name head marketing] wanted that. While we're walking she shows me one of the pictures she took of a young black guy with a wolf mask, because he stood out to her. She is trying to photograph the rock and roll people a bit less, because as she points out "they're there all day anyway".

One photographer at another festival similarly shares how she likes to photograph people who "stand out", giving "queer people" and "people with non-Dutch backgrounds" as

examples. She argues to be focused on that herself, because of her own racial-ethnic background. By observing the festival audience, these photographers draw boundaries between who is considered a regular (and who is not) and who should represent the festival. The photos that eventually end up on the festival's social media accounts, thus seem to be going through "layers of representation", in which both organisers and photographers work together to create a festival's image. I observed this in conversation with a third photographer below:

I tell her about my research and the topic and she takes an immediate interest. She talks about how, a couple of years back, she got asked by a festival in Rotterdam to "rejuvenate". She could only take pictures of young people, not "cauliflowers" as she jokingly refers to people with grey, curly hair when you take their picture from the back. She discusses that they did manage to rejuvenate, which her photography was part of. She continues and says that she's also been asked to only take photos from girls, but this doesn't happen very often anymore. She doesn't feel she has a position of power with regards to diversity very often: even if she shoots "diverse" she doesn't have an influence on what is being used by the organisation in the end.

Section 3.2: boundaries through graphics and textual design. Boundaries are also employed in graphic design and text. First, similar to [Bose \(2005\)](#) I observed the importance of symbolic boundaries in graphic design. As the festival director of Eendracht for example stated, referring to symbolic boundaries related to music scenes: "For each location, each [music] scene, different artwork is being made". Additionally, the artistic director of Blijdorp festival related:

We very consciously keep certain outings a bit more colorful and sweet. And the line-up picture of last year has a lot of flowers and smileys. On the one hand it shouldn't be cheesy and corny [...] it shouldn't become too harsh and serious because we have the feeling that we want the people who think this is cute and sweet- those people we want in as a person and if you as a person say "what's this dull soft nonsense" then I think you're in a group of people that doesn't fit at Blijdorp.

While not necessarily relating this to specific socio-demographic categories, this organiser clearly stipulates the power that he observes to be behind graphic design in audience formation. Later on, he does connect the so-called open-mindedness to gender-sexuality, when stating that:

so you can put a bit of open-mindedness [break] in your communication through which people that are not openminded are deterred. [...] for example- yeah I'm just mentioning something now but you can very clearly communicate that you're pro-LGBTQ you know. [...] then there will be certain people that won't like that and well then- in my opinion [silence] yeah then you belong to the message a bit less- and the feeling we want to radiate. So in that you can sort of filter like okay- this is the message for our audience. [...] maybe I'm saying this very negatively like [...] if you don't want to hear that then you're not welcome, but [break] more using a tone of voice that reaches the right people, [Blijdorp Festival, Artistic Director]

Other organisers also refer to their choices in colour, or the use of moving images in attracting their target audiences. Moving images, for example, are mostly connected to younger audiences: "Preferring making images that move-that's what people want right. That's what [...] makes you reach a younger audience" [Metropolis, Marketing]. In this sense, it seems that organisers appeal to pre-existing cultural scripts, taste patterns and categorisations between differing audience groups that help to distinguish those who they do see part of their festival community from those who they do not see part of it. Organisers also use particular slogans or language to signal their stance towards diversity and inclusion or to "talk" to specific audiences, for example also adjusting language depending on the platform that is used. As summarised by the Artistic Director of Rotterdam Unlimited: "You try to speak the language of the audiences, without ruffling any feathers."

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored how music festival organisers negotiate diversity and inclusion in marketing and promotion practices. I did so by focusing on how symbolic and social boundaries are employed within marketing and promotion practices of popular music festivals. I take an organisers' perspective to show that festival audiences are built through these practices, including festival formats (free or paid), distribution partners and technologies as well as promotional content. Marketing and promotion should therefore be seen to significantly contribute to festival audience formation: both in terms of who is and who is not seen as part of the preferred festival community. While festival formats already bound the types of audiences organisers are trying to attract, particularly focusing on age-generation, social class and race-ethnicity, other strategies pertaining to partners and content further delineate audience groups along symbolic and social boundaries. First, partners and (social) media are divided by organisers along symbolic boundaries, with different partners and media channels perceived to communicate to groups with varying socio-demographic backgrounds and preferred music scenes. Furthermore, through targeted advertisement, organisers build new or larger audiences based on perceived taste patterns of their desired audience. Secondly, through content organisers further establish who their festival is meant to communicate to. By showing particular bodies over others, that vary in terms of gender-sexuality, race-ethnicity and age-generation, they show who is (not) part of their preferred community. Moreover, they communicate to their preferred audience by taking into account symbolic boundaries in their graphic design and text, for example considering how certain colours, shapes and moving image appeal more to some than to others.

I derive two closely related theoretical conclusions from this data. Firstly, only considering within-space dynamics in festival research means to dismiss many processes that significantly affect who a festival is (not) meant for. Where earlier research has for example shown how temporarily fencing off parks for festivals can significantly affect access to these public spaces more broadly (Smith, 2023), I argue that this "fencing off" already happens through marketing and promotional practices year-round. Who is meant to get into the festival space and who is not? Consequently, and this is the second argument I would like to make: if we want to understand how music festivals can be spaces where diverse groups of people meet, it would be limiting to only consider what happens at or within the festival space. While festival spaces are often conceptualised as temporally and spatially bounded, I instead argue for their temporal and spatial overflow. As I show throughout this paper the festival continues to "live", although maybe in a less visceral way, and builds its communities beyond the festival day(s) through marketing. Consequently, the processes through which people may be in – or excluded from participating in them, do too.

While this paper has deepened understanding of how diversity and inclusion are embedded within marketing and promotion practices, I would like to set a future research agenda considering the limitations of this study. First, it would be interesting to further investigate these practices for a wider variety of music festivals. As I have shown, there are differences in how music festivals negotiate diversity and inclusion through marketing depending on their format. Including larger rural festivals, that may be embedded in competitive market forces even more, could provide further insights into marketing and promotion practices. Second, while this research combines interview and observation data, future research could further explore actual practices related to marketing and promotion at and through festivals. Third, while the organisers perspective focused on here is relevant, the audience perspective on marketing and promotion of different festivals should be explored. One could for example investigate if audience members from different backgrounds indeed respond differently to variances in promotional content. The findings

of this research also have practical implications, which are especially relevant to the further development of communication guides for festivals in terms of diversity and inclusion. Namely, as I have shown throughout this paper, different parts of the marketing process tend to affect other parts: for instance, the free festival format also induces different ways of shaping promotional content. Mostly, it shows that negotiating diversity and inclusion is not only about making the festival free, and thus more easily accessible, or making sure that visual representation is more inclusive. Festival organisers should consider the interaction between all elements of the marketing process when shaping their diversity and inclusion strategies, which asks for an integrated approach to the marketing and promotion of music festivals.

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