

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOUNG FESTIVALGOERS? INSIGHTS FROM A CROSS-GENERATIONAL ANALYSIS CONDUCTED IN GERMANY

M. J. BAUER, T. NABER, L. S. MICHEL

Matthias Johannes Bauer¹, Tom Naber², Lea Sophie Michel³

^{1 2 3} IST University of Applied Sciences, Germany

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6050-5612>, E-mail: mjbauer@ist-hochschule.de

² tnaber@ist-hochschule.de

³ lsm0312@aol.com

Abstract: Festivals are a unique cultural space where diverse audiences converge, each with varying expectations and priorities. By focusing on young people, this study explores which aspects festivalgoers across different age groups consider most important, using data from a comprehensive survey conducted in Germany (secondary data analysis of a 2023 survey; $N = 3503$). Through cross-tabulations, the analysis examines preferences such as cleanliness, hygiene facilities, transport options, and entertainment. While initial findings show that sustainability consistently ranks as a low priority for festival attendees regardless of age, this study aims to uncover potential generational differences in other key areas. The results provide valuable insights for festival organizers seeking to align their offerings with the diverse needs of their audiences while addressing broader cultural and societal expectations.

Keywords: festivals, audience, generational differences, experience economy, festival management

1 Introduction

Festivals are unique cultural spaces where audiences comprise diverse social groups, each with its own expectations and priorities. They offer immersive, multisensory experiences that temporarily suspend everyday routines and social roles. Particularly for young people, festivals represent not only sites of entertainment but also spaces of identity formation, social bonding, and self-expression.

The word *festival* is often used in a wider sense to describe event formats such as large trade fairs or events featuring other art forms. (Bauer and Naber 2024; Bauer et al. 2022) However, for the purposes of this paper, we define the term festival as follows: Festivals are generally open-air events, usually lasting several days, at which a number of artists perform their music live. A designated camping area is often located on the festival site and is used exclusively for the accommodation of visitors.

While festivals are often discussed in terms of their artistic, economic, or environmental impact, relatively little is known about what actually matters most to young audiences when attending such events. This paper explores the values, preferences, and priorities of young festivalgoers by drawing on a cross-generational secondary analysis of survey data collected in Germany.

2 Theoretical Framework: The Experience Economy and Music Festivals

2.1 The Four Es of the Experience Economy

The conceptual foundation of this study draws on Pine and Gilmore's seminal work *The Experience Economy* (1999), which outlines the evolution of economic value from commodities to goods, services, and ultimately, staged experiences. According to their model, experiences represent a distinct economic offering—one that is intrinsically personal, emotionally resonant, and created

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through the intentional orchestration of goods and services in a memorable context. In this framework, companies do not merely deliver a product or a service, but rather engage customers in a time-bound, immersive, and emotionally impactful event.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) propose a classification of experiences along two dimensions: the level of customer participation (passive to active) and the degree of immersion (absorption to immersion). From this matrix emerge four realms of experience (the four Es in festival experience): education, entertainment, escapism, and esthetics. Rich, memorable experiences—such as those offered by successful festivals—typically integrate elements of all four realms. Entertainment includes passive enjoyment (e.g., watching a concert), while educational experiences involve active learning (e.g., workshops or lectures). Escapist experiences, by contrast, immerse participants fully in alternative realities or social dynamics, and esthetic experiences allow attendees to appreciate curated environments without direct interaction.

This typology is particularly well suited to the analysis of music festivals. Modern open-air festivals often blend these four realms: they entertain audiences with live performances, offer educational components such as artist talks or skill-based workshops, create escapist spaces through temporary architecture and theming, and appeal to the senses through immersive design and aesthetic ambiance. Festivals such as Burning Man or Glastonbury exemplify this integration, combining performance, interaction, community, and landscape into a holistic and transformative experience. (Pine and Gilmore 1998)

Pine and Gilmore (1998) also emphasize that businesses fundamentally operating within the experience economy charge for the experience itself—not merely for goods or services. Festivals meet this criterion explicitly: the purchase of a ticket grants access to a curated, multi-sensory environment whose value is primarily experiential. The economic logic of festivals thus mirrors the shift from service to staged experience.

Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore (1998) identify several principles for designing memorable experiences: theming the event, eliminating negative cues, harmonizing positive impressions, offering memorabilia, and engaging multiple senses. These principles can be observed in the branding strategies, stage designs, and immersive scenographies of many contemporary music festivals.

Ultimately, viewing music festivals through the lens of the experience economy offers a useful analytical frame for understanding the complexity of visitor motivations and the strategic design of festival environments. It situates festivals not simply as leisure events, but as orchestrated cultural productions within an evolving economic paradigm.

2.2. *The five Es of the Experience Economy*

Rivera et al. (2015) expand Pine and Gilmore's (1998) original model of the four Es of experience economics by adding a fifth E: economic value. In their study, this additional element is particularly relevant in the context of Generation Y—and, as we will see later in the present paper, even more so for Generation Z—as this group is often price-conscious.

In this expanded model, economic value is considered an integral component of the overall experience rather than merely a mediating variable. This means that the economic aspect—the cost factor, the willingness to invest in the experience, and the perceived value—directly influences the perception of the overall experience and thus influences future behavioral intentions (such as revisiting or recommending). (Rivera et al. 2015)

In short, the model now encompasses the five Es: education, entertainment, escapism, esthetics, and economic value. This fifth E highlights that economic considerations play a central role in the perception and evaluation of a festival experience for Generation Y, especially in a tourism context where investments in travel, accommodation, and tickets play a significant role in the perception of the overall experience. (Rivera et al. 2015)

Building on this theoretical framework, the present study investigates how festivalgoers across generational groups evaluate specific aspects of their festival experience—ranging from musical programming and atmosphere to hygiene facilities, sustainability, and social motives.

3. Quantitative Survey

3.1. Survey Procedure

For this study, data were subjected to a secondary analysis. The data were collected in 2023 as part of a study on the determinants of festival loyalty, which involved a quantitative investigation of visitor satisfaction and loyalty, as well as the development of recommendations for action for rock and pop festivals in Germany. (Michel 2024; Bauer et al. 2025) The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire. The data collection took place from January 2, 2023, to February 24, 2023. The quantitative data analysis was carried out using SPSS. (Michel 2024)

A total of 6,411 people took part in the survey for this study. Of these, 2,514 people (39.21%) dropped out of the survey; therefore, their responses could not be included in the data analysis. Of the remaining 3,897 participants, 394 people (10.11%) answered "never" to the introductory question "How often have you been to music festivals of the pop or rock genre in Germany?" These 394 individuals fell outside the defined population and were therefore excluded from the data analysis. After adjustment, the evaluable sample size was $N = 3,503$. (Michel 2024)

35.5 % of respondents were male, 63.3 % female, 0.8 % identified as non-binary (divers in the survey question) and 0.4 % did not specify their gender. (Michel 2024)

3.2. Survey Instrument

The questionnaire which was created for the original study was in German only and consisted of a total of 58 items in a largely closed format. For the secondary analysis carried out here, item 4 ("For what reasons do you visit a festival?", with up to six answers out of 21 predefined aspects and one free field), item 5 ("Which aspects are particularly important to you at a festival?", with up to six answers out of 26 predefined aspects and one free field) and the demographic questions of items 6 to 9 (gender, age, relationship status, and highest level of education) were of particular interest. (Michel 2024)

3.3. Method of Secondary Analysis of the Survey Data

For this secondary analysis, solely descriptive statistical methods were used to describe the data in terms of its frequency distributions in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relevant characteristics examined. The methods used included, in particular, the calculation of mean values and the presentation of cross-tabulations. As this was a secondary analysis, inferential statistical methods were deliberately avoided. (Gisske 2021)

The aim of the analysis was to identify potential generational differences in how various aspects of festival experiences are perceived. The data were analyzed using cross-tabulations based on years of birth. For this paper, we based our analysis on the following age cohorts and generational classifications (including count and percentage) (please note: All results and statements, especially those about the Baby Boomers, should be viewed against the background of their small number of cases. This also applies to the statements about Generation X, even though their case numbers are much higher).

- Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964): $n = 18$ (0.5 %)
- Gen X (1965 to 1979): $n = 211$ (6.0 %)
- Gen Y (1980 to 1995): $n = 1430$ (40.8 %)
- Gen Z (1996 to 2012): $n = 1844$ (52.6 %)

It should be noted that the generations are not homogeneous or isolated, but rather heterogeneous cohorts that live and operate within overlapping cultural and social contexts. People's

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socialization, behavior, and mindset depend on numerous characteristics other than their year of birth. Generation is primarily a statistical device in this study. (Jureit 2006)

All differences reported are descriptive; while statistical significance was checked for the sake of completeness, the low number of cases, especially among the Baby Boomer generation, made all significance tests inconclusive. Thus, all results are presented thematically to highlight broader trends and patterns. However, the results provide valuable insights for festival organizers who want to tailor the experiences they offer to the diverse needs of their attendees.

4. Results

4.1. *“Which aspects are particularly important to you at a festival?”*

The following results address the key aspects of how respondents answered the question: “Which aspects are particularly important to you at a festival?” It should be noted that respondents were able to indicate six of the 26 predefined aspects and one free field for this question. However, an analysis of the free text field was not within the scope of this study.

Importance of Music Acts (Table 1): The importance of music acts on the festival program differs notably across generations. While more than 91% of respondents from Gen X, Y, and Z rate music acts as a key component of the festival experience, only 77.78% of Baby Boomers consider them important. This indicates that younger generations assign greater significance to the musical lineup, whereas Baby Boomers diverge from this tendency, suggesting different expectations of the festival format.

Importance of Side Acts (Table 2): Side acts are generally considered unimportant across all generations. A full 100% of Baby Boomers regard them as irrelevant, and more than 93% of Gen X, Y, and Z respondents share this assessment. This broad consensus illustrates that secondary performances play only a marginal role in shaping the overall festival experience.

Importance of Atmosphere and Vibe (Table 3): The general atmosphere and vibe of a festival are highly valued across generations, though to varying degrees. While 85.78% of Gen X rate atmosphere as important, Baby Boomers follow closely with 77.78%. Although Gen Y and Z show similarly high ratings (82.31% and 82.97 %), their assessments are slightly less consistent, pointing to a shared but more nuanced perception of festival ambience.

Importance of Cleanliness (Table 4): Cleanliness of the festival grounds is a point of generational divergence. Among Baby Boomers, 44.44% consider this aspect important, whereas over 70% of Gen X, Y, and Z respondents view it as unimportant. Only around 26–27% of younger respondents emphasize cleanliness, highlighting a generational divide in expectations related to physical infrastructure and order.

Importance of Hygiene Facilities (Table 5): Hygiene facilities are broadly recognized as important, though with subtle generational differences. Baby Boomers (55.56%) and Gen Z (54.18%) rate this aspect slightly more highly than Gen X and Y, who show slightly lower values (around 52–53%). While the differences are not dramatic, they suggest that older and the youngest respondents assign a little more weight to sanitary conditions.

Importance of Sustainability (Table 6): Sustainability is not a top priority for any generation. Although Baby Boomers assign the highest relative importance (16.67%), the majority in all age groups consider this aspect unimportant. Gen Y (7.76%) and Gen Z (10.57%) rank it particularly low, indicating that ecological awareness plays a minimal role in festival decision-making.

Importance of Safety (Table 7): Respondents' emphasis on safety differs across age groups. Gen Z places the most importance on safety (29.07%), followed by Baby Boomers (27.77%) and Gen Y (26.36%), while Gen X places the lowest value on it (21.8%). These findings suggest a strong awareness of safety issues among younger attendees, possibly driven by social and physical security concerns.

Importance of Festival Recognition (Table 8): The reputation or name recognition of a festival is regarded as unimportant by almost all respondents. Over 98% of respondents across all generations disregard this factor, and no meaningful variation between age groups is observed.

Importance of Price-Performance Ratio (Table 9): The perceived value for money offered by the festival is most important to Gen Z (43.55%), followed by Gen Y (40.10%) and Gen X (33.18%). Baby Boomers assign this aspect comparatively lower relevance (38.89%). This indicates that younger audiences are more cost-sensitive and more likely to evaluate festivals in terms of economic efficiency.

4.2. “For what reasons do you visit a festival?”

The following results address the key aspects of how respondents answered the question: “For what reasons do you visit a festival?” It should be noted that respondents were able to indicate six of the 26 predefined aspects and one free field for this question. However, an analysis of the free text field was not within the scope of this study.

Specific Artists as Reason for Attendance (Table 10): The presence of specific artists or bands on the festival program is a dominant reason for selecting and attending festivals among younger generations. While 91.16% of Gen Z, 89.02% of Gen Y, and 87.68% of Gen X respondents cite this as a reason for attendance, only 55.56% of Baby Boomers do so. This generational gradient suggests that the opportunity to see particular performers is significantly more important to younger attendees, underscoring a stronger artist-centered motivation.

Discovering New Music as Reason for Attendance (Table 11): Discovering new music appears to be more relevant for Gen X, with 43.60% indicating this as a motivation. In contrast, Gen Y and Gen Z show lower levels of interest in this aspect (32.94% and 31.34%), suggesting a more established preference structure or a less exploratory approach to festival attendance among younger groups. However, Baby Boomers show the lowest interest in discovering new music (27.78%).

Dancing as Reason for Attendance (Table 12): Dancing is of similar importance to Gen Z (22.83%) and Baby Boomers (22.22%), whereas Gen X and Gen Y assign it slightly lower relevance (17.54% and 18.39%). This results in a bimodal distribution in which both the youngest and oldest groups attribute greater value to physical expression and active participation.

Listening to Live Music as Reason for Attendance (Table 13): Live music remains a central component of the festival experience for all generations, with approximately 80% of respondents across all age groups identifying that aspect as a key reason for attending. This underscores the enduring appeal of live performance as the core attraction of music festivals.

Meeting New People as Reason for Attendance (Table 14): The desire to meet new people is most pronounced among Gen Z (27.93%), while Baby Boomers show the least interest in this aspect (22.22%). The generational difference suggests that social exploration and expanding one's network are more central to younger participants.

Socializing as Reason for Attendance (Table 15): Socializing with others is a moderately relevant motivation for Gen Z (28.25%) and Gen Y (27.06%). In comparison, only 16.67% of Baby Boomers identify this as a priority. This supports the notion that festivals serve as social platforms, especially for younger demographics.

Connecting with Like-Minded People as Reason for Attendance (Table 16): The opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals is important to 38.29% of Gen Z and 39.09% of Gen Y respondents, whereas only 27.78% of Baby Boomers express this interest. This pattern supports the idea that younger generations seek a sense of belonging and identity alignment in festival environments.

Escaping Daily Life as Reason for Attendance (Table 17): The opportunity to escape daily routines plays a stronger role for Baby Boomers (55.56%) than for Gen Z respondents (43.17%). This generational difference may reflect variations in lifestyle and work-related pressures, or differing conceptions of what festivals represent at different stages in life.

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Relaxation as Reason for Attendance (Table 18): Relaxation is another motivation with generational variance. It is a key value for 22.22% of Baby Boomers, compared to just 11.28% of Gen Z respondents. This supports the interpretation that younger generations tend to experience festivals more actively and less as a space for recovery.

Cultural Interest as Reason for Attendance (Table 19): Cultural interest plays a marginal role for all generations, with only around 4 to 7% citing it as a reason for attendance. This indicates that festivals are primarily perceived as entertainment-oriented rather than culturally educational events.

Partying as Reason for Attendance (Table 20): Partying is more prominent among Gen Y (41.05%) and Gen Z respondents (40.40%), while Baby Boomers are less inclined to prioritize this aspect (33.33%). This suggests that the festive and celebratory dimensions of festivals are particularly attractive to younger audiences.

Drinking Alcohol as Reason for Attendance (Table 21): Drinking alcohol is a more common motivation among younger generations, rising from 5.56% in Baby Boomers to 25.05% in Gen Z respondents. This may reflect a stronger association between alcohol and social enjoyment in younger festival cultures.

Drugs and Sex as Reasons for Attendance (Table 22 and 23): Drugs and sex are consistently ranked as low-relevance motivations across all age groups, with only about 0.5–5% identifying them as reasons for attendance. While festivals may retain a hedonistic image, such aspects do not play a prominent role in participants' explicit motivations.

Escapism as Reason for Attendance (Table 24): Escapism is cited more frequently by Baby Boomers (11.11%) than by Gen Y (9.44%) or Gen Z respondents (7.16%). This suggests that older attendees may be a little more inclined to view festivals as a form of withdrawal from everyday demands. In contrast, Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Rivera et al. (2015), report escapism as one of the four or five key factors of a festival experience.

Curiosity as Reason for Attendance (Table 25): Curiosity is a minor factor for all age groups, with only about 2–5% indicating it as a reason for attendance. Festivals thus appear to be approached with clear expectations rather than as exploratory ventures.

4.3. Discussion of Key Generational Differences

A number of generational differences stand out in the dataset. It is clear that music acts are less important to Baby Boomers than to younger cohorts. The same applies to the importance of sustainability and cleanliness, which Baby Boomers consistently rank higher than respondents in the Gen X, Y, or Z groups. Meanwhile, Gen Z places a greater emphasis on cost-related factors and perceived value for money, signaling a higher degree of economic pragmatism.

Entertainment and Atmosphere: Younger generations appear to view the festival experience primarily through the lens of entertainment and immersive atmosphere. Their preferences are strongly aligned with music acts, social engagement and vibrant ambiance. In contrast, Baby Boomers focus less on entertainment and may attend festivals for different, less experience-driven reasons. This aligns with a study by Bowen and Daniels (2005) which used a US case study to show that music acts are not the only reason for attending a festival.

Practical Considerations: Practical elements such as hygiene facilities and cleanliness are more valued by Baby Boomers, who associate festivals with certain infrastructural expectations. Among younger generations, these concerns are noticeably lower in importance, pointing to a higher tolerance for flexible or improvised conditions.

Sustainability Perceptions: Sustainability does not constitute a key priority for any age group. (Bauer et al. 2024) Surprisingly, younger generations—contrary to common assumptions—rate it lower than Baby Boomers. This could suggest that sustainability is perceived as disconnected from the escapist and hedonistic character of the festival experience, especially among younger participants.

Safety Perceptions: Safety receives greater attention from Gen Z than any other age group (29.07%), indicating a heightened awareness of vulnerability. While Baby Boomers show a comparable level of concern (27.77%), the underlying motivations may differ, ranging from personal well-being to concerns about infrastructural security. Gen X, meanwhile, places the least emphasis on safety (21.8%).

Price-Performance Considerations: Cost-efficiency is a major factor for Gen Z, with 43.55% rating value for money as important. This contrasts with Baby Boomers, of whom only 38.89% share this view. This suggests that younger festivalgoers approach the event more consciously in terms of financial return on investment, reflecting and supporting the extension of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four Es to incorporate Economic Value, as proposed by Rivera et al. (2015)

Side Acts and Festival Recognition: Secondary elements such as side acts and brand awareness of the festival play only a minor role across all age groups. This reinforces the notion that the audience is primarily drawn by core elements such as main acts and atmosphere, rather than by marketing or auxiliary programming.

Atmospheric Factors: Atmosphere and vibe are among the most universally valued dimensions of the festival experience. More than 80% of respondents from Gen X, Y, and Z rate this as important, with Baby Boomers close behind at 77.78%. The data confirm atmosphere as a cross-generational point of convergence.

Differentiation and Homogeneity: While younger generations tend to exhibit more consistent preferences, Baby Boomers display greater variability in their responses. This internal heterogeneity may reflect differing life experiences or expectations within the older demographic, in contrast to the more homogeneous outlook among Gen Z and Gen Y cohorts.

Summary of Trends: The analysis shows that younger generations prioritize entertainment, ambiance, and value for money, while placing less emphasis on practicalities and normative concerns such as sustainability. Older generations, particularly Baby Boomers, are more attuned to hygienic and infrastructural standards and exhibit a wider range of expectations. Notably, side acts and festival branding remain insignificant across all groups, whereas atmosphere functions as a unifying factor.

4.4. *Limitations and Interpretive Considerations*

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into generational preferences and festival motivations, yet several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

Self-Report Bias and Social Desirability: All data in the study are based on self-reported responses collected via structured questionnaires. This method is prone to social desirability bias, which may cause respondents to underreport stigmatized behaviors or overstate socially accepted motivations. For example, topics such as drug use, sexual motives, and escapism may be intentionally or unconsciously underrepresented due to normative pressures or discomfort with disclosure.

Thus, it should be noted that the data analyzed here were collected in 2023, i.e., after the COVID-19 pandemic and before the partial legalization of cannabis in Germany. (Beck and Prinz 2024; Schranz et al. 2024) With the enforcement of the Cannabis Act on April 1, 2024, Germany adopted one of the most liberal legal approaches to cannabis on the continent. (Manthey et al. 2024) Studies have shown that cannabis consumption increased during the pandemic. (Kleine et al. 2024) Recent international studies on cannabis consumption in the festival context also show significantly higher consumption than the data presented here suggest. (Chaaban et al. 2024; Piercey et al. 2024; Hesse et al. 2010)

So even if the figures in this study may suggest otherwise, alcohol and drug consumption at festivals is demonstrably present and problematic (Dumbili 2024; Douglass et al. 2022; Jenkinson et al. 2014; Lim et al. 2010; Jaensch et al. 2018); studies from the 1980s and 1990s onwards have even examined the possibility of diagnosing adolescent drug use based on music preferences. (King 1988; Dent et al. 1992; Lim et al. 2008) And when it comes to sex at festivals, other studies tell a different

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story from this one: A recent, commercially conducted study by the sex toy retailer Lovehoney, which surveyed over 2,000 adults in 2023, shows that many festivalgoers are up for an adventure in a tent. In fact, more than a third (39%) of those surveyed have already had sex at a festival. But there are also obstacles and turn-offs: cramped spaces, flimsy air mattresses, and friends next door. However, not everyone is equally enthusiastic about festival sex. Almost half (47%) of the men surveyed admitted to having become intimate at a festival, compared to only 17% of women. Younger generations are also more willing to give in to their sexual impulses at festivals. Over half (55%) of 18- to 34-year-olds have already done so. But that doesn't mean that festival sex is only for young people: After all, around 13% of those over 55 said they are still sexually active at festivals. (<https://www.lovehoney.co.uk/blog/festival-season-101.html>, 05/12/2025) From a scientific perspective, the risks associated with sex at festivals and festivalgoers' awareness of them have been the main focus of research because educational work at festivals (as one of the Es of the experience economy) reaches a broad audience: Lim et al. (2007) showed that in a survey of 939 participants aged 16 to 29 who attended a music festival (Big Day Out, Australia), 43% of all sexually experienced participants did not use a condom because they reported being drunk or high at the time. Thus, heavy patterns of alcohol and other drug use were some of the strongest correlates of young people's engagement in risky sexual behaviour. (Jenkinson et al. 2014)

Lack of Access to Implicit Motives: An indication of latent brand orientation can be observed in real-world festival behavior: many high-profile festivals in Europe and beyond are regularly sold out before a single act is announced, e.g. Glastonbury Festival (UK), Wacken Open Air (Germany), Tomorrowland (Belgium), and Green Man Festival (Wales). This phenomenon suggests that attendees are indeed often driven by brand loyalty, trust in programming quality, or the symbolic value of attending the event itself—factors that may not be consciously articulated when responding to surveys. Consequently, the survey's finding that over 98% of respondents consider brand recognition unimportant must be interpreted with caution. The discrepancy between reported attitudes and actual booking behavior highlights the potential disconnect between stated preferences and underlying drivers of decision-making. Certain motivational dimensions—such as escapism or brand orientation—may not be fully captured through direct questioning. Although only 7.16% of Gen Z and 9.44% of Gen Y respondents indicated escapism as a reason for festival attendance, it is plausible that this motive operates on a more implicit level; as already mentioned above, Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Rivera et al. (2015), report escapism as one of the four or five key factors of a festival experience. Many respondents may not consciously interpret their desire to "get away" as escapism, but rather as a normalized aspect of their leisure culture. Similarly, festival brand recognition is almost unanimously deemed unimportant (over 98%), which could suggest that strong brand attachment is not consciously articulated by participants, even if it influences decision-making behavior. After all, what distinguishes a festival from a concert with multiple acts? One key difference is that festivals usually operate as independent brands with their own merchandise and identity. (Bauer and Naber 2025) Such implicit factors may require qualitative or indirect methods (e.g., projective techniques, interviews) for adequate identification.

Limitations of Closed Question Formats: The use of exclusively closed-ended questions restricts respondents' ability to elaborate on nuanced or hybrid motivations. Terms such as "relaxation", "atmosphere", or meeting "like-minded people" may be interpreted differently across individuals and contexts. This limitation underscores the importance of complementing quantitative research with qualitative insights to uncover hidden meanings and subjective interpretations. (Porst 2014)

Contextual Variability Across Festival Types: It should be noted that the survey specifically targeted individuals who had experience of attending pop or rock music festivals in Germany. This was established through the initial screening question: "How often have you been to music festivals of the pop or rock genre in Germany?" Consequently, the sample reflects the attitudes and priorities of

people who are already familiar with mainstream or large-scale music festivals, rather than niche formats or genre-specific subcultures. The survey did not differentiate between types of festivals, such as genre-specific, size-based, or location-based distinctions. Since expectations and experiences may differ significantly between, for instance, a small jazz festival and a large electronic music festival, the lack of contextual framing may dilute the interpretability of certain results. Dimensions such as hygiene facilities, safety, and sustainability may be perceived differently depending on festival infrastructure and programming.

Sample Distribution and Representativeness: Although the study was based on a large and diverse sample ($N = 3,503$), it was not designed as a representative cross-generational population survey. Notably, the number of Baby Boomer respondents was very low ($n = 18$), which limits the statistical robustness of comparisons involving this group—significance and robustness could therefore not be tested. Moreover, some demographic segments (e.g., underage participants) may be underrepresented, thereby affecting generalizability.

Genre-Specific and Format-Specific Expectations: The study did not control for musical genre preferences or festival formats, which may affect priorities such as music acts, cultural interest, or social engagement. A metal festival and a folk festival may attract audiences with vastly different value systems, which the aggregated data cannot fully reflect.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer a substantial contribution to understanding generational trends in festival participation. Future research could benefit from mixed-method approaches and more nuanced segmentation to deepen the interpretation of cross-generational visitor expectations and motivations.

4.5. Conclusion

This study offers concrete insights into the varying expectations of festivalgoers across generations, providing a valuable knowledge base for the management of open-air music events. Younger audiences—particularly those from Gen Z and Gen Y—tend to prioritize immersive entertainment, social connectivity, and economic value, with music acts and atmosphere serving as central anchors of the festival experience. In contrast, Baby Boomers display greater sensitivity to infrastructural factors such as hygiene facilities and cleanliness, as well as a more heterogeneous set of motivations that include escapism and relaxation.

These findings underscore the importance of differentiated audience strategies. Festival organizers seeking to attract and retain multigenerational audiences should align core programming and spatial planning with the diverse value systems of their attendees. For younger groups, maintaining a strong musical lineup and fostering vibrant, socially oriented environments will remain key. For older audiences, the provision of comfort, clarity of logistics, and accessible infrastructure may increase satisfaction and loyalty.

The study also highlights the limitations of normative communication strategies in areas such as sustainability. Despite public discourse framing younger generations as particularly environmentally conscious, survey responses indicate that sustainability is not a decisive factor in the context of festivals. This suggests a need for more behaviorally informed approaches—such as nudging and design-based interventions—rather than relying on appeals to ecological responsibility. (Bauer et al. 2024; Aßmann 2022; Bär et al. 2022; Bär and Korrman 2020; Sunstein 2014) Nudging refers to subtle incentives that aim to steer people's behavior in a certain direction without explicitly forcing them to change their behavior. By gently nudging visitors toward more sustainable choices, it could be possible to promote pro-ecological behaviors without visitors feeling coerced. (Aßmann 2022)

Ultimately, the results support a more data-driven and audience-centered approach to festival management. By integrating generational profiles into planning and communication strategies, organizers can design more inclusive, relevant, and resilient events.

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Appendices: Cross-Tabulations by Age Cohorts

1. “Which aspects are particularly important to you at a festival?”—Percentage agreement by generation (*n* = Gen Z: 1844, Gen Y: 1430, Gen X: 211, Baby Boomers: 18).

Tab 1. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of music acts

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	22.22%	9.00%	7.20%	8.19%	7.91%
music acts	77.78%	91.00%	92.80%	91.81%	92.09%

Tab 2. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of side acts

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	100.00%	95.26%	94.89%	93.33%	94.12%
side acts	0.00%	4.74%	5.11%	6.67%	5.88%

Tab 3. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of atmosphere and vibe

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	22.22%	14.22%	17.69%	17.03%	19.69%
mood	77.78%	85.78%	82.31%	82.97%	80.31%

Tab 4. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of cleanliness of the premises

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	55.56%	70.14%	72.38%	73.16%	72.59%
cleanliness	44.44%	29.86%	27.62%	26.84%	27.41%

Tab 5. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of hygiene facilities

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	44.44%	46.92%	47.41%	45.82%	46.53%
hygiene	55.56%	53.08%	52.59%	54.18%	53.47%

Tab 6. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of sustainability

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	83.33%	86.26%	92.24%	89.43%	90.53%
sustainability	16.67%	13.74%	7.76%	10.57%	9.65%

Tab 7. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of safety

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	72.22%	78.20%	73.64%	70.93%	72.48%
security	27.77%	21.80%	26.36%	29.07%	27.52%

Tab 8. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of festival recognition

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	100%	98.58%	98.60%	98.81%	98.72%
awareness	0%	1.42%	1.40%	1.19%	1.28%

Tab 9. Cross-tabulation year of birth – importance of price-performance ratio

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	61.11%	66.82%	59.93%	56.45%	58.52%
price-performance	38.89%	33.18%	40.07%	43.55%	41.48%

2. “For what reasons do you visit a festival?” —Percentage agreement by generation (n = Gen Z: 1844, Gen Y: 1430, Gen X: 211, Baby Boomers: 18).

Tab 10. Cross-tabulation year of birth – seeing specific bands

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	44.44%	12.32%	10.95%	8.84%	10.11%
specific bands	55.56%	87.68%	89.02%	91.16%	89.89%

Tab 11. Cross-tabulation year of birth – discovering new music

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	72.22%	56.40%	67.06%	68.66%	67.29%
new music	27.78%	43.60%	32.94%	31.34%	32.71%

Tab 12. Cross-tabulation year of birth – dancing

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	77.78%	82.46%	81.61%	77.17%	79.30%
dance	22.22%	17.54%	18.39%	22.83%	20.70%

Tab 13. Cross-tabulation year of birth – listening to live music

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	22.22%	18.96%	20.07%	19.96%	19.95%
live music	77.78%	81.04%	79.93%	80.04%	80.05%

Tab 14. Cross-tabulation year of birth – meeting new people

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	77.78%	75.83%	76.50%	72.07%	74.14%
new people	22.22%	24.17%	23.50%	27.93%	25.86%

Tab 15. Cross-tabulation year of birth – socializing with family and friends

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	83.33%	76.78%	72.94%	71.75%	72.59%
socialization	16.67%	23.22%	27.06%	28.25%	27.41%

Tab 16. Cross-tabulation year of birth – being together with similar people with similar interests

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	72.22%	62.56%	60.91%	61.71%	61.49%

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similar interests	27.78%	37.44%	39.09%	38.29%	38.51%
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Tab 17. Cross-tabulation year of birth – looking for a break from everyday life

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	44.44%	47.39%	44.41%	56.83%	51.13%
balance	55.56%	52.61%	55.59%	43.17%	48.87%

Tab 18. Cross-tabulation year of birth – relaxation

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	77.78%	80.57%	85.03%	88.72%	86.67%
relaxation	22.22%	19.43%	14.97%	11.28%	13.33%

Tab 19. Cross-tabulation year of birth – cultural interest

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	100.00%	92.89%	95.38%	95.44%	95.29%
culture	0.00%	7.11%	4.62%	4.56%	4.71%

Tab 20. Cross-tabulation year of birth – partying

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	66.67%	69.19%	58.95%	59.60%	59.95%
party	33.33%	30.81%	41.05%	40.40%	40.05%

Tab 21. Cross-tabulation year of birth – drinking alcohol

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	94.44%	87.20%	78.32%	74.95%	77.16%
drinking	5.56%	12.80%	21.68%	25.05%	22.84%

Tab 22. Cross-tabulation year of birth – taking drugs

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	94.44%	99.05%	99.37%	99.19%	99.40%
drugs	5.56%	0.95%	0.63%	0.81%	0.77%

Tab 23. Cross-tabulation year of birth – having sex

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	94.44%	100.00%	99.30%	98.97%	99.14%
sex	5.56%	0.00%	0.70%	1.03%	0.86%

Tab 24. Cross-tabulation year of birth – escapism

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	88.89%	97.16%	90.56%	92.84%	92.15%
escapism	11.11%	2.84%	9.44%	7.16%	7.85%

Tab 25. Cross-tabulation year of birth – curiosity

	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	Total
-1	94.44%	97.63%	97.27%	95.50%	96.35%
curiosity	5.56%	2.37%	2.73%	4.50%	3.65%