THE CURRENT STATE OF FESTIVAL STORYTELLING RESEARCH (1980–2024): INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE, *FESTIVALS AND STORYTELLING*

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Over the last few decades, storytelling, as a subject for study, has grown exponentially across a number of interdisciplinary fields. However, it remains underdeveloped in event management research, and specifically concerning festival experiences. Following a critical review of the existing research that has contributed to current understanding of storytelling within festival contexts and highlighting the key arguments of these publications, this article provides a comprehensive overview of how storytelling is currently understood within festival contexts. Extending the literature, this article introduces the contributing articles of the Special Issue, which demonstrate the value of storytelling for audiences, hosts, and researchers. This article closes with a call for more research into storytelling within festival contexts and encourages future studies to address the identified gaps to help progress understanding of storytelling, its practice and dynamics, and its value for festival experiences.

Key words: Festivals; Storytelling; Festival stories; Experience; Storyscapes

Introduction

Over the last several decades, storytelling, as a subject for study, has grown exponentially across a number of interdisciplinary fields, including education, media, communications, history, anthropology, archaeology, tourism, and leisure studies. Yet, within the context of event management, and in particular, festival studies, it remains underdeveloped as a directed subject for study and in understanding, despite its demonstrated value for both audiences and host communities.

Storytelling is widely recognized as an ancient tradition that has existed for thousands of years, with some pointing to the Paleolithic Lascaux cave paintings in southwestern France as one of the earliest examples of its practice (Ciancarini et al., 2023). Over time, storytelling practice has evolved from cave paintings and oral traditions to include a variety of visual and performed practices, such as song, dance, written text, art, theater, film, gaming, and photography—all of which can occur in our physical reality, as well as in digital, virtual, and/or augmented realities (Kang et al., 2020; N. L.

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Williams et al., 2015; W. R. Williams, 2019; Zhang & Wang, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). Thus, storytelling is a means for communication, cultural transmission, and knowledge exchange, and occurs across various practices in business, science, social sciences, and the humanities (Ciancarini et al., 2023). However, with reference to the focus of this Special Issue, storytelling is also an essential component for the design of festival experiences (Richards et al., 2014), which for the purposes of this article and the Special Issue are defined as organized events designed to represent, promote, and/or celebrate culture, heritage, and/or community identity, meanings, and values (Cudny, 2013; Gibson & Stewart, 2009).

Within festival contexts, storytelling has been explored as a subject for study and as a growing phenomenon since the 1980s following a surge of publications around the first (1973) annual National Storytelling Festival that took place in Jonesborough, Tennessee, USA (Sobol, 1999; Sobol & Gratch, 2021). Since then, Storytelling Festivals have been successfully occurring on a global scale, attracting media and scholarly attention to their universal efforts of showcasing community voices and stories. Beyond the scope of Storytelling Festivals, over the last 40 years, such attention on storytelling within festival contexts has been slower to publication. A few early studies laid the groundwork for further research and development (see e.g. Cruikshank, 1997; Sobol, 1999; Tewari, 1982), not to mention the plethora of dissertations, conference papers, and the important peer-reviewed journal, *Storytelling, Self, Society*, which since 2004 has published scholarship on storytelling across interdisciplinary fields and practices, including festival management. However, much of this work has been from other interdisciplinary disciplines and thus, from within events management research, storytelling within festival contexts remains limited.

The ideation and development of this Special Issue was based on an assessment of the current state of research concerning festival storytelling and how festivals are venues and a means to share, promote, and create stories. During September and October of 2023, a review was conducted of 150 scholarly publications since 1980, following that surge of publications around the first National Storytelling Festival. This review, using GoogleScholar, was based on the combination of keyword search terms "festival" and "storytelling" or "stories." Titles and abstracts were first reviewed, and those that indicated a directed focus on festivals and storytelling were further reviewed for their main body content to ensure festival stories and/or storytelling were indeed the focus. This search produced a number of scholarly articles, book chapters, books, and conference papers that specifically focused on stories and/or storytelling within or for the development of festival experiences, and, thus, have contributed to our understanding of festivals and storytelling. From these sources, several preferred festival theme types emerged including "cultural," "heritage," "rural," "fringe," "film," "literary," "music," and "virtual." To identify any additional sources within these themes that were not identified through the original search, a supplementary search was conducted with those themes added to the key terms used, as well as other popular festival themes, such as "sport," "pride," "dark," "religious," and "art." From the searches, 17% of the literature reviewed was from *Event Management,* and 9% from *International Journal of Event and Festival Management,* while 18% was from other journals and texts with "event" and/or "festival" in their title, including, for example, *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* and the text *Festivals and Edutainment.* The remaining 56% of the literature reviewed was found from outside a festival or event focus, such as *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* and *Tourism Management*. The search results were separated into groupings: 1) articles from events-related journals, 2) articles from other journals, 3) book chapters, 4) other sources (e.g., reports, conference papers). Each grouping was thematically coded, resulting in nine overarching themes as key areas of scholarly attention. As highlighted in the hierarchy chart shown in Figure 1, these include:

1. Storytelling means and mediums
2. Storytelling through marketing and advertising
3. Storytelling for community development and identity formation
4. Placemaking and place attachment through storytelling
5. Storytelling as a research method
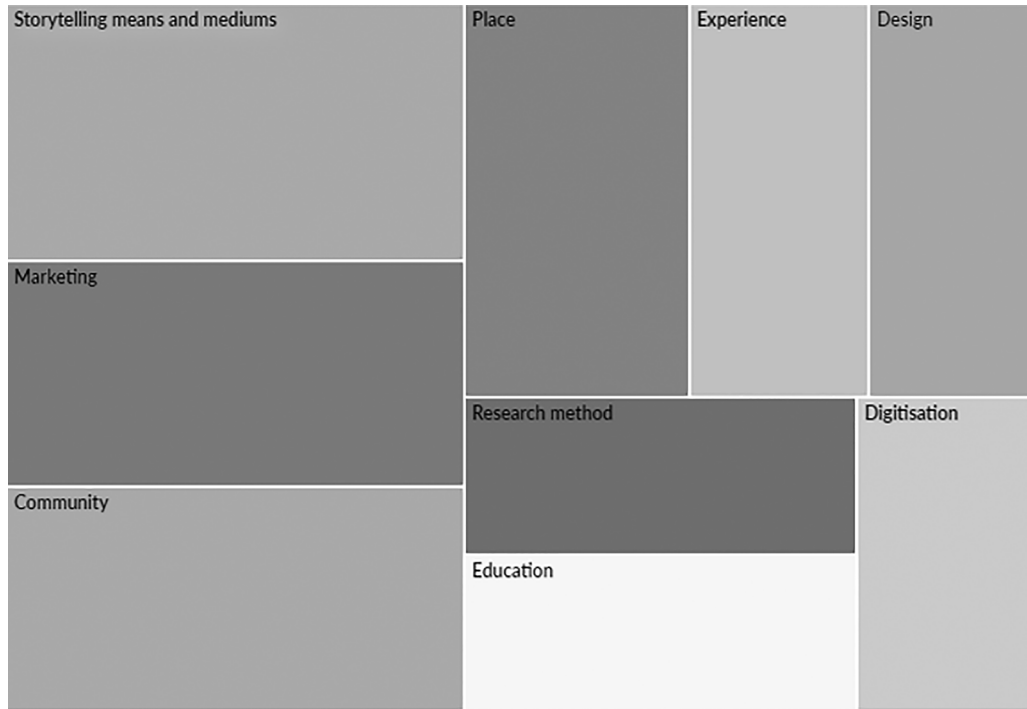6. Storytelling as an educational tool and practice

Figure 1. Key areas of festival storytelling (source: authors).

7. Storytelling and the physical experience
8. Designing festival experiences through storytelling
9. Storytelling in the digital realm

The overarching themes reflected in Figure 1 are introduced and discussed with brevity in the following and conclude with an identification of the research gaps in order to demonstrate the need for this Special Issue within event management studies.

Literature Review: Key Areas of Festival Storytelling

Storytelling Means and Mediums

One of the most prominent themes revealed through the review was how storytelling occurs at and in association with festivals through varying means and mediums. Within the literature, storytelling is commonly discussed as festival media intended to deliver a specific message (Frost & Laing, 2013; Kinnunen & Haahti, 2015). In fact,

Frost and Laing (2013) noted the significance of festival websites, which are often multistoreyed and multistoried—that is, involving several stories and layers of stories that rely on a variety of storytelling media used to construct a persuasive message. Word-of-mouth (WOM) and e-word-of-mouth (eWOM) advertising has also been shown as a storytelling medium in which people tell others of their experiences (Arasli et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2017), as well as user-generated content and photographs of festival experiences that are then posted online for others to see and engage with (San Cornelio & Roig, 2018; Todd & Logan-McFarlane, 2017). However, drawing on theories of applied storytelling and cocreation, the literature also demonstrates how music and art (including digital) is also a form of storytelling, used to help attendees to connect with the festival space, place, community, and experience (Stadler et al., 2014). Turning local stories into a community song, for example, to then be sung by locals has been shown to enhance community engagement and social cohesion (Liguori et al., 2022). Also, drawing one's perspectives of

a festival in pictorial form to then be explained through a storytelling process has been shown to deepen reflective learning and appreciation (Yim et al., 2011). Understandably, communication, narrated stories, and self-expression through written and spoken word, as well as embodied self-expression, are also put forward as forms of storytelling within the existing literature (Bachman & Hull, 2023; Cummings & Herborn, 2015; Dickson, 2015; Rossetti, 2023; Rossetti & Quinn, 2023). Physically engaging with the festival space and place has been shown to enhance the festival experience and one's level of cultural capital, especially if one is sensuously engaged through sight and sound (Rossetti & Quinn, 2023). Yet, some, such as Heng (2014), have argued, and importantly so, that festivals in their entirety are a form of storytelling, designed as material narratives and translated through costumed performances, aesthetic markers, food, drink, and commercial goods.

Marketing and Festival Storytelling

Numerous studies focused on marketing within festival contexts have directly and indirectly discussed the value of storytelling through marketing efforts on the motivations, interests, engagement, and experience of festival-goers. Within this theme, scholars have explored, for example, brand communication and the importance of wording in marketing messages for attracting interest, enhancing the festival image, and supporting festival city place-making (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Li et al., 2021). Social media marketing was also found prevalent, as scholars have explored how this storytelling medium can be used to enhance the perceived festival value among festival-goers, particularly if it promotes a memorable message and brand experience, which, if done through sensory, affective, behavioral, and/or intellectual efforts, can influence festival-goer behavior and the overall festival experience (Strand & Robertson, 2020; Tkaczynski et al., 2022). Such findings are not new, however, as others, including Kruger and Saayman (2012), have articulated the significance of messages ingrained in media, media sponsorship, and marketing media on festival-goers' interests and motivations to attend. Importantly, WOM and eWOM advertising has been shown to play a significant

role in motivating attendance (Ahn et al., 2017; Bachman & Hull, 2023; Kruger & Saayman, 2012). In fact, festival media and how particular festival messages are delivered through media has been shown as being impactful on attendee expectations and satisfaction (Robertson & Rogers, 2009). Thus, how a storyline is woven into marketing strategies and across various media is beneficial for promoting a festival experience, as well as the festival place and host community (Stewart et al., 2024). Despite this interest, further research is still needed on storytelling's influence on marketing strategies within festival contexts to better assess its influence on festival-goers' motivations, expectations and satisfaction.

Communities and Identities via Festival Stories

How storytelling is used in its varying forms to build festival communities, preserve cultural identities, and enhance cultural understanding at festivals has been revealed as a popular study focus in existing literature. For example, in exploring festival connections and how festivals are inherently social events, scholars have demonstrated how storytelling activities are used to enhance cultural transmission and create greater social cohesion and community development among festival-goers and host communities (Black, 2016; Fernandez, 2006; Kridel, 1980; Tewari, 1982). Such revelations have been further demonstrated in a number of studies that have explored the benefit of sharing of stories, values, and beliefs between festival-goers and host communities to promote social bonding and cultural bridging, which can in turn lead to enhanced social and cultural capital, as well as new individual and/or group identity formation (Liguori et al., 2022; Mair & Duffy, 2018; Quinn & Wilks, 2013; Rossetti & Quinn, 2021; Wilks, 2011; Wilks & Quinn, 2016). Adding to this, several studies have in particular explored how Storytelling Festivals are a means for cultural transmission and civic revival (Cruikshank, 1997; Sobol, 1999).

In exploring the link between community development and storytelling, some studies have revealed how identity formation can be shaped, negotiated, and challenged within festival experiences (Koefoed et al., 2022; Kridel, 1980; Quinn, 2003; Tewari, 1982). These studies are supported

by others who have examined the impact of word choice, messaging, and narrative development on festival experiences, particularly those that represent local culture and/or community life (Florence, 2022; George, 2015). Others have explored the importance of community consultation and inclusion within narrative development, particularly when the festival experience includes a message, narrative, or reenactment of difficult and/or contested history (Olsson et al., 2016; Tschida, 2022). Scholars have also explored inclusive storytelling efforts as a means to encourage audiences and their host communities to be more open to getting to know others that they may not otherwise meet, and in turn better understand and appreciate each other, which can thus enhance a greater sense of community, acceptance, and belonging (Duffy & Mair, 2018; Duffy & Waitt, 2011; Giovanardi et al., 2014; Karlsen & Stenbacka Nordström, 2009). Importantly, festival storytelling efforts as a potential medium to support dialogue between different communities have been further explored and shown as a way to transform lives for both short and long term (Duffy & Mair, 2021; Neuhofer et al., 2020).

Festival Places, Spaces, and Storytelling

Another popular theme, which numerous studies have explored, is relating to the festival place and space. Specifically, placemaking, place attachment, and creation of a sense of place have been explored through various forms of storytelling practices. Within these studies, discussions of experience-based consumption practices and their influences on a festival's image, sense of place, and place attachment have been put forward (San Cornelio & Roig, 2018; Sassatelli, 2011; Todd & Logan-McFarlane, 2017). As such, storytelling has been identified as beneficial for placemaking and thus, destination branding, particularly if storytelling leads to the development of "place myths" that can in turn foster place attachment and/or a greater sense of place (Staiff & Bushell, 2017; Thomasson, 2022). Adding to this, studies have evaluated the impact of memory-making and storytelling of those memories on festival-goers' values and attitudes ascribed to the festival place (Y. K. Lee et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Within this, storytelling efforts as a means for creating "storyscapes" have been

shown to encourage learning about the festival place and its host community, thereby promoting greater appreciation among festival-goers (Giorgi, 2011; Lovell & Griffin, 2022; Rossetti & Quinn, 2021). As such, the existing literature has demonstrated that through consumption values and storytelling of their festival experience and the festival place, people (festival-goers and the host community) develop personal attitudes and beliefs of their experience, potentially developing their own identity from their experience, and in turn become more attached and loyal to it (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013; Y. K. Lee et al., 2021; Mair & Duffy, 2018).

*Storytelling Research Methods
and Researchers' Stories*

Storytelling has also been widely observed within festival contexts as a research method. While analyzing festivals through, for example, ethnography, autoethnography, observations, and/or personal reflective journals, researchers produce stories and narratives about their festival observations and holistic experiences. The review has revealed that when data are collected on-site, many researchers engage in an applied process of both collecting other individuals' stories and forming their own stories of the festival experience (Leonard & Whitfield, 2024; Liguori et al., 2022; Rossetti, 2023). Through these efforts, studies have shown storytelling as a research method can help to better understand personal responses, including cognitive, verbal, sensory, and emotional, and further reveal meanings and values in those responses (Brown, 2023). Such research can be conducted through a variety of storytelling means, including personal meaning mapping (Van Winkle & Falk, 2015), audience testimonies (Dickson, 2015), reflections and recollections (Owen & Chambers, 2022), experience descriptions and stories (Kinnunen & Haahti, 2015; Peperkamp et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2019), narrative inquiry and synthesis (Musikavanhu et al., 2022; Yeark & Powers, 2022; Yu et al., 2022), pictorial drawings of festival experiences (Yim et al., 2011), and interviewing (Brown, 2023). Adding to this, some have discussed the value in using online user content through, for example, Facebook and Twitter, as a means for gathering stories of festival experiences (De Jong, 2015; Garay & Morales

Perez, 2017). Importantly, the researcher's own experience is also a story for telling, which some have noted can be recorded via self-reporting, ethnography, diaries, and field notes (Brown, 2023; Fernandez, 2006; Koefoed et al., 2022; Stadler et al., 2013). Particular attention has been paid to the researcher's self-recording of their bodily sensations and emotional experiences while conducting their research (Duffy et al., 2011; Rossetti, 2023).

Learning Through Festival Storytelling

As expected, numerous studies have explored storytelling as an educational tool and practice within festival contexts. Several studies have highlighted how storytelling can be used as a form of knowledge exchange between festival-goers and the host community (Black, 2016; Liguori et al., 2022; Stadler et al., 2014). Even more, scholars have explored how storytelling is an effective tool for delivering messages intended to enhance understanding and appreciation among festival-goers for specific topics, such as cultural traditions, sustainability, and social issues (Collins & Cooper, 2017; Ford & Markwell, 2017; Wright, 2024; Yim et al., 2011). On this topic, numerous studies have examined how storytelling can facilitate learning among festival-goers of local customs and practices, which can support the development of social and/or cultural capital (Rossetti & Quinn, 2019, 2021). In fact, studies such as Duffy and Mair (2021), Merfeld-Langston (2010), and Organ et al. (2015) have revealed how, through storytelling initiatives, festivals can be sources for encouraging positive thinking and behavior, which may in turn enhance sociocultural connections and civic participation. Beyond this, some have analyzed how powerful storytelling initiatives can help to transform lives, promote local pride, and facilitate increased cultural capital—all of which are positive outcomes of learning lessons within festival experiences (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Neuhofer et al., 2020; Rossetti & Quinn, 2023; Woosnam et al., 2009). Taking this further, scholars, such as Benton et al. (2014) and Leonard and Whitfield (2024), for example, explored the relationship between learning and storytelling for engaging audiences with history and heritage for festival experiences. Within these discussions, some (e.g. Kajzer Mitchell et al., 2024; Leonard & Whitfield, 2024; Lu, 2024; Wyatt

& Rossetti, 2024) have demonstrated how storytelling is made possible through edutainment—the mixing of education with entertainment. Such storytelling experiences, as some studies have indicated, can create lucid learning spaces and enhance the overall festival experience (Kajzer Mitchell et al., 2024; Wright, 2024).

Storytelling, Physical Experiences, and Self-Expression

Academic deliberations have also explored how, within festival experiences, people communicate, narrate stories, and express themselves through written and spoken word, as well as with their bodies (Cummings & Herborn, 2015; Dickson, 2015). Numerous studies have noted how the body, through bodily senses and physical interactions, enhance the festival experience, in addition to supporting placemaking and place attachment (Duffy, 2019; Duffy et al., 2011; Giovanardi et al., 2014; Rossetti, 2023). Within this context, some have highlighted how experiential consumption at festivals through embodied storytelling and the physical use of space and place within the festival experience can enhance the audience's sense of wellness and well-being (Katczynski et al., 2023; Lea, 2006). This is shown to further extend to audience emotions and psychosomatic interactions. For example, some have explored how through storytelling, festival-goers can celebrate and reminisce deceased loved ones, and are therefore able to better cope with their bereavement (Patterson et al., 2017). Thus, as a form of storytelling, physical movement, emotional interactions, and the application of sensorial activities within a festival experience can help festival-goers to engage in their experience more deeply (Rossetti & Quinn, 2023). Such findings have been observed at, for example, film festivals (Dickson, 2015), multicultural festivals (Simonsen et al., 2017), and pride festivals (Kaygalak-Celebi et al., 2020). Within these studies, self-expression and physical movement are shown to be essential elements of the festival experience, and thus, of the festival story.

Designing Festival Storytelling Experiences

It is made clear that storytelling within festival contexts is inherently linked to the festival activities

and experience design. Scholars have argued that festival experiences tend to use innovative and engaging methods to relay stories, messages, or narratives to their audiences through, for example, interactive theming, immersion, technology, simulation, and reenactment (Neuhofer et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2015; Wreford et al., 2019; Wyatt & Rossetti, 2024). While the review identified some studies that have explored storytelling as a means to create more unique and memorable experiences (Iversen et al., 2023; Morgan, 2008; Whitford & Dunn, 2014; Wright, 2024), others explored storytelling through festival theming and how the integration of decorations, aesthetics, and lighting with an enchanting storyline or directed message can help to enhance the festival's image and sense of culture (Lovell & Griffin, 2022; Neuhofer et al., 2020). Within the theme of storytelling and experience design, many studies explored the importance of comprehensive and composite storytelling, which can help to ensure the intended message is delivered and received, thereby enhancing the possibility of learning, understanding, and appreciation among festival-goers (Andersson et al., 2013; Dębicka-Borek, 2022; Ford & Markwell, 2017; Wright, 2024). Adding to this, some studies have explored how storytelling can be used to design meaningful and transformative festival experiences with educational benefits and identity and community formation opportunities (Neuhofer et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2015), while others have explored the impact of experiential opportunities, customer services and offerings on the festival journey, and festival-goers' stories (I. S. Lee et al., 2012; Peperkamp et al., 2015). Supporting these studies, others have explored the value of cocreation for applied and performed storytelling opportunities (Brown, 2023; Karlsen & Stenbacka Nordström, 2009; Liguori et al., 2022; O'Grady & Kill, 2013). Story sharing of event management and design processes across event management practice was also identified as a subject for study (Stadler et al., 2014), although minimally, and thus, deserving of further scrutiny.

Digitization and Digital Festival Storytelling

As expected in a technological world, digital storytelling and the digitization of festival experiences was found to be a relatively prominent theme in the review of existing literature. Studies have explored the digitalization of storytelling through user-generated online content, as visitors and community members share their festival experiences, interact, and create new festival stories before, during, and after their experience in online environments (Estanyol, 2022; Gyimóthy & Larson, 2015; Lu, 2024; Montanari et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2015). Adding to this, numerous studies have examined the importance of eWOM and how social media story-sharing can enhance postfestival promotion efforts, support the overall festival image and branding, and generate interest and motivation for future attendance (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; I. S. Lee et al., 2012; Sigala, 2019a, 2019b; N. L. Williams et al., 2015). Most recently, scholars have been exploring the move of festivals into online environments following the arrival of COVID-19, creating "webstivals," and how digital storytelling of those experiences proliferated as online festival-goers shared their experiences and engaged in digital learning and community development (Estanyol, 2022; Kotova et al., 2022; Lu, 2024). These studies, along with several others (e.g. Bachman & Hull, 2023; Gyimóthy & Larson, 2015; Wreford et al., 2019), have demonstrated the value of AR and VR technology, as well as social media networking, on the festival experience and stories of those experiences that are later told by virtual attendees. Since the end of lockdowns, festival experiences (and many other events) continue to offer virtual and/or hybrid experiences, which studies have highlighted as beneficial for extending the festival experience beyond the physical constraints of place and space, as well as extending the networking possibilities (Kotova et al., 2022; Wreford et al., 2019).

Concluding Thoughts on the Current State of Research

The extent of storytelling as a subject for study within the context of festival experiences has been outlined in the above. However, while important and supportive to the advancement of understanding festival storytelling, most of the literature identified and evaluated has come from within the fields of education, anthropology, literature, heritage, and

folklore, thereby demonstrating a significant gap in events management research. Additionally, there is a heavy presence of rural, literary, film, and music festivals, not to mention Storytelling Festivals, used as case studies within these works. Further complicating these issues, much of the literature does not always directly refer to *storytelling* as the key subject for study. Instead, storytelling is often embedded as a lesser topic within larger discussions of festival design, festival experiences, and/or festival tourism. Also, and in many of the cases, storytelling is not explicitly referred to, but is instead an inferred topic woven into discussions of narrative development, identity formation, and experience design. It is because of this inference that the review undertaken of the literature is subjective and based on the authors' interpretations of meaning in terms of context, phrasing, and terminology. Reflecting on this, the authors acknowledge two arguable limitations. First, since the review included subjective interpretations, the results can be challenged by more objective, positivist examinations. Second, while a substantial body of literature was reviewed to offer a near-comprehensive understanding, it is certainly not exhaustive. Yet, both of these limitations are grounded in the fact that much of the studies do not refer to storytelling explicitly, despite its nature and context underpinning the core of their discussions.

Perhaps the indirect approach taken to discuss storytelling in some studies is due to it often being perceived as merely a form of content marketing and branding (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Strand & Robertson, 2020). Yet others, such as Mossberg et al. (2010) and Richards et al. (2014), have demonstrated how storytelling is more than just the marketing campaign and guiding concept. Rather, the storytelling is the whole event experience, comprising the service landscape, the packaging and programming of activities and entertainment, the experience offerings (e.g., food, drink, souvenirs, merchandise), and the marketing and promotional activities (Brown, 2023; Mossberg et al., 2010; Richards et al., 2014). Others have highlighted it as being essential for the delivery and reinforcement of underpinning messages in festival and event experiences (Kinnunen & Haahti, 2015; Smith, 2015), as well as for the encouragement of social interactions and sharing of symbolic values,

cultural traditions, local heritage, and affective benefits that influence or are influenced by the festival experience (Morgan, 2008; Richards, 2019). From this, it is clear that storytelling guides the creation of the audience experience and can be found in the festival places, spaces, design functions, aesthetics, artefacts, interactions, performances, communications, and promotional materials (Dębicka-Borek, 2022; Neuhofer et al., 2020).

In review of festival and events research and future directions, Laing (2018) called for more in-depth studies of the emotional labor in attending and/or working at a festival; how festivals enhance and contribute to stakeholders' well-being; subculture festival experiences and specifically their impact on social capital and identity development; and how innovative methodological approaches are being used in festival and events research. Following, Mair and Weber (2019) called for more interdisciplinary research that incorporates business, social, and/or spatial perspectives; non-Western festival phenomena; pedagogical festival studies; and research that offers more conceptual or theoretical framings. Adding to these, Duffy and Mair (2021) called for more research into how we can, for example, normalize climate concern into festival designs, and how to balance hybrid and virtual offerings to ensure the intangible benefits of physically attending a festival are not lost in a post-COVID-19 world. Similarly, Mensah et al. (2023) have called for more research into continued digital festivals; the management of information communication technologies in festival experiences; and negative behaviors that often occur within festival experiences. It is important to recognize here that some of these underdeveloped research themes have been proposed for future research for decades.

Reflecting on the calls for future research, and in comparison to the review done for this Special Issue introduction article, it is clear that festival studies within events management research requires much more attention. Much of this attention can be explored through the context of storytelling, which, as previously demonstrated, is woven into every facet of the festival experience, but remains an underdeveloped subject for study. Therefore, as outlined in the following, this Special Issue addresses innovative storytelling methodologies for festival research; festival storytelling

for pedagogical development; the impact of festival storytelling on well-being, social capital, and identity development; storytelling through digital technologies; storytelling in non-Western festival phenomena; and conceptual and theoretical framings of festival storytelling. Additionally, to extend existing knowledge of other prominent issues relating to storytelling in festival research, authenticity, placemaking, inclusivity, sustainability, commercialism, and managing contested history within festival experiences are also explored.

Introduction to the Special Issue: Festivals and Storytelling

Opening this Special Issue, Wood, Kinnunen, and Coll, in their article on shared festival memories, offer a methodological contribution to festival and events research, and in particular to studies that explore audience experiences. By introducing an Aristotelian approach to storytelling, the authors demonstrate the complexity of storytelling, including the necessary characters and plot points to form a complete story. Specifically, they explore the influence of how memories are framed and shared as stories or minidramas on the believability of a story, and thus the effectiveness of a story to motivate future festival attendance. Importantly, the authors reveal how memories can be triggered with each retelling of a story, while at the same time articulating the ways in which others can pass on versions of a story that they heard. As such, storytelling is explored as a form of word-of-mouth advertising, which is discussed within the context of brand and marketing activities. While this study is relevant to any form of research that explores human experiences and memory-making, it is particularly relevant and recommended to those who study reenactment and heritage interpretation.

In keeping with the use of storytelling as a research method, the second article of this Special Issue introduces story-mapping as an innovative approach for collecting stories of festival-goers. In their article, Davies, Thatcher, Haven-Tang, Packer, and Thomas argue that the breadth of festival research is predominantly based on quantitative analysis, and while numerous studies using the qualitative methods of interviewing and focus groups have contributed significantly to our knowledge

development, there remains a need for alternative methods that can reveal new insights that might not otherwise be revealed through the more traditional approaches. Exploring the Between the Trees festival in South Wales, the authors demonstrate how story-mapping is a useful technique for alleviating potential power imbalances between researchers and participants, while also articulating the usefulness of its application for place-making.

Complementing the first two articles that demonstrated storytelling as a research method, Chen responds to Mair and Weber's (2019) call for more pedagogical festival studies, by exploring multilingual digital storytelling as a method to enhance primary school students' learning of traditional Chinese festivals. As Chen highlights, the National Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Schools in China ensures students gain the essential understanding of Chinese language, culture, and history, which can be facilitated through learning of traditional Chinese festivals (see, e.g., Yang, 2006). In exploring the use of multilingual digital storytelling, Chen demonstrates how this form of storytelling can facilitate a student-regulated learning experience as opposed to teacher-led instruction, a pedagogy that echoes Kugel's (1993) five stages of teacher development. In addition, Chen demonstrates how digital storytelling is more effective than traditional storytelling techniques (e.g., oral and written narratives) and allows students to take ownership of their learning, which supports the notion of students as partners (see Healey et al., 2014). Importantly, this article demonstrates how learning experiences about festivals through digital storytelling can increase student interest and appreciation for history, heritage and culture.

In keeping with the effort to increase interest and appreciation for history and heritage, Leonard and Whitfield explore how storytelling is used within heritage festivals to stage authentic representations of the past. Through an exploration of 1940s events and the application of reenactment and thematic staging, the authors articulate the significance of storytelling for the preservation of heritage and contribution to collective memory. Importantly, the authors demonstrate the impossibility of recreating a truly authentic past, as spaces, places, and people change over time. However, the significance of this article is in their argument that storytelling allows for a glimpse into

what the past was like, based on our modern interpretations of it through surviving material evidence. Such storytelling efforts have been shown to successfully influence attendees' learning and appreciation, while fostering deeper personal connections that support a stronger collective memory. This article is not only a contribution to this Special Issue and future research pertaining to festivals and storytelling, but is extended to other reenactment and living history studies across interdisciplinary disciplines, particularly those concerned with authenticity.

In the fifth article, Orea-Giner, Fusté-Forné, and Todd analyze storytelling strategies within the context of the oríGenes astronomic festival, recognized for its use of food as a cultural language and to create the festival storyscape. In exploring a variety of storytelling mediums used by the festival, the authors highlight the significance of the festival's influence on audience learning about food sustainability, fair trade, and social responsibility. In designing the festival around the storyline of "the origin story is the product," the festival is shown to connect its audience with food and its preparation techniques, further supporting the sharing of values between the audience and artisans who have prepared the food, and thereby strengthening the festival's sense of community. These experiences are highlighted as creating food consumption experiences that encourage the audience to look for authentic, raw gastronomic products that offer an origin story and sustainable value. Importantly, this article also acknowledges the benefit of the festival's storytelling efforts for supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including (3) good health and well-being, and (12) responsible consumption and production.

In keeping with community development, McClinchey explores the potential for Caribbean festivals to enhance community development and decolonize everyday spaces through storytelling and place-making. Using the case of Junkanoo, this article demonstrates how festivals are used to tell the story of communities, and importantly, how festivals can employ storytelling to preserve the history and heritage of local culture. Yet, as McClinchey demonstrates, storytelling can maintain colonial and imperial legacies, thereby overshadowing the storytelling power of the local people. Through this, the author addresses the issues of mass tourism and destination development activities and how they can endanger the authenticity of cultural heritage festivals like Junkanoo. In doing so, and to ensure authentic storytelling for accurate representation and place-making, McClinchey stresses the importance of voiced participation, which, as Tschida (2022) highlighted, requires community collaboration and inclusivity.

Within the realm of social issues and inclusivity, in their article Jang, Li, Chen, Bordelon, and Green explore how gender might influence the way in which people experience festival storytelling. They do this through a study on the impact of festival storytelling on audience engagement and behavioral intentions through a gendered consumer behavior perspective. Specifically, they explore if and how hearing festival experience stories influence attendance motivation and engagement and how that influence is influenced, if at all, by the listeners' gender. Importantly they explore the relationship between storytelling mediums and gender, and how that link influences attendee engagement and intention. The findings reveal important insights for future festival experience and marketing designs to enhance audience interest and engagement.

On the topic of design, Baker explores how storytelling is applied within the production of Halloween festivals in theme parks. Specifically, the author explores how the festival narrative is woven through the collaboration of Halloween activities, including haunted houses, scare zones, stage shows, and amusement rides to create holistic festival experiences. The overarching and significant contribution of this article is the introduction of narratological concepts within the framing of Halloween festivals, which helps to mobilize future research of storytelling within the growing area of "dark events."

Following are two research notes dedicated to the emerging research area of dark events. In the first research note, Ironside explores storytelling and story selling in ghost hunting events and paranormal festivals. Drawing on popular locations in the UK, Ironside demonstrates how storytelling becomes cocreated experiences within ghost hunting events, often provoked by stories told about these locations in popular media. Echoing Ironside's commentary on how stories are created, used, and sold for experiential dark event experiences, in the second research note, Kennell explores the ways in which the creation and use of stories and myths contribute to memory making and identity

formation. Importantly, Kennell concludes by noting how festivals and events are venues for storytelling, and thus maintain a significant role in fostering particular messages that can influence society and culture on a larger scale.

Concluding this Special Issue is a short Teaching and Learning Note that describes techniques in which storytelling for festival experiences can be taught and practiced within university learning environments. Supported by a student-focused practical guide, Wyatt articulates how "learning by doing" through various mediums can help event management students to plan, design and deliver a clear storyline for the delivery of festival (and event) experiences.

Future Directions in Festivals and Storytelling Research

Reflecting on the calls for future research and on the identified themes of how storytelling has been explored and examined, directly and indirectly, within festival contexts, it is clear that much more research is needed to better understand its influence and impact on the festival experience. Importantly, more research is needed from inside the realm of events management. This will not only help to inform and extend events management research and industry practice, but it will also support events management university programs that require students to plan, design, and deliver their own festival (and/or event) experiences.

Reflecting on existing research, the recommendations put forward by the articles of this Special Issue and the continued calls for further research within events management, Figure 2 is offered as a means to highlight the future directions for festival storytelling research. Given the impact and influence of storytelling within festival contexts, as demonstrated in this article and through this Special Issue, festival storytelling must progress as a core theme within events management research.
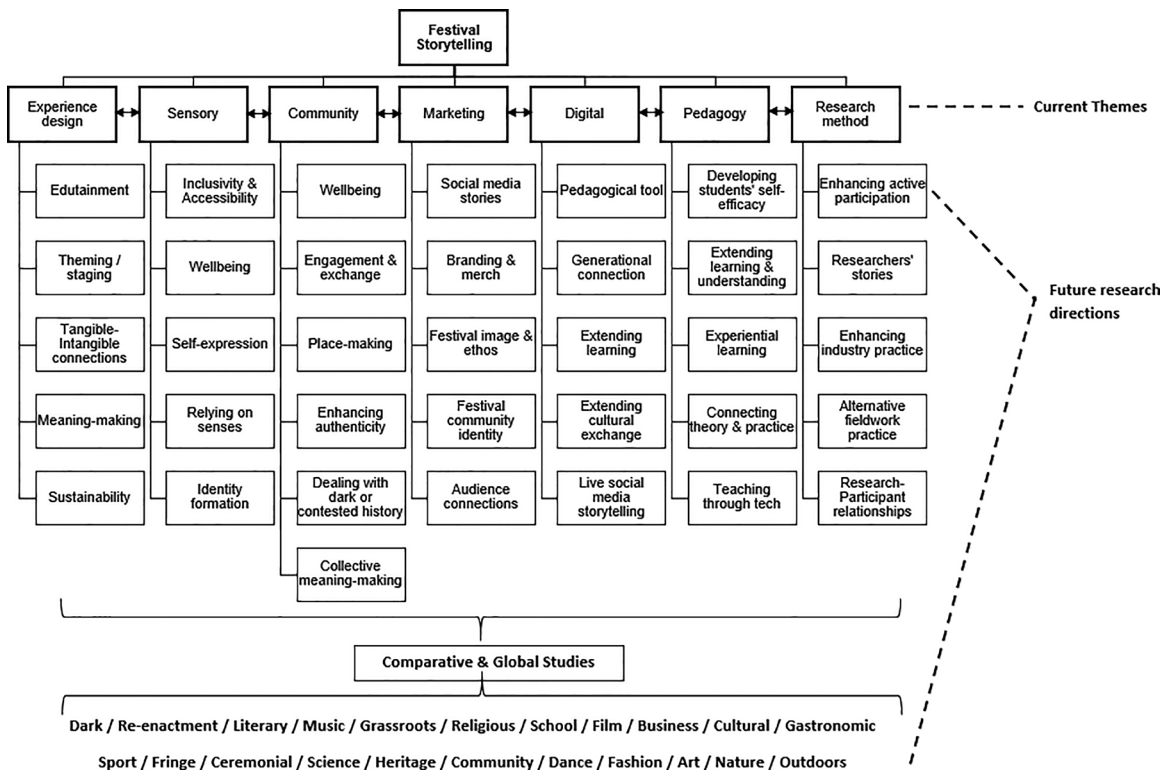

Figure 2. Future directions for festival storytelling research (source: authors).

Importantly, the topics addressed in this Special Issue—Design, Sensory, Community, Marketing, Digital, Pedagogy, Research methods—must continue as leading themes for future research, as it has been shown these are fundamental to the overall festival experience, how these experiences are studied, and how these experiences are then understood in both practice and academic learning. How these overarching themes are explored and investigated in future research should highlight nuances of the festival experience and how storytelling is used to influence, impact, support, create, and/or manage the experience. For example, how storytelling is used to: direct a festival's theming and staging, support the creation of place-making, and/or manage the festival image online and in branding.

Yet, it is also important for future researchers to address how storytelling can help to manage, mitigate, and/or resolve potential or existing concerns of, for example, darker or contested histories, sustainability and climate change, equality, diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility. Moreover, future research should address festival storytelling and these nuances through a pedagogical lens since, as demonstrated in this Special Issue, festivals and the stories that underpin them are useful sources for school learning and support the course structure design of many higher education programs. Extending this, festival storytelling as a useful source for learning must continue to be applied within research practice. The benefit of using storytelling techniques for festival-related research will not only extend existing knowledge and understanding, but also help to shed new light on how researchers, festival attendees, practitioners, and teachers of festivals and events connect and work together, directly and indirectly, in an effort to shape the future of festival experiences.

Importantly, the direction of future research must become more diverse in the types of festivals explored and investigated. Scholars must acknowledge the need to compare different festival types, which through the lens of storytelling can help to enlighten existing knowledge of, for example, attendees' interests and motivations, design and operational challenges and best practices, and social issues and concerns. Comparative studies between different festival types may demonstrate shared communal values and meaning across the festival spectrum, despite their differences in theme and design. Moreover, future research, and particularly that research within events management, must explore and investigate the proposed topics and nuanced themes on a global scale. Greater diversity in the cases used within future research will not only help to shape the scale and scope of cases used to enhance our understanding of the global industry, but it will also help to enhance the overall sense of inclusivity among scholars and practitioners around the world.

An argument has been made for how festival storytelling remains underdeveloped and therefore deserving of greater attention. Through this effort, this article not only recognizes the existing research that has contributed to our current understanding of storytelling within festival contexts, but it also highlights the key arguments of these publications to provide a comprehensive overview of how storytelling is currently understood within festival contexts. In doing so, this article and the Special Issue encourages future studies to extend our existing knowledge and address the gaps outlined to help progress our understanding of storytelling, its practice and dynamics, and its value for festival experiences.

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