

Communication Analysis of Sustainable Festivals

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Abstract. For almost 20 years, sustainable development has been one of the priority goals of the European Union. Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004 and is actively involved in the topic of sustainability not only at the state level but also at the business and individual levels. Sustainability is relevant to maintaining balanced economic growth and price stability, a social market economy that aims for full employment and social breakthroughs. One such initiative for the development of sustainability in Lithuania is the organization of sustainability festivals aimed at addressing environmental issues such as climate change, sustainable lifestyle, active leisure, and healthy lifestyle. The main goals of these festivals are creating and presenting new, more sustainable social norms, developing a network of sustainable creative communities in Lithuania, lifelong learning, promoting positive personal change in the global fight against climate change, and more. Such festivals are dedicated to the community interested in a sustainable lifestyle and various environmental issues and to the dissemination and implementation of sustainability initiatives. Sustainability policy solves the problems of saving resources and environmental pollution and raises questions about society's future welfare. The concept of sustainability is not only related to future generations, but it is also relevant for existing consumers whose habits and changing needs influence businesses to refocus on sustainable solutions and their use in the development of their products. Sustainable festivals prioritize environmental, social, and economic sustainability, contributing to local economies and community engagement. The study employs a stratified random sampling methodology to identify optimal mass communication channels for engaging audiences interested in sustainable events. Findings reveal a heightened awareness and interest in sustainability among respondents in Lithuania. This study could be used by other sustainability promotion initiatives developing or newly emerging in Lithuania, aimed at effectively informing and attracting a more significant part of the community.

Keywords: sustainability, communication, mass communication, sustainable festivals.

1. Introduction

The global discourse surrounding sustainability has permeated diverse sectors in recent years, prompting industries to reevaluate their practices and communication strategies to align with environmental and social responsibility. Within the expansive landscape of the entertainment industry, festivals stand as vibrant hubs of cultural expression and communal celebration. As these events attract large audiences and generate substantial economic and environmental footprints, the need for effective sustainability communication becomes increasingly paramount. The intersection of sustainability and the entertainment industry reflects a complex interplay of artistic expression, cultural engagement, and environmental impact. Festivals, in particular, serve as microcosms of this convergence, where the challenge lies in balancing the spectacle of entertainment with a commitment to sustainable practices.

The goals set by sustainable festivals, such as involving the most significant possible part of the Lithuanian community in implementing sustainability and developing a network of sustainable creators and participants, are achieved by increasing visibility and attracting participants to the events using mass communication. Sustainability festivals organized in Lithuania compete not only with festivals with a sustainable theme but also with other festivals in order to attract the largest possible target audience. Since the theme of sustainability in festivals is relatively new, it is not easy to assess how to communicate sustainable festivals properly. Therefore, in order to show the uniqueness of these festivals, it is necessary to emphasize not only the aspect of sustainability but also to select suitable mass communication channels and tools since the visibility of festivals can suffer due to ineffective mass communication. Therefore, it is essential to determine the awareness of sustainable initiatives in society and to study specifically the communication of these events in order to identify which communication channels and tools are the most appropriate to use and which communication tools would be the most effective in attracting participants. This study seeks to delve into the multifaceted realm of sustainability communication within the festival context, exploring how these events navigate the delicate equilibrium between providing memorable experiences and minimizing ecological and social consequences.

The study employs a stratified random sampling methodology to identify optimal mass communication channels for engaging audiences interested in sustainable events. A survey (structured questionnaire) was chosen for the research. The survey questionnaire consisted of 13 questions and 153 respondents participated in the survey. They were selected according to the sustainability relevance assessment criteria as being interested or planning to be interested in a sustainable lifestyle.

2. Theoretical Analysis

Mass communication emerged as a response to changing socioeconomic conditions resulting from industrialization and urbanization (Meškys, 2010; Simonson, Morooka, Xiong, Bedsole, 2019). Mass communication emerged as a way to reach large audiences and disseminate information, ideas, and products on a mass scale (Meškys, 2010; Simonson, Morooka, Xiong, Bedsole, 2019). One of the fastest developments in mass communication has been identified as the creation of political ideology (Simonson, Morooka, Xiong, Bedsole, 2019). According to Simonson, Morooka, Xiong, and Bedsole (2019), mass communication helps to influence the audience's thinking and choices positively. In the past, radio was the fastest way to disseminate news and information, but in the era of new media, people can access information more quickly through computers and mobile phones, and with the increasing number of internet users, the internet has become an essential means of disseminating information (Gan, 2021). With the development of networked information technology, various new media platforms have emerged with higher communication speeds and broader audiences and, therefore, have had a significant impact on traditional media (Gan, 2021). Social media, a term used to describe technology and online tools, is characterized by its broad reach and high communication speed (Kumar and Nanda, 2019).

McQuail distinguishes four primary functions of mass communication: observation, interpretation,

socialization, and entertainment. Monitoring refers to the role of the news media in providing information about events, issues, and trends. Interpretation involves analyzing and interpreting the meaning of events and problems. Socialization refers to the role of the media in transmitting values, norms, and beliefs to society. Entertainment includes all media content that provides pleasure or entertainment (Kosyakov, Universalyuk, 2019). Mass communication is vital in influencing people's opinions in various contexts. For example, it is widely used in advertising and marketing to convey the favorable characteristics of a particular brand or product (Giraldez-Cru, Chica, Cordon, 2022).

Recently, Facebook has come to dominate other social networking sites, offering advertising opportunities for brands to connect more effectively with their customers (Wajid, Awan, Ferooz, Shoukat, Anwar, & Mazhar, 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become vital channels for promoting and distributing entertainment content, allowing creators and companies to reach large audiences quickly and easily (Ahuja, 2022). Social media has created a new public culture in which the creation and sharing of content that reflects individuals' identity and self-perception has become central (Törnberg and Uitermark, 2022). Visual content is usually more appealing and eye-catching than plain text. It can help grab users' attention as they scroll through a news feed, increasing the likelihood of stopping and engaging with textual content (Morgan, Uzoagba, & Uzoagba, 2022). Wong, Wu, and Cheng (2015) argue that marketing researchers have focused on the importance of image in influencing marketing activities such as communication and branding. Image is defined as customers' perceptions of an organization, reflected in their associations and memories (Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015).

Festivals can include various activities such as music, dance, food, games, art, and other entertainment. Festivals are a popular way to experience many branches of the entertainment industry in one place: music, cinema, sports, and tourism. Festivals feature performances, exhibitions, and film screenings by established and emerging artists and entertainment (Jepson, Clarke, 2014). They are usually associated with a particular community or region and are a way for people to come together and celebrate a shared heritage or tradition. Festivals can be large or small in scale and can be organized by the local community, government, or private organization (Lynch, Quinn, 2022). The central concept of the festival is that it should be an atypical occasion that takes place at an unconventional time, so it should be unique and memorable for people (Dalgiç, Birdir, 2020). According to Dalgiç and Birdir (2020), the festival experience can be divided into three dimensions: what happens during the event, the information received, and the emotions experienced. The first dimension is related to physical activity and how individuals behave during the event. The second dimension is related to awareness, perception, memory and learning, and the third is related to feelings, emotions, preferences and values (Dalgiç, Birdir, 2020). Festival marketing often requires collaboration within the organization and between different organizations to achieve the intended results (Choo, Park, 2018). For example, musical performances at festivals attract participants who want to hear a particular performer (Mulder, Hitters, 2021).

Sustainable festivals are events that prioritize environmental, social, and economic sustainability in their planning and execution. This means that organizers of sustainable festivals strive to minimize the event's negative environmental impacts while considering the socioeconomic impacts on the local community (Kim, Lee, Park, 2021). Festivals also boost the local economy by promoting tourism, creating jobs, and supporting local businesses such as food vendors, hotels, and transport services (Taylor, Bennett, 2014). Common practices of sustainable festivals include waste reduction and management, use of renewable energy sources, promotion of public transport or alternative transport options (Collins, Potoglou, 2019), use of sustainable materials and resources, and support for local businesses and artisans (Kim, Lee, & Park, 2021). Sustainable festivals aim to create an enjoyable and entertaining experience for participants while contributing to the community's and the environment's long-term sustainability. A climate change-related discussion on a social media platform can create a community environment (Pearce, Niederer, Özkula, Sánchez, & Querubín, 2019). Actively engaging

audiences in substantive conversations creates a forum where those interested in environmental issues can gather and exchange views (Pearce, Niederer, Özkula, Sánchez, Querubín, 2019). This community structure increases audience engagement and loyalty and strengthens the bond between the festival and the audience. Festivals contribute to socio-cultural sustainability and play an important symbolic and political role in placemaking by marking the passage of time through a community of witnesses (Lynch, Quinn, 2022).

The emergence of mass communication aimed to reach large audiences, disseminate information, and shape public perceptions on a broad scale. Mass communications platforms have become essential for promoting and distributing entertainment content, shaping public culture, and facilitating identity expression. This study explores the role of social media in stimulating community debate on climate change, creating a platform for meaningful participation of those interested in environmental issues. This community structure increases audience engagement and loyalty and strengthens the connection between festivals and their audiences.

3. Methodology

The goal of mass communication is to reach as large a target audience as possible, and the effectiveness of communication in the media will be achieved by the right channel, the level of understanding of the message communicated, and the impact of the message on the audience. The achievement of the objectives of mass communication can be assessed by determining the limits of dissemination of the message and the number of audiences reached.

A survey (structured questionnaire) was chosen for the research. The survey questionnaire consisted of 13 questions, and 153 respondents participated. Stratified random sampling was used for this study. Stratified random sampling allows the population to be divided into different groups (strata) according to certain attributes and then subsamples to be selected randomly from each stratum. As the effectiveness of the channels used by the target audience of sustainable events is to be understood, it was crucial to survey those respondents who were adopting a sustainable lifestyle and were interested in sustainable events. Stratified sampling was used to select only those respondents who chose a sustainable lifestyle and those who were interested in sustainable events.

The structured questionnaire consisted of three parts:

1. Introductory – introducing the study, its performer and informing about the anonymity of the respondents,
2. Target questions of the questionnaire, aimed at finding out the relevance of sustainability in relation to the respondents, the respondents' information search and evaluation habits and the influencers of the audience's decision, the visibility of the researched initiative, the attractiveness of the event information to be published and the specific part of the previous communication,
3. The questions were intended to collect respondents' socio-demographic data (age, gender, education, employment, place of residence).

The survey included such questions as respondents' interest in sustainable initiatives and events (festivals) in Lithuania, how often they were interested in and searched for information about sustainable initiatives and events (festivals) in Lithuania, have they had heard about sustainable festivals in Lithuania; where they first heard or saw information about sustainable festivals; which media channels used most often; where they choose to follow information about the festival of interest; what information about festivals attracts the most attention; how long before respondents would like to hear/see information about the upcoming festival; evaluate which tool of communication was the most persuasive in influencing the decision to participate in the festival and other questions.

4. Optimal Mass Communication Channel and Tool

The findings of this study, derived from a sample of 153 respondents, provide valuable insights into the attitudes and behaviors of individuals regarding sustainability in lifestyle choices. The study primarily focused on the respondents' self-reported commitment to a sustainable lifestyle, their interest in sustainable initiatives in Lithuania, information-seeking behaviors, and preferred tools for staying updated on festivals. The results illuminate the complex relationship individuals have with sustainability and the role of information dissemination in shaping their choices.

One of the noteworthy outcomes is the high level of awareness and interest in sustainability, with 92.9% of respondents falling into categories expressing some degree of commitment to a sustainable lifestyle. The majority, 63%, reported partial commitment, while a significant 31% fully embraced sustainability. The 6% expressing nascent interest or plans for adopting sustainability suggests a potential for growth in adopting sustainable practices among the sampled population (Fig. 1).

Exploring the specific context of Lithuania, the study reveals a substantial interest in sustainable initiatives, with 63% of respondents indicating interest. This implies that a considerable segment of the population is receptive to sustainability efforts within the country. However, the study also highlights a significant portion (37%) that appears less interested in sustainable initiatives and events, signaling the need for targeted interventions to engage and educate this demographic (Fig. 2).

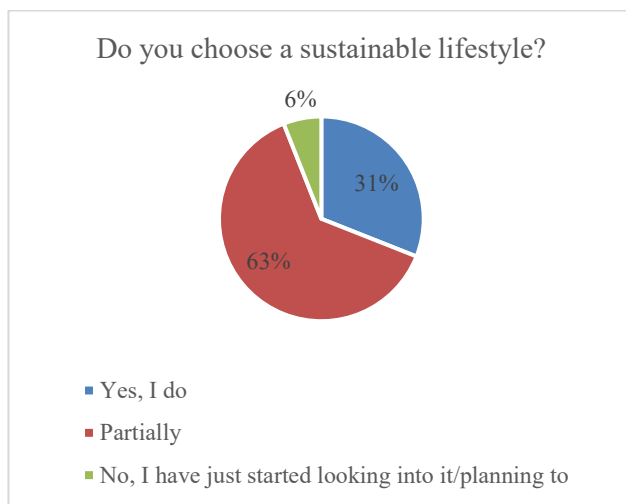


Fig. 1: A sustainable lifestyle choice

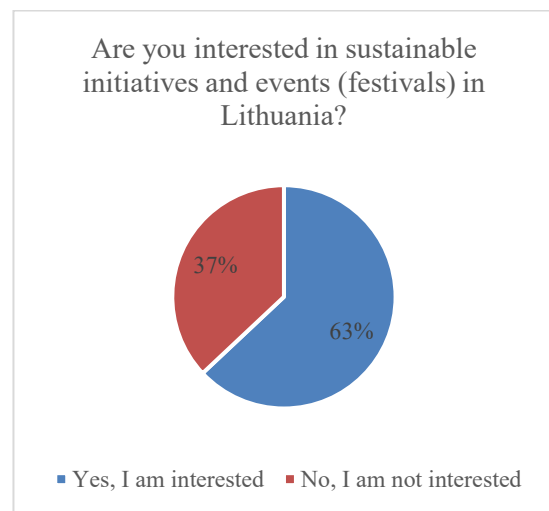


Fig. 2: Respondents' interest in sustainable initiatives and festivals in Lithuania

Respondents in the 26-36 and 37-47 age groups were most interested in sustainable events and initiatives (Fig. 3).

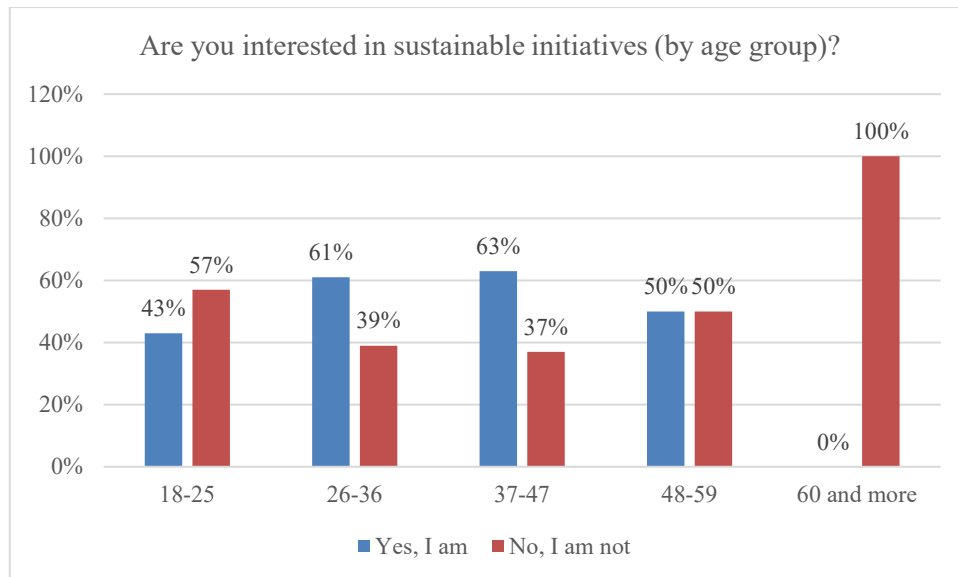


Fig. 3: Interest in various sustainable initiatives according to the age groups of the respondents

Women who participated in the survey (55%) were more interested in sustainable events compared to men (48%) (Fig. 4). Summing up the demographic characteristics of the respondents (education and employment), the vast majority of respondents stated that they had a university education (60%) and were employed (76%). It is essential to mention that respondents with higher university education and working people were interested in sustainable events and initiatives in Lithuania, 59% and 58%, respectively. To the question about the place of residence, the vast majority indicated that they lived in one of the five big cities of Lithuania (87%). Among them, more than half of the respondents were interested in sustainable events and initiatives (52% in big cities and 58% in cities).

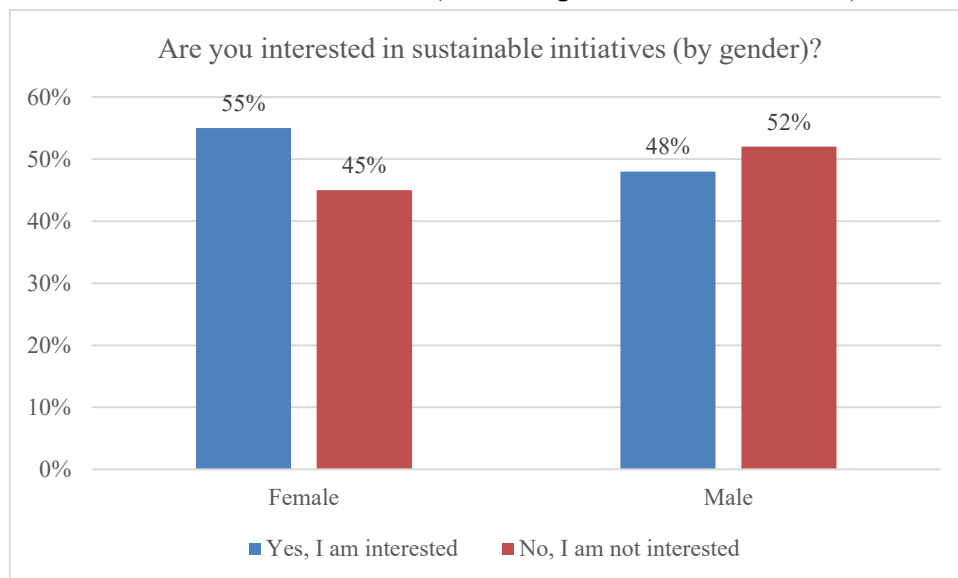


Fig. 4: Interest in sustainable initiatives (by gender)

Regarding information-seeking behavior, this study sheds light on the frequency with which individuals search for information related to sustainable initiatives and events in Lithuania. The distribution, with 19% searching once or twice a year and 17% searching more than twice in half a year, suggests a moderate but consistent interest in staying informed about sustainability-related activities (Fig. 5).

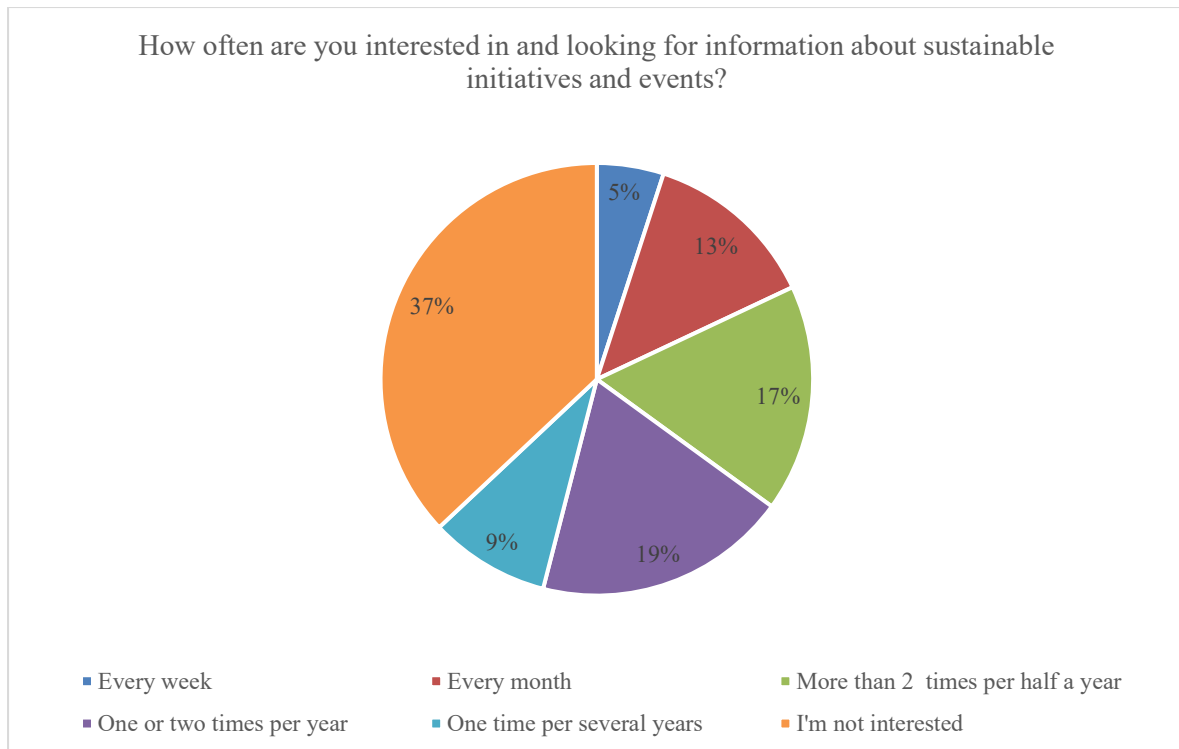


Fig. 5: Respondents' interest and search for information about sustainable initiatives and events (festivals)

Respondents who heard about sustainable events indicated that they learned about festivals mostly from acquaintances (30 respondents out of 66 answers). The second source of information was the Facebook social network (19 answers), and the third and fourth were media sources such as news portals and radio.

The questions presented below were formulated to determine the factors influencing the search for information about events, evaluation habits, and the audience's decision about participation in the festival.

The preference for information tools provides further insights into how individuals seek festival updates. When asked about media channels and sources of information about festivals, Facebook was the most mentioned as a news source (123 times), followed by the choice of news portals (120 times). Notably, the popularity of Facebook as a source of information underscores the significance of social media in disseminating details about events (Fig. 6).

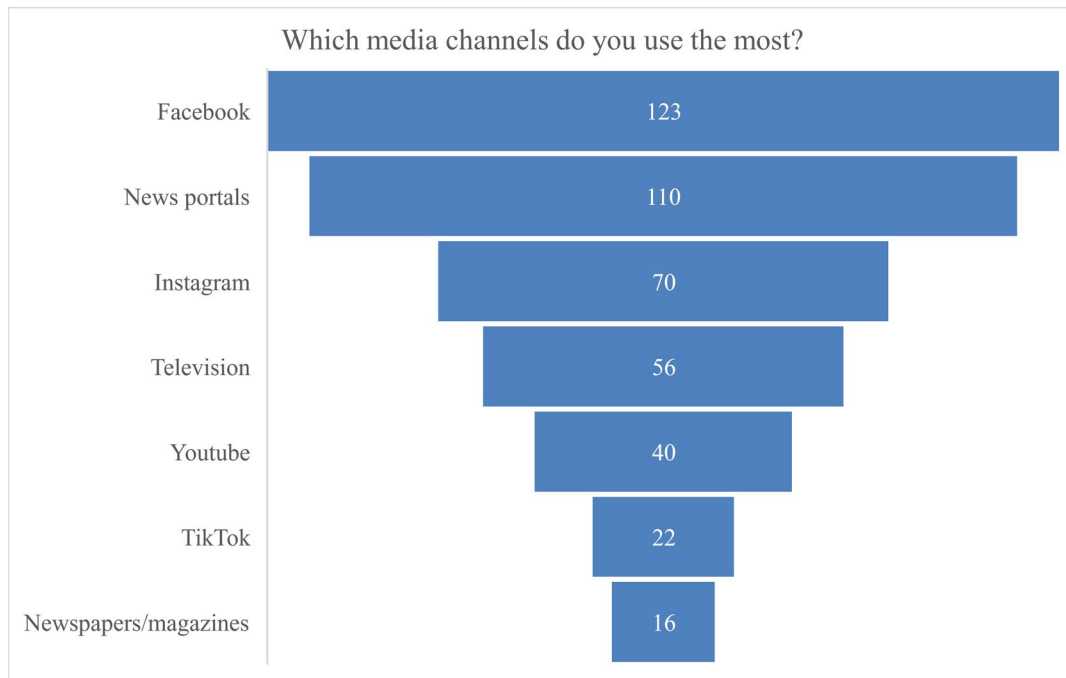


Fig. 6: Most frequently used media channels by respondents (number of choices by respondents)

When media were grouped into social media (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok) and traditional media, the first option (social media) was indicated as more frequently used than news portals, newspapers, radio, and television (Fig. 7).

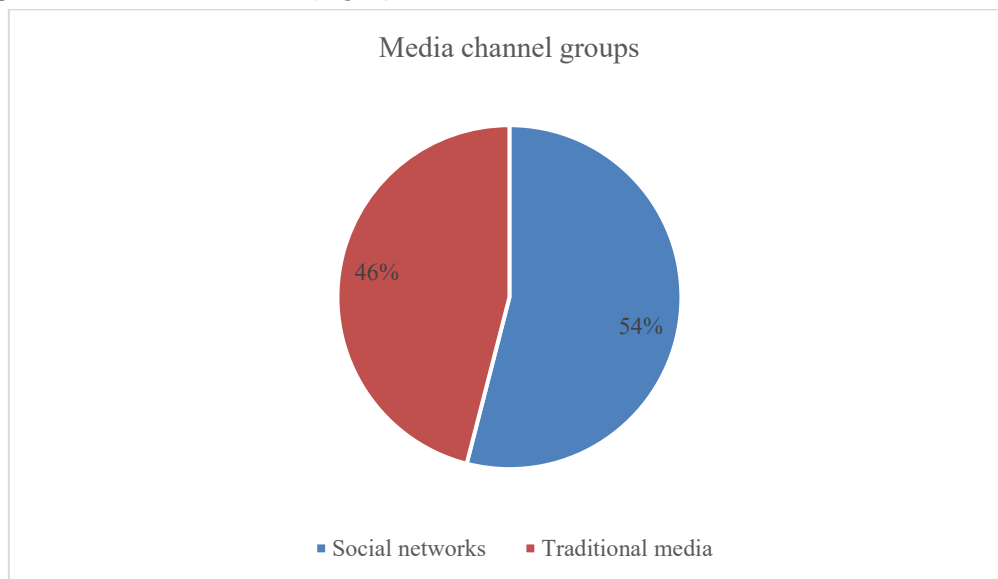


Fig. 7: Traditional media and social networks

Similarly, information tools were chosen for tracking information about festivals of interest: the event's Facebook account was the most popular (113 respondents' choices), the event's target website (90 respondents' choices) came second, news portals were chosen as a source of information about events 84 times (Fig. 8). As a result, the event's website and news portals also emerged as prominent sources, reflecting the diverse channels through which individuals access information about festivals.

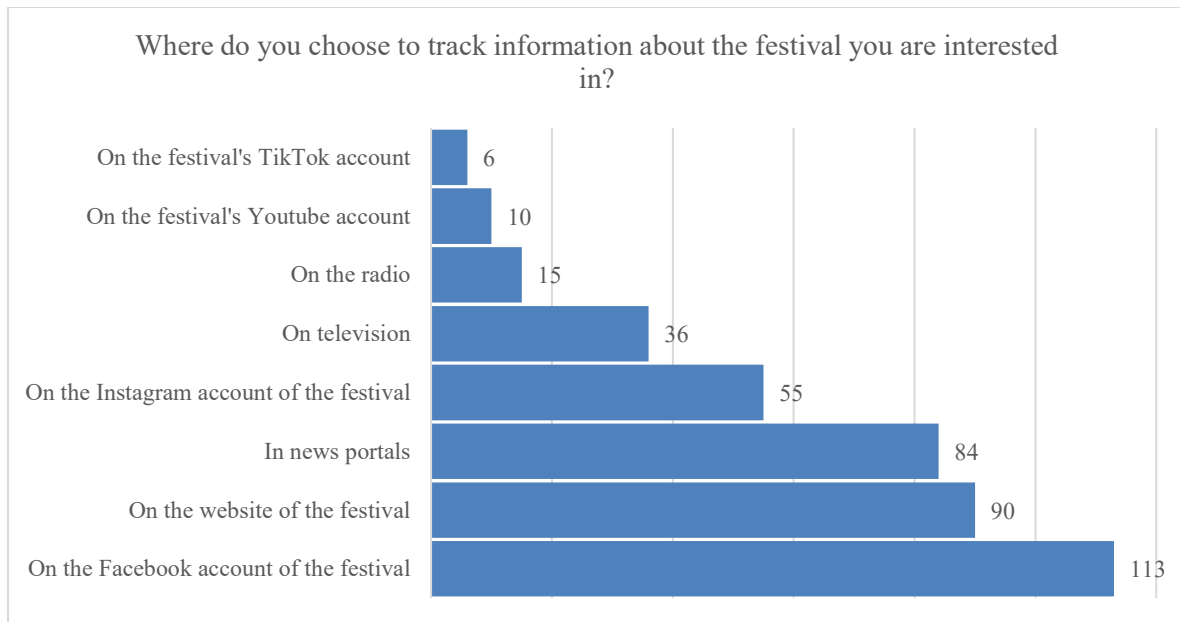


Fig. 8: Following the festival of interest using different media of information (number of respondents' choices)

Summarizing the research results, which form the assumptions to investigate the factors that draw the respondents' attention to the ongoing festivals, it was observed that the respondents paid the least attention to the sponsors and partners of the event and were most interested in the content of the event: the festival program, format (musical, film, etc.), invited guests participating in the festival. The importance of the festival's location was highlighted in the fourth place, and the importance of the festival's activities and workshops was underlined in the fifth place (Fig. 9).

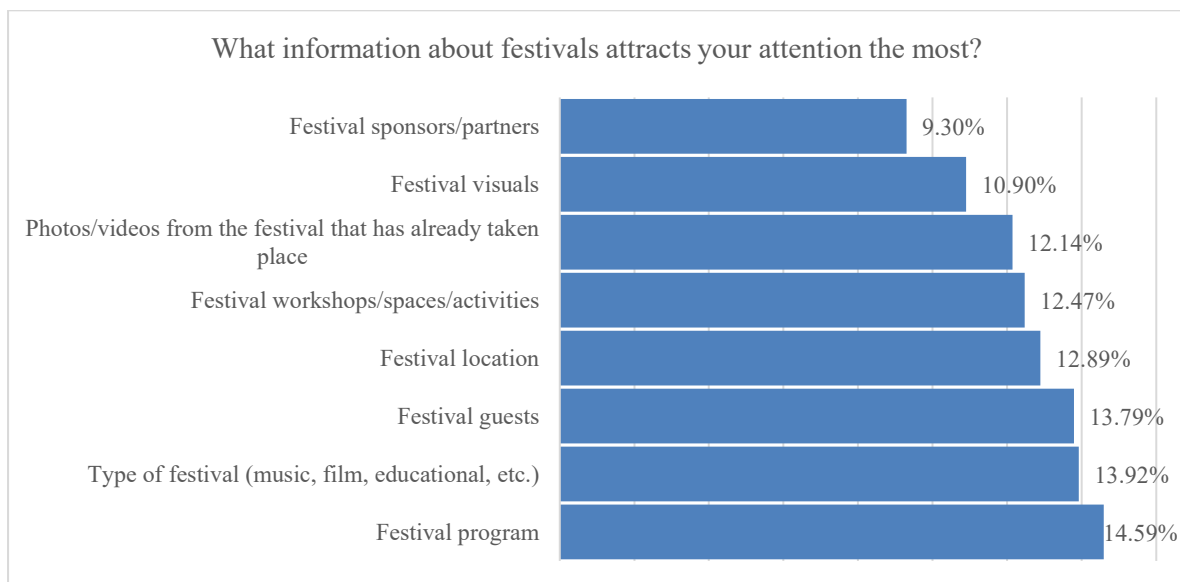


Fig. 9: Factors drawing respondents' attention to the ongoing festivals

Most respondents wanted to find out information about the upcoming event either earlier than a month in advance (51 respondents) or to hear or see communication a few months before the festival (47 respondents). In comparison, 28 respondents chose the period half a year ago. For 15 respondents, visibility time was unimportant; only 1 answered that they wanted to know information a year before the event. Less than a tenth of the respondents wanted to know about the upcoming festival during the week (Fig. 10).

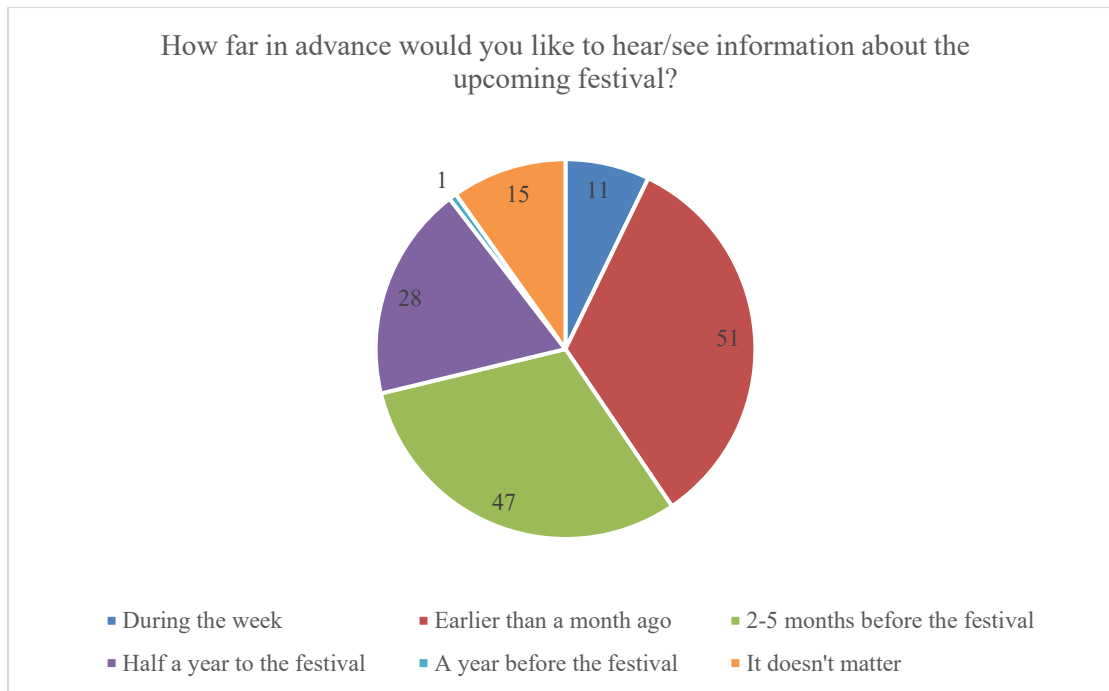


Fig. 10: How far in advance respondents would like to hear/see information about the upcoming festival (number of respondents)

The results of this study showed that the respondents were influenced mainly by tools of mass communication channels (70 percent - online news portals, event websites, social networks) compared to traditional media (30 percent - television, radio, newspapers). The media channels influencing the respondents the most were news portals, posts on the Facebook account, information on the festival website, and posts on the Instagram account (Fig. 11).

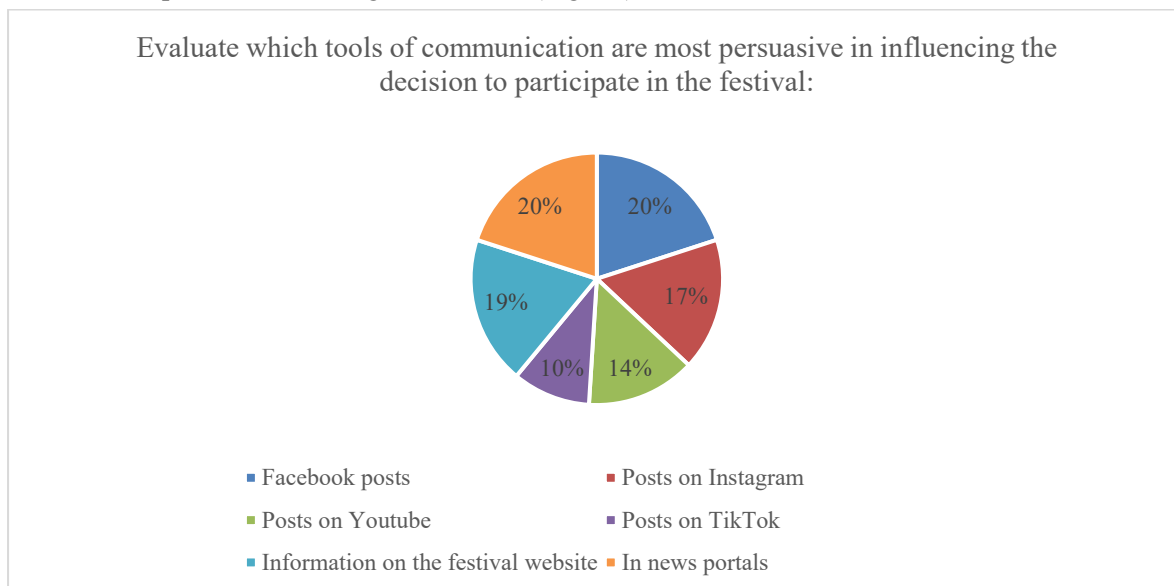


Fig. 11: Respondents' opinions about the most influential media channels

In sum, the priorities identified, such as the festival's program, format, content, location, and activities, offer guidance for event organizers to tailor their communication strategies to align with audience preferences.

The study highlighted the role of social media, particularly Facebook, as a prominent source of information about festivals and sustainable initiatives. These research results aligned with the theoretical analysis emphasizing the impact of social media on public culture and identity expression. The preference for specific information tools, such as social media platforms, event websites, and news

portals, provided valuable insights for event organizers to tailor their communication strategies to align with audience preferences. The study on sustainability and lifestyle choices provided practical insights into the attitudes and behaviors of individuals, particularly in the context of Lithuania. The high level of awareness and interest in sustainability and the considerable segment of the population receptive to sustainable initiatives indicated a growing consciousness around environmental issues.

The integration of theoretical insights on mass communication and the empirical findings on sustainability attitudes emphasized the pivotal role of communication platforms, especially social media, in shaping public discourse, fostering community engagement, and influencing individual choices in the context of sustainable living and festival participation. The combination of historical context, theoretical analysis, and empirical evidence enriched the aspects of the dynamic interplay between mass communication, social media, and societal attitudes toward sustainability.

5. Conclusions

The theoretical analysis underscores the evolution of mass communication as a tool to shape public perceptions and ideologies, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in disseminating information and influencing public culture. The study then narrows its focus on sustainable festivals, emphasizing their commitment to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. These events aim to minimize negative impacts while contributing to local economies and fostering community engagement.

The methodology section outlines the approach to determining the optimal mass communication channel and tool for engaging the target audience interested in sustainable events. Stratified random sampling is employed to survey respondents adopting a sustainable lifestyle and interested in sustainable events. The subsequent findings provided valuable insights into the attitudes and behaviors of individuals regarding sustainability, indicating a high level of awareness and interest in Lithuania.

The study identified Facebook as a prominent source of information about festivals and sustainable initiatives, aligning with the theoretical emphasis on the impact of social media on public culture. The discussion section synthesizes theoretical insights and empirical findings, highlighting the pivotal role of communication platforms, especially social media, in shaping public discourse, fostering community engagement, and influencing individual choices related to sustainability.

In essence, this research contributed to the aspects of the dynamic interplay between mass communication, social media, and societal attitudes towards sustainability, specifically within the context of festivals. The combination of historical context, theoretical analysis, and empirical evidence has enriched the comprehension of the challenges and opportunities in achieving a balance between providing memorable entertainment experiences and promoting long-term environmental and social sustainability within the festival landscape.

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