

9 Liveness 4.0: A new paradigm for accessible performances at music festivals

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Introduction

There are growing demands for the music festival industry to significantly enhance inclusivity for a range of audiences. This includes increasing accessibility for people who are Deaf or disabled. The use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) is becoming increasingly central to the way in which many audiences experience music festivals. While digitising performances is contentious, Covid-19 stimulated a proliferation of digitised live music content generation. Audience engagement with remote content may extend to content generated at on-site music festivals and this is likely to be more popular if it is perceived to be authentic as a live experience. ICT offers some potential to increase accessibility to live musical performances. However, ICT needs to be sensitively deployed when supplementing ‘as live’ content, to avoid *“any risk of creating new instances of exclusion at music festivals”* (Bossey, 2020: 22).

This chapter analyses existing literature and builds on previous enquiry to inform conceptual research, which can represent *“a powerful means of theory building”* (Jaakkola 2020: 18) to connect concepts together relationally (Reese, 2022). In doing so it responds to a recommendation from Wilson et al., (2017: 206) that *“festival studies embrace greater methodological diversity”*. The author considers liveness, authenticity, communitas and performance futures in relation to ICT enhanced content generated by music festivals to improve accessibility for people who are Deaf or disabled. Responding to *“Industry 4.0”* (Schwab, 2016) a new conceptualisation of ‘liveness 4.0’ is proposed to incorporate the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The chapter questions whether a new paradigm of ‘liveness 4.0’ is required to consider audience experiences facilitated by emerging ICT, which aim to increase accessibility for people who are Deaf or disabled at music festivals.

A case study on the Beat Blocks haptic flooring system is included as a novel example of developing accessibility at events. This considers respondent’s perceptions of liveness in relation to a range of viewpoints and perceptions of liveness, authenticity and communitas regarding haptic flooring technology.

Key concepts regarding ICT enhanced performances at music festivals

Music festivals are “concerts, usually outdoor, often held over several days” Shuker (2012: 130) and can be considered as “part of the fabric of global society” (Davies, 2021: 185). Audiences are predominantly motivated to attend for social and personal reasons (Mulder & Hitters, 2021), with 35.3 million people visiting UK outdoor music events in 2018 (Jackson et al., 2019). In America, the Nielsen Music’s 2018 *Music 360 Report* stated that more than 52% of the US population attend live music events (Rys, 2018) and in Europe 20.9 million people attended music events in during the same year (Statista, 2021). Feelings of belonging are created at time-limited music festivals through ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1969: 94). This temporary “psychological sense of community” (Jahn et al., 2018: 329) may motivate music festival attendances (Wu et al., 2020) and stimulate intense shared emotional reactions to performances which are “sometimes overwhelming” (Karlsen, 2016: 115). Ideally, music festival attendees will experience inclusive collective celebrations (Banke & Woodward, 2020).

Under the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010) UK music festivals must not discriminate due to ‘protected characteristics’ including age, race, gender and disability. In the UK, 14.6 million people were identified as having a disability in 2020/21 (House of Commons Library, 2022). Their rights to “take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life” are recognised by Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). However, music festivals may generate social exclusion (Duffy et al., 2019) which can further increase “when a person belongs to several different groups, each of which is subject to discrimination” (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012: 183).

In this context, accessibility can be defined as “measures put in place to address participation by those with impairments” (Finkel et al., 2019: 2). In some circumstances, it may be facilitated by accessible technology which can be utilised effectively by people who are Deaf or disabled (Lazar, et al., 2015: 18). This could include hearing loops, which provide a magnetic, wireless signal for hearing aids (Hearing Link Services, 2023) or well-presented immersive subtitles which “can contribute to a higher e-inclusion” (Hughes et al., 2019: 4). Indeed, these bespoke ICT developments have already proved valuable in increasing accessibility for people who are Deaf or disabled and further advancements “should be seized” (Alvarado, 2022: 214). Deafness encompasses a range of sound experiences including accessing music at specific volumes or registers and feeling vibrations (Cornelius & Natvig, 2023). Clearly, individual levels of hearing loss dictate what may be accessible for each audience member who identifies as Deaf or hearing impaired (British Deaf News, 2022: 5).

Despite the centrality of music, visiting a music festival is an immersive experience, “addressing not only the auditory but the whole of perception” (Lell, 2019: 66). A broad range of equipment and resources used to “transmit, store, create, share or exchange information” (UNESCO, 2019: 1) can be described as ICT. Technologies develop over time and Industry 4.0 describes a fourth industrial revolution