

# **Marketplace continuum of taste: How do music festivals act as institutions?**

## **ABSTRACT**

We explore how marketplace spaces relate to, shape, and further contribute to the institutional logics, aesthetics, and practices of a given consumption field. Our ethnographic study illustrates how the Primavera Sound festival acts as a marketplace continuum of taste; that is an institution within the indie music field.

## **Keywords**

Taste, indie music, space and place, market dynamics, (neo-)institutional theory, institutions

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how marketplace spaces relate to, shape, and further contribute to the institutional logics, aesthetics, and practices of a given consumption field. By drawing upon the Primavera Sound festival (hereafter, Primavera), our findings illustrate that the festival marketplace can be understood as a lived experiential snapshot of taste that is associated with identity investments within the indie music field. We theorize the festival as a *marketplace continuum of taste*, which links indie music consumers' and professionals' experiences in previous indie music spaces and shapes their subsequent indie music practices. We illustrate how the festival ultimately becomes an institution (Scott 2014) within the field. Our study brings together Bourdieuan theories of taste along with (neo-)institutional theory (Chaney and Ben Slimane 2014; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006) and phenomenological perspectives on space and place; and provides implications for consumer culture theory and practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Taste has become a fruitful arena of research inquiry, especially in those strands of consumer research that have dealt with the study of consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures and the socio-historic patterning of consumption (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Inspired by Bourdieu (1984; 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), taste has been consistently theorized as a means of socio-cultural distinction that consumers utilise to establish communal affiliation and/or mark aesthetic discrimination via consumption experiences in the marketplace (McQuarrie et al. 2013). Accordingly, consumer researchers have most commonly explored socio-cultural differences and status games at the micro-level of marketplace performances (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Ustuner 2015; Ustuner and Thompson 2012); the emergence of consumption patterns, activities, and

interactions at the meso-level of consumption communities (Arsel and Bean 2013; McQuarrie et al. 2013; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013); and the maintenance of social hierarchies at the macro-level of institutionalized domains (Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Humphreys 2010). However, prior research says little about the overall positioning of marketplace spaces in the experiential equation of taste and how the marketplace informs, shapes and extends the institutional logics, aesthetics and practices of a given consumption field.

We argue that this omission is largely due to how the marketplace has been hitherto theorized in consumer research. The concept of place, as possessing clear ontological qualities, has largely remained mute in favour of materialistic conceptions that treat place as a marketing mix element (e.g. Price and Arnould 1999; Rosenbaum and Massiah 2011); a product of social interactions (e.g. Arnould 2005; Borghini et al. 2009; Visconti et al. 2010); and/or a constituent of consumption practices (e.g. Arsel and Thompson 2011; Bradford and Sherry 2015; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013). Place is often either abstracted and treated synonymously with space (Sherry 2000) or delimited to the notion of context (Askegaard and Trolle-Linnet 2011). Consumer researchers have most commonly theorized the places in which consumption experiences occur and taste is manifested either as ‘relatively autonomous enclaves’ (Ustuner and Thompson 2015, 237) in which consumers attempt to resist market-mediated norms, or as places of subversion in which consumers are often exposed to ‘a view of the world as it is, from the vantage point of the dominant design, whether civic or commercial’ (Bradford and Sherry 2015, 131).

Prior research has dealt predominantly with extraordinary and/or hedonic consumption experiences in the marketplace that portray the dichotomies between everyday life and larger societal structures (Arnould and Price 1993; Kozinets 2002; Tumbat and Belk 2011). Previous studies have focused exclusively on studying the diversity of ways in which such distinctions are manifested and, in some cases, negotiated in the marketplace (Skandalis

et al. 2019). Such theorizations leave the experiential aspects of taste untouched (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017) and also result in marketplace spaces that lack positioning into a broader institutional context (Askegaard and Trolle-Linnet 2011).

To account for such disparities and to explore how marketplace spaces fit into the everyday realities of a given consumption field, we investigate Primavera through a Bourdieuan and (neo-)institutional theory lens (Chaney and Ben Slimane 2014; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). (Neo-)institutionalism is ‘a key research stream in organisational theory, able to tease out the cultural, political and cognitive processes that underpin social practices through the notion of institution’ (Chaney et al. 2015: 4). We explore how Primavera relates to, shapes, and further contributes to the institutional logics, aesthetics, and practices of the indie music field. We illustrate how the music festival acts as a marketplace continuum of taste – an institution (Scott 2014) within the indie music field. Specifically, we show how Primavera generates taken-for-granted elements, rules and meanings that shape the beliefs and behaviour of market actors according to templates of action, cognition and emotions (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977).

## **METHOD**

We conducted a three-year ethnographic study at Primavera, a major international popular music festival held in Barcelona, Spain, which is culturally embedded within the context of indie music consumption. Ethnographic data collection involved the gathering of written fieldnotes, visual ethnographic data (photos and videos), and artefact material (leaflets, programs, music magazines). The first-named author also participated in several informal conversations and completed unstructured on-site interviews with participants while on-site (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Kozinets 2002). At a later stage, we moved on to conduct unstructured off-site interviews (McCracken 1988) with 61 participants who have

attended Primavera (45 consumers, 16 professionals) via purposive and snowballing techniques to further position our ethnographic ensemble within the indie music field. We coded, categorized and abstracted in a constant comparative manner as we went back and forth between the emergent block of data and extant literature (Belk et al. 2013; Spiggle 1994). All interviews were taped, transcribed, and anonymised.

## FINDINGS

Our findings illustrate that the festival marketplace can be understood as a lived experiential snapshot of taste which is associated with music professionals' and consumers' identity investments within the indie music field (Skandalis et al. 2018). Primavera acts as a *marketplace continuum of taste*, linking consumers' and professionals' experiences in previous indie music places and, in parallel, shaping their subsequent indie music practices; thus, becoming an institution within the indie music field (Scott 2014). Our theoretical framework indicates the existence of a tripartite place continuum of place, object, and human elements which intermingle into Primavera (Figure 1), and upon which we now elaborate further.

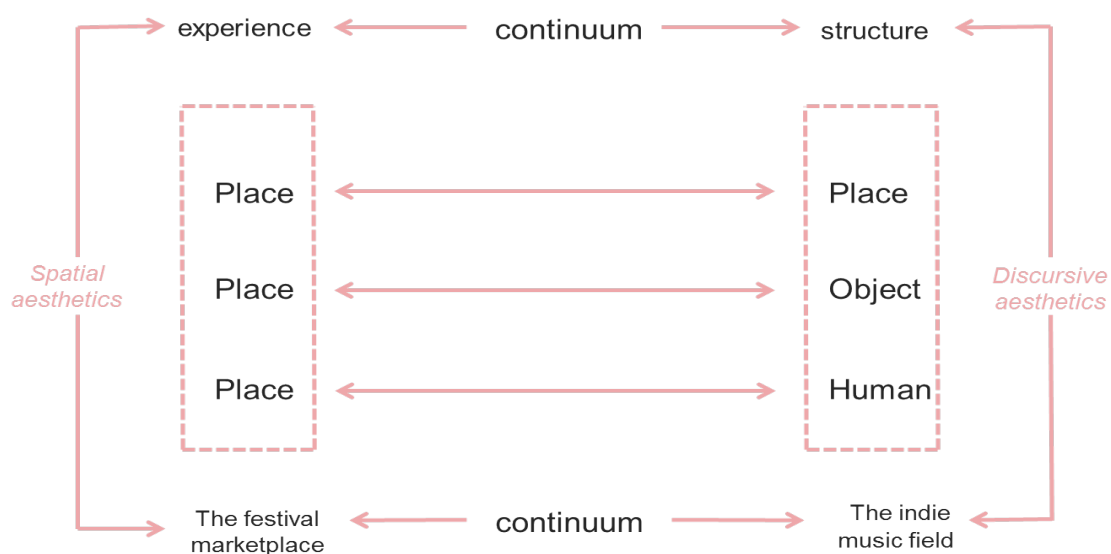


Figure 1. Marketplace continuum of taste

### ***The place-place continuum***

Primavera can be considered as part of a wider network of indie culture, which loosely revolves around a web of different elements such as clubs, music and fashion stores, third places, other festivals, media, and social networking sites (Arsel and Thompson 2011).

*'Primavera doesn't feel like the band is turning up just to perform and play and then bugger off home...quite often you hear bands describe it... "it's so great to be back in Barcelona, [it] is a great place, first came here in 2006 and never experienced a crowd like this; and it's so good to be back, [it] feels like home..."'* (George, indie music fan)

The festival can be understood as a significant place within the indie music field for consumers and professionals alike, who often aimed to differentiate it from the diversity of spaces in which the indie music field and the indie music 'taste regime' (Arsel and Bean 2013) are manifested, 'feels like home'. To these ends, John further explains the importance of Primavera for up-and-coming bands as other festivals are very likely to emulate its line-up when they construct their own:

*'[A] band that plays at Primavera one year, they'll probably play at another festival in Spain next year... For example, bands like Ty Segall, or Deerhunter, they are Primavera bands, nobody in Spain knew much about them until the festival has brought them.'* (John, indie music professional)

John highlights how the festival stimulates the discovery of new acts, operating as an institution by influencing the behaviour of others (e.g., indie music fans, festival organisers) in the field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This 'field-specific' significance of Primavera is heightened by its spatial aesthetics (e.g., built and natural environment) which further play a major role in defining indie music professionals' and consumers' choice of attendance and in shaping their subsequent in-festival experiences (e.g., the festival's actual setting in a vast

and surreal urban landscape in Parc del Forum, an area of Barcelona that has experienced sustained growth and which is well-connected with the city's centre).

### ***The place-object continuum***

In the festival space, a variety of symbolic meanings are (re)produced. These revolve around a place-object continuum and are manifested through ritualized behaviours which align objects with the festival context and the indie music field (Arsel and Bean 2013). Nick discusses these further:

*'Everyone is wearing t-shirts which are denoting their cultural capital, thinking about weird bands, that if you have that Sonic Youth t-shirt with the literal smile, it's almost like too obvious.'* (Nick, indie music fan)

According to Nick, 'wearing t-shirts' exemplifies consumers' indie tastes and also provides a direct linkage between the festival and the field which might often lead to negative aesthetic judgements if they lack subtlety and eclecticism, 'too obvious'. Such aesthetic rules become clear in attendees' patterns of dress and were evidenced in many photographs and videos that were captured as part of the ethnography (Figure 2). These rules give rise to symbolic meanings which denote status hierarchies within the festival; hierarchies based on participants' personal biographies and associations with the field. These lead to the creation of status games which lie at the intersection of the festival experience and the overall structure of the indie music field (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Ustuner and Thompson 2012).

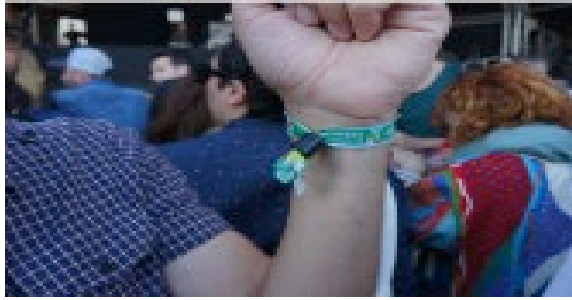


Figure 2. 'Place-object' aesthetics

### ***The place-human continuum***

A set of hedonic reactions and social interactions were also documented which deal with the music experience at Primavera. On the one hand, there is a feeling of total immersion with both the music and the other participants, when watching a performance on-stage. This converts the festival experience into an extraordinary one, which jointly surfaces communal and individualistic behaviours (Skandalis et al. 2019), as evidenced by Nathan:

*'.... if I didn't know Phoenix and I went to go see it, and the friends I went with absolutely flipped out, they just loved it, you know, I would too probably have a good time and therefore associate Phoenix with that great time and now remember that band for that, right?'* (Nathan, indie music fan)

Nathan highlights that these behaviours seem to acquire a strong anti-structural and transcendental status for the duration of performances, which ultimately become normalised and connected with the structure of the indie music field and with consumers' capital investments within it.

On the other hand, there is the out-of-stage experience, which was evidenced through attendees' interactions before and after music performances. These include the creation of preference timetables, where attendees create a programme of all the artists they wish to see during the festival; as well as out-of-stage discussions, where they express their opinions on



the music performances they attended, and networking opportunities with indie music professionals. Andrew explains:

*'We chose [festivals] based on how many people will actually be there, we're talking about professionals, [...] and see what we're like, what the music we're doing is like, so we basically choose places that we knew that lots of people were going from professional standpoint, and that's basically not only networking but also to relaxing, it's always good.'* (Andrew, indie music professional)

Andrew illustrates how the festival marketplace connects indie music professionals with others in the field, enabling professionals from dispersed locations to meet and interact. For Andrew, it is vital that festivals have a strong professional element in order to ensure that their practices align with others in the indie music field, *'see what we're like, what the music we're doing is like'*.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how marketplace spaces relate to, shape, and further contribute to the institutional logics, aesthetics, and practices of a given consumption field. Our findings showed how the Primavera Sound festival acts as *a marketplace continuum of taste* and operates as an institution (Scott 2014) within the indie music field, which links indie music consumers' and professionals' experiences in previous indie music places and, in parallel, shapes their subsequent indie music practices. Our analysis highlights that it is the focus on music (indie field) that offers continuity to these consumers and professionals and makes them elevate Primavera as a significant place within the indie music field. We contribute to research on market dynamics (Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Humphreys 2010) by illustrating how Primavera influences behaviour in the indie music field, it creates and

perpetuates rules, norms, and meanings that arise during the festival and are preserved afterwards (Scott 2014).

## REFERENCES

- Arnould, E. (2005). Animating the big middle. *Journal of Retailing*, 81(2), 89-96.
- Arnould EJ and Price LL (1993) River magic: extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter. *Journal of Consumer Research* 20(1): 24-45.
- Arnould, E. and Thompson, C. (2005) "Consumer culture theory (CCT): twenty years of research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 868-882.
- Arnould, E. J., & Wallendorf, M. (1994). Market-oriented ethnography: interpretation building and marketing strategy formulation. *Journal of marketing research*, 31(4), 484-504.
- Arsel Z and Bean J (2013) Taste regimes and market-mediated practice. *Journal of Consumer Research* 39(5): 899-917.
- Arsel Z and Thompson CJ (2011) Demythologizing consumption practices: how consumers protect their field-dependent identity investments from devaluing marketplace myths. *Journal of Consumer Research* 37(5): 791-806.
- Askegaard S and Trolle-Linnet J (2011) Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory: phenomenology and the context of context. *Marketing Theory* 11(4): 381-404.
- Belk R, Fischer E and Kozinets RV (2013) *Qualitative consumer and marketing research*. London: Sage.
- Bradford, T. W., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (2015). Domesticating public space through ritual: Tailgating as vestaval. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(1), 130-151.
- Diamond, N., Sherry Jr, J. F., Muniz Jr, A. M., McGrath, M. A., Kozinets, R. V., & Borghini, S. (2009). American girl and the brand gestalt: closing the loop on sociocultural branding research. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 118-134.

- Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu P (1986) The forms of capital. In: Richardson JG (ed) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, pp.241-258.
- Bourdieu P (2003) Participant objectivation. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9(2): 281-294.
- Bourdieu P and Wacquant LJ (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chaney D, Ben Slimane K and Humphreys A (2016) Megamarketing expanded by neo-institutional theory. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 24(6): 470-483.
- Coskuner-Balli G and Thompson CJ (2013) The status costs of subordinate cultural capital: at-home fathers' collective pursuit of cultural legitimacy through capitalizing consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research* 40(1): 19-41.
- DiMaggio PJ and Powell WW (1983) The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48: 147-160.
- Dolbec PY and Fischer E (2015) Refashioning a Field? Connected Consumers and Institutional Dynamics in Markets. *Journal of Consumer Research* 41(6): 1447-68.
- Humphreys A (2010) Megamarketing: The creation of markets as a social process. *Journal of Marketing* 74(2): 1-19.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer research*, 29(1), 20-38.
- Lawrence TB and Suddaby R (2006) Institutions and institutional work. In: Clegg SR, Hardy C, Nord WR and Lawrence TB (eds) *SAGE Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage Publications, pp.215-254.

- Maciel, A. F., & Wallendorf, M. (2016). Taste engineering: An extended consumer model of cultural competence constitution. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(5), 726-746.
- McCracken, G. (1988) *The long interview*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- McQuarrie EF, Miller J and Phillips BJ (2013) The megaphone effect: taste and audience in fashion blogging. *Journal of Consumer Research* 40(1): 136-158.
- Meyer JW and Rowan B (1977) Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340-363.
- Price, L. L., & Arnould, E. J. (1999). Commercial friendships: Service provider–client relationships in context. *Journal of marketing*, 63(4), 38-56.
- Rosenbaum, M. S., & Massiah, C. (2011). An expanded servicescape perspective. *Journal of Service Management*, 22(4), 471-490.
- Saatcioglu, B., & Ozanne, J. L. (2013). Moral habitus and status negotiation in a marginalized working-class neighborhood. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(4), 692-710.
- Scott WR (2014) *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests and identities* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Sherry JF (2000) Place, technology, and representation. *Journal of Consumer Research* 27(2): 273-278.
- Skandalis, A., Banister, E., & Byrom, J. (2018). The spatial aspects of musical taste: Conceptualizing consumers' place-dependent identity investments. *Marketing Theory*, 18(2), 249-265.
- Skandalis, A., Byrom, J., & Banister, E. (2019). Experiential marketing and the changing nature of extraordinary experiences in post-postmodern consumer culture. *Journal of Business Research*, 97, 43-50.
- Spiggle S (1994) Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research* 21(3): 491-503.

Thompson CJ and Haytko DL (1997) Speaking of fashion: consumers' uses of fashion discourses and the appropriation of countervailing cultural meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research* 24(1): 15-42.

Thompson, C. J., & Üstüner, T. (2015). Women skating on the edge: Marketplace performances as ideological edgework. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(2), 235-265.

Tumbat G and Belk RW (2011) Marketplace tensions in extraordinary experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research* 38(1): 42-61.

Üstüner T and Thompson CJ (2012) How marketplace performances produce interdependent status games and contested forms of symbolic capital. *Journal of Consumer Research* 38(5): 796-814.

Visconti LM, Sherry JF, Borghini S and Anderson L (2010) Street art, sweet art? Reclaiming the "public" in public place. *Journal of Consumer Research* 37(3): 511-529.