

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ATTENDEES' EXPECTATIONS AND
PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EVENTS

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ATTENDEES' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EVENTS

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Social media use has become a part of many peoples' everyday routine, and businesses have also started using it as a means of communication with consumers. As the individual use of social media has increased, consumers have developed expectations in regards to accessible information and easy communication. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media use on attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events. The researcher created an online questionnaire and distributed it to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo students. The results indicated that there is a relationship between social media usage and access to special event information and services. Additional research should be conducted to examine the most effective practices for special event companies looking to utilize social media marketing.

Keywords: social media, special events industry, event marketing, social media marketing, expectations, perceptions

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

The term “special event” was coined by Disneyland’s Director of Public Relations, Robert Jani, when the park opened in 1955 (Goldblatt, 2007). According to Goldblatt Walt Disney challenged Jani with the task of creating something to keep guests in the park past dark. Jani came up with the idea of featuring exciting shows after night fall, an idea that Disneyland still honors. Jani was responsible for the term’s first definition, which was something different from everyday activities and programs (Goldblatt). This broad description of a special event has continued to be the most accurate and all-inclusive definition available. Although Disneyland shows are still considered special events, in 2013 the category has grown to include a greater variety of occasions.

Similar to how the special event industry has grown, there has also been rapid growth in the world of social media over the past 15 years. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media started gaining popularity in the 1990s with the basic blog forums, and by 1995 corporations were utilizing websites. Prior to the development of social media, company websites could only be used as a one-way information channel. As social media has evolved its interface and usability, it has created a convenient and efficient way for individuals and businesses to interact. According to Qualman (2010), a rise in the use of social media has caused a dramatic shift in the way the world communicates. These websites have become integrated into the daily lives of millions of

people all over the world. Kaplan and Haelein pointed out that Facebook alone has more than 200 million users, and an average of 10 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every 60 seconds.

The wide range of people who are attracted to social media has become of interest to special event companies looking to gain a better understanding of their clients' wants and needs. In 2011, a poll conducted by Edelstein (2011) showed that 60% of special event organizations use Facebook, while 55% use Twitter, 52% use LinkedIn, and 20% use an alternative form of social media for marketing purposes. This increase in industry usage has turned social media into a primary source of information for consumers, and has changed the way that they experience a company's products or services. Attendees' expectations of interaction and service at an event are influenced by what they see on social media event pages and websites.

This study will assess the current trends in social media, individual usage, and social media's impacts on individual's expectations and perceptions. The results of this study will be beneficial to special event planners and agencies that conduct special events. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of social media marketing on an individual's expectations and perceptions of a special event.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Google Scholar, Hospitality and Tourism Complete, Business Source Premier, and

Academic Search Elite. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: growth in social media usage and special event trends and best practices.

Growth in social media usage. Social media has become a primary medium for communication and marketing for a vast array of populations. Lee and Parsons (2011) mentioned that social networks have been used for hundreds of years, but only in the last decade has social media been able to excel past the limitations of accessibility and speed. According to Qualman (2010), "...there is a revolution happening. It is being driven by a fundamental shift in how we communicate and it is enabled by the unprecedented rise of what is commonly called 'social media'" (p. xiii). As individual use of social media has increased in recent years, the corporate world has been slower to follow suit. This section examines the effects of increased social media usage among individuals and the professional world.

Social media sites began with the individual user in mind. As sites evolved, page formatting and applications were engineered to optimize the ease of personal communication. The idea of user-based functionality was founded upon the original intentions of the Internet, which Lee and Parsons (2011) said were to, "[transform] connections between people into one never-ending loop of all mankind" (p. 2). As social media websites improved the user experience, individual use started increasing. This increase can be assessed in order to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and difficulties it presents to members of the corporate world.

Lee and Parsons (2011) pointed out that until recently the Internet has only compiled fragmented data about consumers, but social media has allowed companies to organize the information into an effective client profile. According to Pappasolomou and

Melanthiou (2012), the integration of social media into a company's public relations campaign is not only inexpensive and effective, but also allows them to reach an international audience and receive instantaneous feedback from users. Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012) also argued that traditional marketing is not being replaced, but rather social media should be viewed as a supportive addition.

The corporate world was using the Internet for web pages and advertisements long before social media emerged (O'Connor, 2010). Companies had complete control over all of the information that consumers could see. The emergence of social media provided consumers with online forums that encouraged users to leave feedback and information about products and services based on personal experience with the companies. A study conducted by O'Conner (2010) to determine the professional impact of hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, found that individuals rely on user generated content more than most other sources when they want information about a company or place. The results also found that one of the biggest challenges for companies affected by user generated content is a slew of biased and false reviews. This lack of control over the informational flow is an intimidating concept for most businesses.

In the past decade members of Generation Y, individuals born between 1985 and 2000, have started entering the work force (Altes, 2009). This generation is often associated with social media use because its members were responsible for creating, maintaining, and evolving it. Altes argued that as Generation Y becomes the majority population in the business world, social media will become a more commonly used strategy in business plans. Already, social media has become a crucial part of everyday business activity, from marketing to recruiting. Although the technological transition is

moving slower among the age group that typically occupies senior level positions, companies are warming up to the inexpensive alternative marketing techniques.

How social media marketing affects consumer attitudes towards special events.

Social media has continued to grow as a subdivision in the marketing industry. According to Tanuri (2010), various aspects of marketing are compatible with the use of social media, including public relations, communications, and sentiment research. This marketing opportunity has allowed companies to reach consumers directly, and utilize immediate feedback to tailor marketing plans around the wants and needs of the target market and to measure the success of a plan. According to Jago and Shaw (2000), marketing in the special event industry in particular has been something of both interest and confusion. Successful marketing for special events requires a more unique strategy because the company emphasizes an experience that must appeal to a wide variety of individuals rather than a product or service. Wysong, Rothschild, and Beldona (2011) pointed out that to provide good customer service; a company must to understand the consumer. This section investigates consumer attitudes towards the use of social media for marketing special events.

Advancements in social media technology have given way to a new communication platform that is available to individual and corporate users. Akar and Topcu (2011) discussed how traditional marketing methods are less effective than social media marketing. Older methods were driven by companies pushing information on potential customers, whether the individuals had expressed interest or not. Lee, Xiong, and Hu (2012) suggested that social media marketing is most effective when a company can create an emotional experience for the individual. Wysong et al. (2011) discussed

that guests prefer to participate in an event and have an opinion regarding the information that is produced surrounding the event. Social media marketing encourages information interaction by providing consumers with an opportunity to leave a review.

As social media marketing continues to grow, companies must determine a way to stand out from the competition. A study conducted by Chen, Ching, Tsai, and Kuo (2008) addressed the relationship between social media marketing and consumer attitudes towards a brand. The results showed that interpersonal trust, message exchange, and two-way communication had positive and significant effects on brand attitude. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), attitudes shape the way people feel about things and influence the way individuals behave. Social media marketing has provided special event companies with the opportunity to influence guests' attitudes towards an event before it happens. According to a study conducted by DEI Worldwide (2008), the majority of internet-using consumers have utilized social media websites to get information, and roughly half reported using the information to make a purchasing decision. Cha (2009) found that people are more likely to make a purchase if the information regarding the purchase is useful and easy to use. If potential guests are notified of an event early on, then a company will have ample time to effectively communicate information and start to form positive attitudes towards the event.

Summary. The era of social media began nearly a decade ago, and since then it has brought about a cultural shift on a global scale. Social media has changed the way people communicate with each other on a personal and professional level. It has come to be considered one of the most effective marketing tools for businesses, and has given them the opportunity to reach the greatest number of people at the lowest cost. A two-

way communication platform has been created for the interaction of corporations and consumers, which has improved business and contributed to higher levels of customer satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of social media on attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in expectations of special events based on social media images from 2009 and before or 2012 and beyond?
2. Has social media improved access to information regarding special events?
3. Has social media improved access to special event services?
4. What are the primary social media sources that affect attendee expectations?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on special events was gathered from attendees of special events and event planners.
2. Social media usage and attendee expectations were analyzed.
3. Conclusions were drawn from the northern and central California areas.
4. The data were collected during the spring of 2013.

5. Information for this study was gathered using a combination of systematic and convenience sampling methods.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. Subjects can provide false information.
2. The sample was selected using convenience sampling.
3. The instrument was distributed via email, allowing it to be forwarded to spam or deleted.
4. The instrument was distributed electronically, therefore it is impossible to know if the responses are from the desired population.

Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that respondents would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
2. It was assumed that respondents were the participants intended to take the survey.
3. It was assumed that participants understood all of the questions.
4. It was assumed that all of the email addresses were valid.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Social media. “The Internet-based technologies that individuals use to exchange thoughts, feelings, attitudes, opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives in many different forms including text, images, audio, and video” (Rubenstein, 2011, p. 19)

Social media marketing. “Use of social media channels to promote a company and its products” (Akar & Erkan, 2011, p. 36)

Special event. An infrequent and unique occurrence outside of daily activities

User generated content. ”Understood very broadly to include all content put online by users, whether it was created by them or not” (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010, p. 119)

Chapter 2

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media on attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events. This chapter includes the description of subjects, description of the instrument, description of procedures, and the method of data analysis.

Description of Subjects

The subjects of this study were undergraduate students at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Each subject included in the study was between the ages of 18 and 23 years old, and had a social media page. The study included male and female, part-time and full-time students enrolled at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo in the Spring 2013 quarter. Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo consists of approximately 17,680 undergraduate students, of which 55.1% are men and 45.9% are women (Cal Poly Institutional Planning & Analysis, 2012). These subjects were evaluated to assist in the collection of information on social media usage among students at the same university. The subjects were selected through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Students who were accessible to the researcher via the Internet served as the subjects for this study.

Description of Instrument

The instrument for this study was an electronic, self-administered questionnaire created by the researcher. A copy of the instrument can be found in Appendix A. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items designed to determine the effects of social media use on the expectations and perceptions of special events. On April 18, 2013, the researcher conducted a pilot test with eight current Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo students. Minor changes were made to the formatting of the questionnaire, including question layout and wording. These changes were made prior to the distribution of the instrument to the subjects.

The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions to determine whether a participant qualified for the study, and to contribute to the future application of the study's results. Questions regarding age, gender, and year in school were asked to describe the sample of the study. These questions were answered using a combination of open-ended and close-ended formats.

A series of three questions were asked to determine the participants' personal social media usage. These questions addressed websites the participants used, and how frequently they visit the respective pages. The questions were asked using a combination of multiple choice and open-ended formats.

The second group of items consisted of three questions that focused on the integration of social media into special events. Two of the questions were asked using a multiple choice format to address the participants' opinions of special event information and services offered via social media. The other question in this series was asked to

determine the participants' perceptions of the affects social media has on expectations of a special event. This question was asked using a Likert-type scale.

The final series of questions consisted of three items. Each question presented two images of the same aspect of a special event, including table décor, invitation, and exhibit. Every question consisted of one image from 2009 or earlier, and one from 2012 or after. The participants were asked to identify their expectation levels of the special events that were represented by the images. These questions were designed to address the participants' preferences, which could then be compared to their social media usage that was determined in previous questions.

The instrument was submitted to and approved by Cal Poly State University's Human Subjects Committee. An informed consent letter preceded each questionnaire, and was also approved by Cal Poly State University's Human Subjects Committee. A copy of this consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Description of Procedures

The researcher created an electronic, self-administered questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com. On February 28, 2013, the RPTA department head, Dr. Bill Hendricks, approved the questionnaire. On May 7, 2013 the researcher created an event page on Facebook and invited all members of the Cal Poly State University student network to complete the survey. The link to the questionnaire was posted on the Facebook event page on May 7, 2013. Students that were invited to the event were encouraged to invite other Cal Poly State University students to participate in the study.

Participants had until May 14, 2013 to complete the questionnaire, at which time data collection ended.

When subjects viewed the questionnaire they were presented with a letter of informed consent that was approved by the Cal Poly State University Human Subjects Committee. The letter notified the participants of the purpose of the study and that the subjects' participation was voluntary. If the subjects agreed to the terms of the consent form they were taken to the remainder of the survey, but if they did not consent they were exited from the questionnaire. Contact information for the researcher was provided in the letter of informed consent if the participants had any questions, comments, or concerns.

Method of Data Analysis

The electronic, self-administered questionnaire consisted of 15 items that resulted in the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire included 11 questions that addressed one or more of the four research questions; the others were demographic questions that contributed to describing the sample. These demographic items were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and mean score.

A series of seven questions were used to address how social media has affected individuals' expectations and perceptions of special events. Two of the items were measured by asking the participants' opinions regarding whether or not social media has improved their access to special event information and services, and if it has changed their expectations. These questions were analyzed with frequencies and percentages. A bivariate table was then created to show the relationship between the results of each question. The other three questions used a comparison of images from 2009 and before

and 2012 and after to determine the level of expectations of the special events that were represented in the images. The images symbolized aspects of special events before and after the expansion of social media websites, which assisted the researcher in determining if there was a relationship between social media usage level and expectations of special events. For every image a mean expectation rating was calculated, and a standard deviation was determined. A bivariate table was then created to compare the mean ratings and standard deviations for each pair of images.

Two items were used in combination with the previous series of questions to determine the relationship between the participants' personal social media usage and their expectations and perceptions of special events. These two questions asked the participants to identify which social media pages they visited, and an estimate of how often they visited social media pages per day. Means and standard deviations were calculated for each group.

The questionnaire included two items that were used to determine the most popular social media websites within the sample. Two questions were asked regarding which websites the participants used, and which ones they visited most frequently. The data analysis consisted of calculating frequencies and percentages for both data sets. This allowed the researcher to determine which social media websites were most popular among the study's respondents.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media usage on attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events. The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Facebook.com between May 7, 2013 and May 13, 2013. There was a 21.4% response rate from the members of the Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo Facebook network that were invited to take the survey, which resulted in a sample size of 58 subjects. This sample represented the population of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo graduate and undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 23.

Demographics

Of the 58 participants, females ($n = 53$, 93%) outnumbered males ($n = 4$, 7%). The participants were between the ages of 18 and 23, and the sample had a mean age of 21. The majority of the participants were between 20 and 22 years of age. Please refer to Table 1 for information about the ages of the participants.

Table 1
Age of Participants by Frequency and Percentage

Age in Years	<i>f</i>	%
18	5	8.8
19	9	15.8
20	14	24.6
21	12	21.1
22	15	26.3
23	2	3.5

Social Media Use

The participants were asked to identify their level of personal social media usage, and the websites they used most often. All of the participants responded that they utilize social media. Of the 58 participants, all but 1 (n = 57, 98%) had a Facebook account in addition to one or more other social media accounts. The majority of the respondents also had a Pinterest account (n = 44, 76%) and a Twitter account (n = 33, 57%), as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2
Social Media Accounts by Frequency and Percentage

Social Media Accounts	<i>f</i>	%
Facebook	57	98.3
Twitter	33	56.9
LinkedIn	31	53.4
Pinterest	44	75.9
MySpace	2	3.4
Other	14	24.1

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Of the 58 participants, most of them (n = 49, 86%) responded that they visit their Facebook accounts more than any other social media account, as is indicated in Table 3, followed by “other” websites, Twitter, and Pinterest.

Table 3
Social Media Visits by Frequency and Percentage

Social Media Visited	<i>f</i>	%
Facebook	49	85.9
Twitter	4	7.0
LinkedIn	1	1.8
Pinterest	3	5.3
MySpace	0	0
Other	6	10.5

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Participants were asked to estimate how many times they visit their social media accounts per day. The majority of respondents (n = 26, 45%) specified that they visit their social media accounts an average of 5 to 10 times per day, while 13 subjects (22%) reported visiting less than 5 times per day. Responses were divided into groups based on the daily range they fell into. To see the frequency and percentage of each category refer to Table 4.

Table 4
Daily Use by Frequency and Percentage

Visits Per Day	<i>f</i>	%
Less than 5	13	22.4
5 - 10	26	44.8
11-15	6	10.3
16 - 20	6	10.3
More than 20	7	12.1

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Effects of Social Media on Special Events

The participants provided information regarding their attendance at special events over the past year and their interaction with social media surrounding those events. More than half of the participants (n = 30, 52%) have attended between 5 to 10 special events in the past year, followed by 19 subjects (33%) that have attended less than 5 events. Refer to Table 5 for the additional results regarding participant's special event attendance.

Table 5
Participant Attendance at Special Events by Frequency and Percentage

Events Attended	<i>f</i>	%
Less than 5	19	32.8
5-10	30	51.7
11-15	3	5.2
More than 15	6	10.3

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Nearly all of the participants (n = 57, 98%) indicated that social media has improved their access to information regarding special events; while only one participant (2%) responded that they were unsure, and none said that social media had not improved their access to information. The majority of the respondents (n = 41, 71%) found that social media had provided them with access to special event services, including designs, supplies, and event planners. Please refer to Table 6 for further information regarding respondents' access to special event information and services through social media.

Table 6
Effects of Social Media on Access to Event Information and Services by Frequency and Percentage

Response	Improvements			
	Information		Services	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	57	98.3	41	70.7
No	1	1.7	8	13.8
Unsure	0	0	9	15.5

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages are less than 100%.

Participants indicated on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 4 how the images on social media effect their expectations of a special event. The mean rating was a 3.14 with a standard deviation of 0.65.

Special Event Expectations Based on Images

Participants were shown images from 2009 and before and 2012 and after and asked to rate them on a scale from one to four based on their expectations for the special event pictured. Differences were observed between the mean ratings for the invite and the exhibit. The greatest difference in mean score was for the exhibit, which was 2.63 for the image before 2009 and 3.40 after 2012. The mean ratings for both of the reception images were very close, with the mean score of 3.22 for the image from prior 2009 and 3.38 after 2009. Refer to Table 7 for the mean expectation rating and standard deviation of each image.

Table 7
Expectations of Special Events Based on Images According to Mean and Standard Deviation

	Year			
	2009 and Before		After 2009	
Image	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Reception	3.22	0.86	3.38	0.67
Invite	2.95	0.74	3.48	0.78
Exhibit	2.63	0.79	3.40	0.80

Summary

The results in this chapter reflected that social media effects individuals' expectations and perceptions of special events. All of the respondents indicated that they had multiple social media accounts, and most of them reported that the accounts have improved their access to special event information and services.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research in this study provides information that can be helpful for companies in the special event industry to effectively utilize social media outlets as a marketing and communications tool. This concluding chapter will include the following: a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Summary

The rise of social media has been particularly noticeable among college aged individuals. As students are aging out of school and into the working world, businesses have learned to utilize social media to effectively communicate with and market to consumers. Social media allows individuals to find information quickly and easily, ultimately improving their overall satisfaction with the company and experience.

The research for this study was conducted via an online survey, which was created on SurveyMonkey.com. Participants were invited to a Facebook group or emailed a link to the survey on May 7, 2013, and the survey was available to participants until May 13, 2013. When participants accessed the survey they were directed to a letter of informed consent, and the researcher's contact information should the participants have any questions. The survey was completed by 58 people.

The results of this study indicated that college students rely heavily on social media for information regarding special events. Most students have more than one social media account, and depend on them when looking for information. This expectation has

provided companies with the opportunity to reach their consumers quickly and improve customer experiences. Facebook and Pinterest were the most commonly used social media websites for college students, but other websites were utilized as well.

Discussion

This study shows that social media is a valuable communication and marketing tool for individual users and businesses in the special event industry. All of the participants respond that they have multiple social media accounts and attend multiple events per year. The findings from this study present special event companies with an opportunity, knowing that the majority of their attendees' can be reached via social media. These results indicate that Facebook and Pinterest are the most frequently used websites for individual users. This information will allow companies in the special event industry to utilize the most effective social media channels, and give them the information needed to focus their marketing and communication efforts.

Nearly all of the participants in this study report that social media has improved their access to information regarding social events, and most of them also indicate improved access to special event services. This information shows special event businesses that using social media to communicate information to consumers is efficient, and also exhibits that social media marketing efforts are effective. The amount of daily usage that the participants report in combination with the stated improvement of access to information and services suggests that subjects turn to social media when looking for information or services regarding special events. This suggestion provides companies with an explanation of why utilizing social media is an important tool for their business.

Findings from this study demonstrate the effects of images on social media consumers' expectations and perceptions of special events. The majority of participants indicate that images on social media effect their expectations of special events. This information suggests that social media is also a valuable marketing tool for businesses. Participants were asked to rate their expectations of special events that were represented in a picture, two images were shown of a reception, an invitation, and an exhibit, one from 2009 and before and one from 2012 and after. This year was chosen based on information provided from Qualman in 2010, who said that the rise in social media usage has caused a change in the way the world communicates. This suggests that social media use has been on the rise prior to 2010. All of the images that are from after 2012 have higher mean ratings than the images from 2009 and before, and most of them have lower standard deviations. This information supports the idea that utilizing social media for marketing is beneficial for businesses. Additionally, these results indicate the importance of utilizing current images for when using social media for marketing purposes.

There are several limitations present in this study that impacted the results. The sample consists of primarily female subjects and 22 years old, which does not accurately represent the population. The sample size is only 58, which is very small relative to the population of Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo undergraduate and graduate students. The sample was obtained using convenience sampling so the data may be biased. Because the survey was distributed via Facebook, there is no way to verify if an individual taking the survey is a member of the appropriate sample. Additionally, most of the subjects accessed the survey via the Facebook event page that was created for the survey, which may have skewed the results based on the subject matter of the questions.

The results of this study support previous research that social media is an essential tool for businesses to utilize as a part of their communications and marketing strategies. The study demonstrates that college aged students rely on social media for information concerning special events, and that they are influenced by social media images. Findings from this study have provided companies in the special event industry with insight regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of using social media. Additionally, the study has narrowed down the best social media resources to use should they choose to utilize the tool.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. There are differences in expectations based on social media images of invitations and exhibits from before 2009 and after 2012, but not for receptions.
2. Social media has improved access to information regarding special events
3. Social media has improved access to special event services.
4. The most frequently used social media sites are Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Companies in the special event industry should continue using social media channels as a tool for communicating with and marketing to customers.
2. Companies that choose to use social media marketing should utilize current images and continually update the websites.

3. In future studies, a more diverse sample would result in a more complete and detailed study.
4. Future research should explore the most effective practices for improving attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events through social media.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Social Media Usage and Special Events

1. Do you use social media websites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.)?
 - Yes
 - No

2. If so, which website(s) do you use? Please check all that apply.
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
 - Pinterest
 - MySpace
 - Other (please specify): _____

3. Which of the following social media websites do you visit most often?
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
 - Pinterest
 - MySpace
 - Other (please specify): _____

4. On average, how often do you visit your social media page(s) per day? _____

5. How many special events (i.e. music festivals, weddings, professional conferences, etc.) did you attend in the past year? _____

6. Do you feel that social media has improved your access to information regarding special events?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

7. Do you feel that social media has provided you with access to special event services (i.e. design, supplies, event planners, etc.)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Unsure

8. How do the images on social media websites affect your expectations of a special event?

They have no impact on my expectations	They have little impact on my expectations	They have moderate impact on my expectations	They have significant impact on my expectations

1

2

3

4

Questions 9-11 depict images, each representative of different special events. For each picture please indicate your level of expectations for the special event from 1 to 4.

**1=No Expectations, 2=Low Expectations, 3=Moderate Expectations,
4=High Expectations**

9. Below are pictures of two separate special event receptions.



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4

10. Below are pictures of two separate invitations to special events.



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4

**1=No Expectations, 2=Low Expectations, 3=Moderate Expectations,
4=High Expectations**

11. Below are pictures of exhibits at two separate conventions.



1 2 3 4



1 2 3 4

12. How old are you? _____

13. Gender _____

Thank you!

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON ATTENDEES' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EVENTS

A senior project on the effects of social media usage on attendees' expectations and perceptions of special events is being conducted by Samantha Buono in the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo under the direct supervision of Dr. William Hendricks.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire. Your participation will take approximately three minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study. Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy. Potential benefits associated with the study include learning more about the influence of social media on special events among students at Cal Poly State University.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Samantha Buono at sbuono@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Bill Hendricks at whendric@calpoly.edu. If you have concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at (805) 756-2754, sdavis@calpoly.edu, or Dr. Dean Wendt, Interim Dean of Research, at (805) 756-1508, dwendt@calpoly.edu.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this senior project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing and returning the attached questionnaire. Please retain this consent cover form for your reference, and thank you for your participation in this research.