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An Analysis of Online CSR Communication of Dutch Music Festivals

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly competitive music festival landscape, both commercial and nonprofit organizers are under pressure to ensure the long-term sustainability of their events, with environmental and social impacts becoming key factors in standing out and maintaining their position in the market. Communication is a pivotal tool for music festivals to support and implement sustainability initiatives in their management. In fact, research has shown that transparent and proactive *communication about sustainability* can offer several benefits. It helps build audience trust in the festival's image and fosters a sense of collective responsibility, potentially influencing audience behaviour. The term used to describe an organization's communication of its sustainability commitment is *corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication*. The aim of this study is to analyse the CSR communication of *Dutch music festivals* and to identify the narratives and frames they employ, whether they focus on building trust in their initiatives, or generate collaboration with their audience. A qualitative method of data collection was adopted for this study with forty-one data units originated from *websites* of Dutch music festivals. The method of data analysis was the qualitative content analysis, which allowed to investigate CSR-related contents on websites, often found under 'sustainability' pages. The topic addressed, the *framing* of the *message*, the tone of voice and the aim of the communication action were investigated in each data unit of the dataset. Applying the framework of Elving et al. (2015) on CSR communication to the dataset, four major categories were deductively identified: 'informative', 'value-driven', 'future-oriented', and 'audience-involvement' CSR communication. For each major category, two subcategories deductively emerged from the data. The findings emphasize that CSR communication by Dutch music festivals serves four aims: to inform and educate about their commitments, to persuade and build trust in their sustainability efforts, to encourage future change and shared responsibility, and to actively involve the audience in their initiatives. Contrary to the original framework, where the division between strategic and communicative action was related to major categories, in this study, it was attributed to the subcategories. Specifically, four subcategories focused on strategic action, aiming to build trust in the festivals' commitment to sustainability. The other four emphasized communicative action, fostering a sense of community and shared knowledge with the audience. Moreover, gain-framed messaging and a conversational human voice were evident in nearly all subcategories, except one, which used an organizational tone. Thus, Dutch music festivals appear to adopt a balanced approach to online CSR communication, characterized by an overall positive framing and a human tone.

KEYWORDS: *Dutch Music Festivals – Sustainability Communication – Corporate Social Responsibility Communication — Websites analysis – Frame message*

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1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, music festivals aren't just events, they're culture heritage. Dutch pop music festivals have been around since the 1960s, with legends like PinkPop festival, but their rapid growth and commercialization have become especially noticeable since the 2000s, particularly in cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Hitters & Mulder, 2020, p. 45; Leenders, 2010, p. 291). Given that, music festivals in the Netherlands play a central role in the creative industry, offering diverse experiences that attract both domestic and international audiences (Leenders, 2010, p. 291).

In an increasingly competitive music festival landscape, both commercial and nonprofit organizers face pressure to ensure the long-term viability of their events, where sustainability, as environmental and social impacts, has become a key factor in standing out and securing their place in the market (Laing & Frost, 2010, p. 261). In fact, failing to meet green promises can lead to regulatory challenges and harm future audience trust and support towards the music festival (Laing & Frost, 2010, p. 261). Within this context, the term 'green event' emerged to define an event that implements a sustainability policy or integrates sustainable practices into its management and operations (Laing & Frost, 2010, p. 262). Specifically, in music festivals, sustainability encompasses the adoption of practices aimed at reducing environmental harm, promoting social responsibility, and strengthening community involvement (Harms et al., 2023). As a rule, sustainability can be defined as encompassing not just environmental responsibilities or concerns, but also economic and socio-cultural sustainability, as reflected in the triple-bottom-line (TBL) across the private sector (Laing & Frost, 2010, p. 262; Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006, p. 2). This construct, coined by Elkington (1997), is needed for evaluating an organization's performance through three key dimensions: economic, social, and environmental, often referred to as people, planet, and profit (as cited in Alhaddi, 2015, p. 6).

The growing emphasis on sustainability in the Dutch music festival sector was marked by the launch of the Green Deal Circular Festivals (GDCF) in 2019 (Circular Festivals, n.d., para. 1). Launched and facilitated by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, the GDCF represents a partnership between the Dutch government and a coalition of pioneering European music festivals. Since its inception, 49 festival organizations from 17 countries have signed the agreement (Circular Festivals, n.d., para. 1). Multiple music festivals in the Netherlands, such as Amsterdam Dance Event, Mysteryland, Down the Rabbit Hole, and Awakenings, signed it (Robertson, n.d., para. 2). The main goals

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of the agreement are to manage resources wisely by recycling and reusing materials, to reach net zero by cutting carbon emissions to zero, and to support communities and nature by reducing harm and creating benefits for local people and ecosystems (Circular Festivals, n.d., para. 2).

The establishment of this agreement on sustainability in music festivals underscores the importance of integrating sustainable practices into the operational core as a fundamental aspect of responsible and forward-thinking event management. In addition to implementing sustainability initiatives, music festivals should also communicate them clearly, as effective communication plays a key role in promoting sustainable practices (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 474). Festivals often leverage sustainability communication to differentiate themselves and enhance their brand image, which in turn strengthens their reputation as socially and environmentally responsible events and provides a competitive edge in attracting environmentally conscious attendees (Jones, 2017, pp. 64-69; Werner et al., 2020, pp. 128-129). Transparent and proactive sustainability communication allows festivals to clearly demonstrate their commitment to sustainability while actively encouraging audience participation. By openly sharing their initiatives, festivals position themselves as responsible and trustworthy actors within the industry (Harms et al., 2023, p. 5). This not only informs audiences but also fosters engagement and collective action (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475). In summary, transparent messaging strengthens credibility, builds trust, and can lead to more positive perceptions among attendees. Additionally, it can shape attendees' environmental attitudes and behaviours, promoting a sense of shared responsibility (Laing, 2018, p. 166).

This concept, at the corporate level, is embedded in the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, which is the focus of this study. CSR communication refers to the integration of sustainability issues into corporate communication, encompassing both marketing and management (Van Riel, 1995 as mentioned in Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 327). The study on sustainability communication at European music festivals was conducted by Harms et al. (2023). Hence, having established the importance of communicating sustainability in a transparent way that informs audiences about the commitment of music festivals, fosters their engagement, and encourages collective action for sustainability, this study explores how Dutch music festivals communicate and frame sustainability within CSR communication.

The research question posed is: *How is CSR communication about sustainability framed on the official websites of Dutch music festivals?*

1.1. Relevance of the research

Considering the potential of sustainability corporate communication to improve the brand image of music festivals and to engage audiences in sustainable actions, this research aims to establish a framework for better analysing CSR online communication of Dutch music festivals.

This research's findings can reveal the communication strategies implemented by Dutch music festivals within CSR, whether they focus on self-interested communication aimed at generating trust in their initiatives, or they seek to influence audience behaviour and actively involve them in their actions. As aforementioned, ethical and transparent CSR communication brings key benefits to event management, including broader reach, stronger brand awareness, and improved sustainability outcomes that align with community expectations (Nicolaides, 2017, p. 1; Dodds et al., 2020, pp. 476-477). Hence, the findings can serve as a starting point for other music festivals in Europe to structure their CSR online communication, by identifying the most commonly addressed topics, the tone of voice used, and the message framing employed by Dutch music festivals.

Academic research tends to emphasize the importance of adopting sustainable practices at festivals, analysing drivers and challenges of the process; thus, there is less focus on how these practices are communicated by the organizations in their online channels (Van Berkel, 2014, pp. 8-9; Stettler, 2011, p. 20; Dodds et al., 2020, p. 474). Specifically, within the CSR communication, the existing research practices primarily employs quantitative methods or interviews with experts, focusing on measuring the presence of sustainability content or drivers behind the implementation of initiatives (Dodds et al., 2020, pp. 476-477; Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 323: Richardson, 2019, p. 1257). A relevant study is shown by Dodds et al. (2020, p. 473) on Canadian music festivals revealed that promoting sustainability efforts tend to generate added value for both attendees and host communities. It emerged that sustainability information was rarely prioritized in Canadian music festivals' online communication, with 64% of festivals not communicating any sustainable practices through their websites and only 6% using social media for this purpose. Furthermore, sustainability content was typically placed in the "about" section rather than prominently featured on the home page (Dodds et al., 2020, pp. 478-480). Hence, this predominant quantitative focus limits a deeper understanding of how CSR communication is framed and presented to audiences. The only qualitative study found on this topic is by Harms et al. (2023, p. 14), who discovered that 60% of the music festivals analysed, were using websites and social

media to communicate their sustainability efforts. Their study highlights the availability of data for analysing CSR communication online within music festivals in the Netherlands. To conclude, the limited literature that uses a qualitative approach about CSR communication, has focused on the linguistic fabric of it within various industries, but not on the music festival industry, as this research does (Ojha, 2023, p. 29). All the academic limits individualised lead this research to address this gap by qualitatively examining the framing of CSR online communication content within music festival industry, aiming to uncover the narratives and frames festivals use to engage stakeholders around sustainability.

1.2. Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction to the thesis topic, the theoretical framework outlines the key theories related to the framing and aim of CSR communication via online channels. The subsequent methodology section describes the data collection process involving the website content of Dutch music festivals and details the qualitative content analysis used for interpretation, along with an overview of the sample. It also explains how the previously introduced theoretical frameworks are applied to the dataset during the analysis. The core of the thesis lies in the fourth section, the results, which presents the main findings and emerging categories, linking them back to the theoretical concepts discussed earlier. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key insights into CSR communication on Dutch music festival websites in relation to the research question and reflects on their practical and theoretical implications. The thesis ends by acknowledging its limitations and offering recommendations for future research based on the findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter offers context for understanding the link between the music festivals industry and the ways in which it communicates its sustainability efforts and initiatives through online channels. It is structured as follows. Firstly, it presents the music festival industry through the lens of event studies, defining its scope and the academic approach adopted in this research. Secondly, it expands on the concept of sustainable development and its application within a corporate context. The focus then shifts to corporate sustainability communication, namely CSR communication, which is the central theme of this study. Moreover, it discusses the online channels used in CSR communication, highlighting their features and relevance to this study focus. Following that, the tone of voice and message framing in online CSR are examined as the first layer of communication analysis, as they provide theoretical tools to analyse language use. Then, a content-based theory of CSR communication is provided as a useful tool for analysing the themes reported in CSR communication. Finally, an essential framework is presented, which focuses on CSR communication aim, based on Habermas' theory.

2.1. The Evolving Landscape of Music Festivals

Before narrowing the focus to music festivals, it is useful to understand how the concept of festival is defined in a general sense. Falassi (1987), from a classical cultural-anthropological perspective, defines festivals as "a sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances" (p. 2). In this view, festivals were primarily cantered on building and celebrating a sense of community, serving as expressions of shared values, collective ideologies, cultural identity, and the continuity of social bonds (Falassi, 1987, p. 1). From a more contemporary perspective, Getz (2005), in his book about event studies, describes festivals as "themed, public celebrations" (p. 21). In a subsequent study, Getz (2008) defines events planned as "spatial–temporal phenomenon, and each is unique because of interactions among the setting, people, and management systems" (p. 404). He categorizes events into eight types based on their purpose and programming: cultural celebrations, political events, arts and entertainment, business and trade, educational, sport, recreational, and private events. Although festivals are classified under cultural celebrations, some of them, such as music concerts, are more closely aligned with the arts and entertainment category (Getz, 2008, p. 404).

Building on this distinction, the present research focuses specifically on music festivals. The definition of music festivals considered in this paper is based on the citation from Shuker's book "Popular Music Culture" (2011). He defines them as "concert[s], usually outdoor, often held over several days" (Suker, 2011, p. 127). According to him, they contribute to the preservation of traditions while also expanding the audience for music and fostering a sense of collective identity among performers and fans (Shuker, 2011, p. 128). The summer festival season has become a staple in the music calendars of the United Kingdom, Europe, and North America. These events typically feature multiple performers over several days, often across various stages. To distinguish themselves within a saturated market, many festivals focus on a specific music genre or curate a lineup designed to appeal to a targeted group of fans (Shuker, 2011, p. 128). Music festivals, and festivals more generally, have been examined by scholars within the broader field of event studies, a domain extensively theorized in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology due to the importance of festivals in nearly all cultures (Getz, 2010, p. 1).

2.2. Understanding Music Festivals Through Event Studies

Event studies has undergone a significant transformation in its academic positioning. In its early stages, it was conceptualized through a pyramid model, where event studies sat at the top, supported by more practical-oriented event management degree and diploma programs (Getz & Page, 2019, p. 5). In contrast, the new model presented by Getz and Page (2019, pp. 5-6) displays event studies as a broader and interdisciplinary field, that extends beyond the boundaries of event management and tourism. Hence, event studies are presented as a comprehensive approach to understanding events as complex phenomena, specifically named "social and politic constructs" by Tribe (2004) (as cited in Getz & Page, 2019, p. 6). This field encompasses not only the planning, design, and execution of events, but also their roles, meanings, and impacts within societal and cultural contexts (Getz, 2010, p. 4). It emerged from the understanding that, for a field of study to be recognized as legitimate, it must possess a defined core focus that serves as the foundation for systematic research (Getz, 2010, p. 4).

According to this framework, the classical event studies encompass event management and event tourism (Getz & Page, 2019, p. 6). Event management is committed to understanding and addressing the effective planning and execution of events. It explores elements such as human resources, communication, risk, logistics, and marketing (Getz, 2010, p. 2). This discourse can also include assessments of environmental and economic

impacts. The last discourse, event tourism, views festivals as tools to enhance tourism and economic development, approaching them through an economic lens (Getz & Page, 2019, p. 6).

Typically, the object of interest and perspective in studying events influence both the analytical approach scholars take and how the subject is examined (Tribe, 2004, as cited in Getz & Page, 2019, p. 6). For instance, an interest in festival sustainability draws on management theory, social psychology, and other disciplines to build a deeper understanding. Therefore, this paper, which focused on music festivals' environmental communication, falls within the framework of event studies, and it draws on events management theory, corporate sustainability, and framing sustainability communication theory to develop a thorough understanding and provide guidance for data analysis.

2.3. The Environment Impact of a Music Festival

In the realm of event management, Getz & Page (2019, p. 31) highlight some major forces, trends and issues affecting planned events, emphasizing the need to be prepared for the future. Among these forces, such as politics and legal issues, sociology and culture, the environmental also play a central role. Within the latter area, key challenges include climate change, peak oil, renewable energy, and shortages of water and food. These issues jeopardize prosperity, safety, leisure, and peace of events, as music festivals (Getz & Page, 2019, p. 33). Indeed, recently research has begun to explore the complex relationship between events and environment issues (Mair & Smith, 2021, p. 1739). For instance, Anderton (2022), in his review of music festivals, claim that outdoor music festivals held on greenfield sites creates a deep connection with the location that host them, since every year temporary villages are built and rebuilt (Anderton, 2022, pp. 1-8). Over time, they develop their own traditions, behaviours, landmarks, and norms, shaped by the dynamic relationship between organizers and attendees, and re-enacted each year (Anderton, 2022, p. 14). However, festivals, particularly large-scale music events, carry a significant risk of unintentionally producing negative effects on their host environments, including economic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions (Mair & Laing, 2012, p. 688). The environmental consequences of crowds are increasingly being considered by event managers (Cierjacks et al., 2012, p. 328). Indeed, a growing number of music festival organizers around the world are asserting their ability to identify and actively address the potential negative impacts of their events by integrating the concept of sustainability into their operational practices (Zifkos, 2014, p. 3).

2.4. Sustainability Development: People, Planet, Profit

The term Sustainability Development (SD) has been defined in 1987, by the World Commission on Economic Development, as "…development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Zifkos, p. 4; Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006, p. 2). According to a report of United Nation, it involves caring for the environment, economy, and society in ways that support long-term well-being for both people and the planet (Zifkos, 2014, p. 4). Thus, SD is defined as a model of Tiple Bottom Line (TBL) (Ebner & Baumgartner, 2006, p. 2). This construct, coined by Elkington (1997), is needed for evaluating an organization's performance through the economic, social, and environmental dimensions often referred to as people, planet, and profit (as cited in Alhaddi, 2015, p. 6).

Harms et al. (2023, p. 5) cite that in music festivals, sustainability "involves implementing practices that minimize negative environmental impacts, promote social responsibility, and foster community engagement". Nevertheless, in the event management context, the term "sustainable events" is used to refer primarily to efforts that reduce environmental impacts (Mair & Smith, 2021, p. 1740). Therefore, in this paper, 'sustainability' mainly focuses on the environmental aspects of music festivals, while social and economic factors are mainly considered whether they arise during the content analysis. For instance, an increasing number of events are implementing environmentally responsible management strategies, including waste reduction, recycling, energy conservation, and promoting the use of public or bicycle transport (Mair & Laing, 2012, p. 684; Zifkos, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, many event organizers are not only implementing, but also strategically communicating their environmental efforts to stakeholders (Mair & Laing, 2012, p. 684).

2.5. Sustainability in Corporate Communication

At the company level, putting sustainability into practice demands not just the backing of top leadership, but also the involvement and collaboration of various internal departments, including legal, R&D, quality control, HR, and communications (Signitzer & Prexl, 2007, p. 2). Notably, communication is a pivotal tool to promote sustainable practices (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 474). Music festivals frequently use sustainability communication as a means of brand differentiation, reinforcing their image as socially and environmentally responsible events and gaining a competitive advantage in appealing to environmentally conscious audiences (Jones, 2017, pp. 64-69; Werner et al., 2020, pp. 128-129). This

strategic use of communication aligns with the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication and Corporate Sustainability Communication (CSC), both of which are situated within the broader framework of Corporate Sustainability (CS), a term that reflects sustainable development (SD) at the organizational level (Sarvaiya & Wu, 2014, p. 59). CS serves as an umbrella concept encompassing various approaches to the role of business in society, including CSR, corporate citizenship, corporate social performance, social accountability, the triple bottom line, corporate governance, the stakeholder approach, and notably, CSC (Signitzer & Prexl, 2007, p. 3).

Given the nature of the research topic, the concepts of CSC and CSR communication are introduced. CSC is understood as a developing concept that encompasses how companies communicate about sustainability-related matters (Alhaddi, 2015, p. 6; Signitzer & Prexl, 2007, p. 5). In this research, the term corporate sustainability communication (CSC) is used to describe how companies communicate about sustainability-related topics. Rather than being seen as a separate branch of public relations, CSC involves embedding sustainability concerns into existing communication strategies (Alhaddi, 2015, p. 5). Its focus includes issues such as CSR, social justice, environmental responsibility, and their connection to economic performance, covering areas like corporate sustainability objectives, current practices, impacts and challenges in sustainability management, sustainable products and processes, and stakeholder engagement (Alhaddi, 2015, p. 5).

The concept of CSR, still no universally agreed-upon defined, encompass an organization's legal, ethical, economic, and philanthropic duties toward its stakeholders and society (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320). Similarly, the European Commission defined it as the voluntary integration of social and environmental considerations into a company's daily activities, highlighting its role in fostering transparent communication with stakeholders (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021, p.2). Specifically in this paper, CSR is seen as an increasingly important framework of corporate communication, with a focus on how organizations convey their sustainability-related efforts to stakeholders (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2021, p.2; Ashrafi et al., 2018, p. 674). Accordingly, the term CSR communication is used to highlight this focus, particularly in the context of Dutch music festivals.

The terms CSR communication and Corporate Sustainability Communication (CSC) are used interchangeably (Alhaddi, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, the theoretical literature examined in this research focuses on CSR communication, as it inherently includes sustainability-related messaging. However, the term CSC is also occasionally used in this paper to refer specifically to CSR communication. A practical example of CSR in the context of music

festivals can be seen in dedicated sustainability webpages, where festivals disclose environmental initiatives such as emissions reports or donations to environmental organizations.

Corporate communication plays a dual role in sustainability: it not only reports a company's sustainability achievements but also motivates the organization to pursue further sustainability initiatives (Bittner-Fesseler & Weicht, 2020, p. 96). Research has shown that communicating CSR efforts can yield several organizational benefits, including improved reputation, increased stakeholder trust, but also foster collective responsibility towards sustainability and shape behaviours (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320; Laing, 2018, p. 166). Recognizing recurring patterns in how organizations communicate CSR is important, as they can generate diverse stakeholder engagement, which vary in motivation and intensity (Haberberg et al., 2010, p. 367).

2.6. CSR Communication in the Digital Space

CSR communication is typically constructed through a variety of channels (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475). Online technology has become a vital component of CSR communication because it enables real-time interaction between organizations and their audiences. As digital networks have expanded recently, academic interest has grown in how an organization's online presence influences two-way communication (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320; Du et al., 2010, p. 13). Given the importance of online channels in CSR communication, this paper analyses the online communication strategies of music festivals, focusing on their official websites.

Each digital channel, as websites or social media, possesses distinct features and modes of use. Whether websites serve as key content delivery systems, social media transforms consumers from passive observers into active participants, by allowing to reach wider audiences and foster ongoing relationships (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475; Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). In this research, only music festival websites are examined, due to their greater availability and the advantage of analysing communication channels with similar structures and features. These websites often include dedicated sections for corporate sustainability communication, where organizations present their initiatives related to environmental sustainability, diversity, and inclusion (Du et al., 2010, p.14).

Therefore, each communication channel tends to align with a specific type of CSR messaging and framing. For instance, music festivals may utilize websites to disseminate information regarding social issues and to highlight the contributions of music festivals toward environmental protection and sustainability (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 474). However, to

ensure credibility and build a reputation of trust, it is essential that messaging across all digital channels remains consistent and effective (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475). This discussion highlights the importance of aligning sustainability communication with concrete actions to avoid the risk of corporate greenwashing (Du et al., 2010, p. 12; Dodds et al., 2020, p. 474). Greenwashing is defined as "the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (Mair & Laing, 2012, p. 686).

2.7. Online Social Presence and Tone of Voice

Communication channels vary in the degree of social presence they offer, depending on how many physical or interpersonal cues they provide (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). The more a channel conveys a sense of human presence, the more effectively it can engage its audience. Social presence is a term used to discuss presence in online communication environment (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). In this context, social presence refers to the extent to which music festival are perceived as a "real person" in digital communication. Social presence is recognized as an important factor in building strong relationships between organizations and their audiences. Higher levels of it can foster trust, enhance satisfaction with the communication experience, and even influence behaviours as online purchasing (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). Therefore, creating a sense of social presence in CSR communication may enhance the impact and persuasiveness of messages. While online communication lacks face-to-face contact, techniques like using first-person voice or adding a personal touch can make messages feel more human. This personalization can lead to a stronger sense of connection and engagement (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321).

In the digital environment, organizations use various tones of voice to enhance the communication experience (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). Hence, researchers have found that using a conversational human voice in communication, especially online, can enhance message effectiveness, generate positive audience responses, and strengthen organization-public relationships by fostering trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321). According to Kelleher (2009, p. 177), a conversational human voice indicates "an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics". Within this research context, music festivals may use this tone of voice through a natural and personable writing style, frequently employing first-person narration. Conversely, the "organizational tone of voice" is used when the organization

refs to itself as an institution, avoiding the personal pronouns and preferring to cite its name (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 321).

2.8. Message Framing: Gain or Loss

Another pivotal feature commonly used in communication strategy is message framing, which involves shaping how recipients interpret the consequences of certain behaviours (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322). Since the way a message is framed can significantly influence how people understand and assess an issue, this strategy has become a key theoretical tool across various domains, including public relations, advertising, and health communication, for enhancing message impact. Based on prospect theory of Kahneman and Tversky (1979), two types of message framings are introduced: gain- and loss-framed (as cited in Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322). Specifically, gain-framed messages highlight the advantages of engaging in certain behaviours, whereas loss-framed messages focus on the drawbacks of not taking action (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322). In this study, a gain-framed message might promote the benefits of initiatives undertaken by music festivals, while a loss-framed message would underscore the harmful outcomes of not acting.

Gain-framed messages have been shown to be particularly effective in promoting high-risk behaviours, generally elicit greater audience engagement, and are more influential in fostering positive attitudes toward a company (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322; Ojha, 2023, p. 32). Within the context of music festivals, Oh & Ki's (2019, p. 327) findings confirmed that gain-framed CSR messages are more effective than loss-framed ones in shaping behavioural intentions and inspire positive word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. Given this, the consistent use of gain-framed messages by music festivals may reflect an intentional effort to foster positive attitudes among visitors toward their sustainability initiatives, emphasizing achievements already made rather than focusing on areas still requiring action.

2.9. Message Focus: Issue or Initiatives

An important field of research explores how specific message elements enhance the effectiveness of CSR communication (Du et al., 2010; Gilley et al., 2000; Kolk, 2004 as cited in Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320). To guide the analysis of CSR message content, this study draws on the framework developed by Du et al. (2010). According to their study, a company's CSR message can either emphasize the social issue itself or the company's direct involvement in addressing that issue (Du et al., 2010, p. 10). Recent studies suggest that

when CSR messages focus on the issue itself, consumers may view them with scepticism, suspecting hidden motives, especially if the cause seems unrelated to the company's core business. To enhance credibility, companies are therefore advised to support social issues and demonstrate a lack of self-serving interests by selecting causes unrelated to their core business (Du et al., 2010, p. 10). However, many CSR campaigns tend to emphasize the company's role and initiatives undertaken for various social causes. Within this latter approach, companies communicate their initiatives commitment, impact, motives, and the degree of alignment between the cause and their core business, commonly referred to as CSR fit (Du et al., 2010, p. 10)

The first theme analysed is the CSR commitment. It is often used by companies to demonstrate their involvement in a social cause through donations, funding, marketing expertise, research and development, or the use of human capital. Commitment can be reflected in the amount of input provided by the company, the duration of its involvement, and the consistency of its contributions (Du et al., 2010, p. 11). Conversely, when companies emphasize the outcomes of their initiatives, this is referred to as CSR impact. The framing here refers to the societal impact or the benefits generated by the company. It has been found that these two message contents used are an effective communication strategy, as it avoids appearing self-promotional and provides factual credibility (Du et al., 2010, pp. 11-12). CSR commitment and impact also act as cues to assess the company's motives. Research shows that long-term involvement suggests genuine concern for societal welfare, while short-term efforts may appear profit-driven (Sen et al., 2009; Webb & Mohr, 1998 as cited in Du et al., 2010, pp. 11-12). The other two message elements are CSR motives and CSR fit. The former refers to when companies communicate the business reasons behind their initiatives to promote transparency and reduce consumer scepticism. The latter refers to the alignment between the social issue and the company's core business, such as similarities in product characteristics, alignment with target audiences, or the brand's reputation built through prior engagement in related social issues (Du et al., 2010, p. 12). In the context of music festivals, examples of CSR fit often involve addressing sustainability concerns linked to the large scale of these events, their temporary use of land, and the considerable waste they generate. Common CSR initiatives in this sector also include promoting inclusivity, combating discrimination, and ensuring attendee safety. When there is a low CSR fit, meaning the social issue has little logical connection to the company's core business, it tends to prompt more critical thinking, which can diminish stakeholders' positive responses to the company's CSR efforts (Du et al., 2010, p. 12).

In Du et al.'s (2010, p. 11) framework, they also identify key stakeholder characteristics, such as opinion leaders and consumers, and company traits like reputation, sector, and strategy as factors influencing CSR messaging, along with internal and external communication outcomes. However, this research considers only the 'message content' dimension of Du et al.'s (2010) framework, as it is the most relevant for addressing the research question related to CSR communication. Despite the strength of this framework, its application to the context of music festivals remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by applying it to the online corporate sustainability communication of Dutch music festivals.

Figure 1

A framework of CSR communication (Du et al., 2010, p.11)
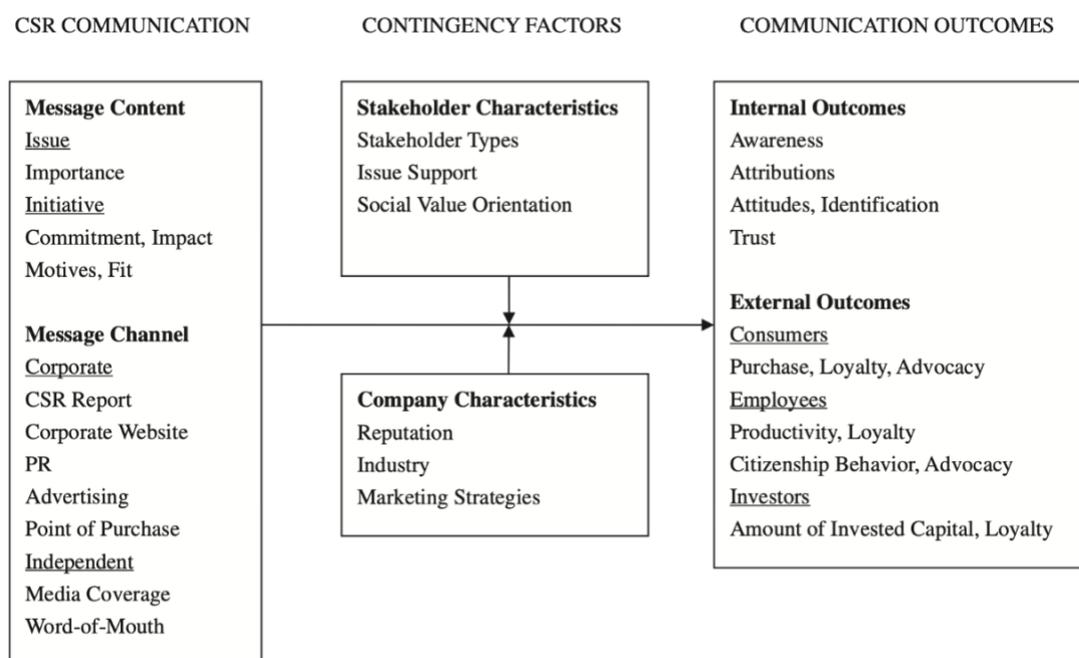
2.10. Framing the Actions behind CSR Communication

In addition to examining the content of CSR communication, as previously discussed, scholars have also focused on broader perspectives regarding the role of communication. Specifically, academics explored how communication supports the strategic and transformative role of CSR within markets and societies where business operate (Elving et al., 2015, 119). The communicative action in relation to CSR is explained through

Habermas' (1984) theory, which offers a valuable framework for understanding these communicative dynamics (as cited in Elving et al, 2015, p. 120). Habermas distinguishes between strategic, instrumental, and communicative action. The two concepts represent opposite ends of an action spectrum and reflect distinct approaches to achieving outcomes. Each is grounded in different assumptions and provides a unique lens for understanding CSR communication (Elving et al., 2015, p. 120).

Strategic action is goal-driven and seeks to influence others to achieve specific outcomes. CSR messaging here becomes a branding mechanism rather than a form of ethical engagement. Habermas warns that strategic language instrumentalises the audience, prioritising corporate interests over meaningful interaction (Habermas, 1984, as cited in Elving et al., 2015, pp. 119-120). In the context of this research, this suggests that music festivals use CSR communication as a means to persuade others of their "good actions" or to present themselves as responsible and sustainable organizations, using language primarily for self-presentation rather than genuine dialogue (Elving et al., 2015, p. 120). Thus, this communication can serve both to persuade and to inform others about their sustainability efforts. This communicative action results in outcomes comparable to initiative commitment or impact, as outlined in Du et al.'s (2010, p. 11) model, with strategic language framing the music festival's efforts to emphasize commitment and influence on key issues.

In contrast, communicative action prioritises mutual understanding and cooperation. Organisations using this approach engage stakeholders in discussions about sustainability, fostering shared responsibility instead of imposing their own agenda. Rather than using CSR as a marketing strategy, they aim for collaborative problem-solving on social and environmental issues (Elving et al., 2015, p. 120). Within this action, music festivals may involve audience in the communication, using calls to action or efforts to raise awareness and build a sense of community around the issue, with the aim of influencing behaviours. According to Du et al. (2010), the content of such messages can be associated with initiative motives, where music festivals engage visitors in a shared responsibility for sustainability by communicating the reasons behind their commitment.

2.11. Evolving Habermas' Theory

Drawing on Habermas' concepts of strategic and communicative action, Elving et al. (2015) expanded the framework by identifying four ways in which CSR communication and discourse are framed. According to Habermas's approach, Elving et al. (2015, p. 123) divide CSR communication in two major framing, strategic and communicative actions. Within this

initial division, they further create four subcategories, where CSR communication manifests in various forms and serves different purposes. Thus, strategic action encompasses "informative" and "persuasive CSR communication". Whereas communicative action includes "aspirational" and "participatory CSR communication" (Elving et al., 2015, p. 124).

Within strategic action, 'informative CSR communication' refers to companies transparently informing stakeholders by providing credible sources and data about their CSR initiatives. This category, in line with the framework by Du et al. (2010), includes communication that addresses both issue-related and company-related information. The second subcategory within this action is 'persuasive CSR communication'. According to some sociolinguists, persuasion, unlike argumentation, focuses on influencing others, often through emotional appeals (Hidey & McKeown, 2018, p. 5173). This form of communication is frequently linked to more interactive formats, such as social media. Nonetheless, even on two-way communication channels, persuasive messaging often serves individual interests (Elving et al., 2015, pp. 124-125). The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) by Friestad and Wright (1994) suggests that a key element of persuasion is "CSR knowledge", which refers to an individual's understanding of how persuasive strategies work. Consumers draw on this persuasion knowledge to interpret the motives behind CSR-related crisis responses and to assess or regulate their reactions according (as cited in Ham & Kim, 2019, p. 356). Adapting this model to the current context, an essential aspect of persuasion lies in the CSR motives behind corporate actions, a concept that aligns with Du et al.'s (2010) notion of communicating the motives behind CSR initiatives. To justify the measures taken, music festivals may aim either to influence visitor behaviour or to generate word-of-mouth (WOM). In fact, Ham and Kim (2019, p. 363) found a significant interaction between perceived CSR motives and both word-of-mouth intention and purchase intention. Although no direct application of this approach has yet been identified in CSR communication within music festivals, this paper highlights such an application in a festival that conveys its CSR motives and employs imagery or statements to persuade its audience.

Conversely, within communicative action, 'aspirational CSR communication' is described by Christensen et al. (2013, p. 373) as having a performative and future-oriented role. It involves open-ended dialogue about values, goals, and visions, often aiming to influence social norms and inspire a sense of community. Although such communication may not yet be fully realized in practice, it holds the potential to shape the future direction of CSR (Elving et al., 2015, p. 124). The application of this approach to music festivals can be seen in future-oriented communication, which may focus either on data and concrete

upcoming initiatives or on broader visions, such as building a community around sustainability.

The second subcategory of communicative action is 'participatory CSR communication', which seeks to actively engage stakeholders by encouraging exemplary behaviour through explicit calls to action, and the use of a real two-way form of communication. According to Park and Kim (2022, p. 360), recent CSR literature has moved beyond merely disclosing and promoting CSR information, shifting toward the co-creation of social value through active engagement with the public in corporate CSR efforts. Participatory CSR communication plays a key role in this process, as involving consumers not only reinforces their sense of self-efficacy and social value, but also motivates them to engage more actively in initiatives they feel capable of influencing (Park & Kim, 2022, p. 360). This category aligns with the aim of CSR communication outlined by Harms et al. (2023, p. 5), according to whom CSR can shape attendees' environmental attitudes and behaviours, promoting a sense of shared responsibility. In this research, a participatory approach to CSR communication in music festivals is understood as a dialogic model that emphasizes incorporating visitors input and feedback into corporate decision-making.

To conclude, the illustrated framework has not previously been applied to the CSR communication of music festivals. Therefore, this study applies a general theory to the communication practices of music festivals, in order to assess whether the model holds or requires adaptation in this specific setting.

Figure 2

Types of CSR communication (Elving et al., 2015, p. 125)
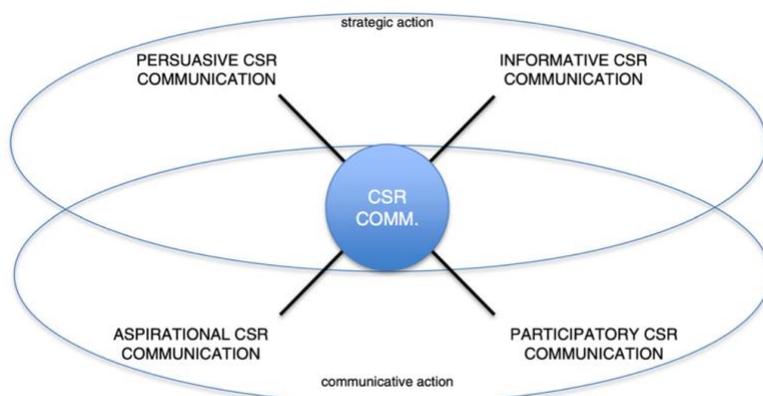
3. Methodology

This research aims to investigate how CSR communication about sustainability is framed on the official websites of Dutch music festivals. The qualitative nature of this study stems from the way the research question is formulated. In fact, this approach seeks to understand the underlying reasons and processes, the 'how' and 'why', behind phenomena and context (Cleland, 2017, p. 61). Specifically, to address the research question, a qualitative content analysis is adopted. This approach has been applied to the official websites' pages of Dutch music festivals, to analyse their CSR-related contents about sustainability.

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative research is commonly described as the in-depth and holistic exploration of phenomena, using rich narrative data and a flexible research design (Moser & Korstjens, 2017, p. 271). In this research, it was adopted because it offers deep insights and a thorough understanding of complex, real-world issues (Moser & Korstjens, 2017, p. 271). This approach enabled a focus on the analysis of written text from the website's pages of Dutch music festivals, providing a means to investigate the processes behind a specific context, such as corporate sustainability communication.

The choice of focusing on online channels stems from the current need for businesses to maintain a strong digital presence in order to communicate effectively with their audiences. Company websites and social media platforms have become essential tools for conveying corporate messages, including those related to sustainability initiatives (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475). Nevertheless, given their diverse features and modes of use, this research focuses only on websites of Dutch music festivals (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320). To explore how CSR messages are framed, official websites pages are analysed in this study to ensure a sufficiently consistent dataset.

Qualitative content analysis is employed to systematically explore CSR communication. It has been chosen for being a method used to systematically interpret and describe both the explicit and implicit content embedded in data (Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012 as cited in Schreier, 2014, p. 3). The process involves assigning segments of the material to specific categories within a coding frame, which serves as the core of the method by capturing all relevant aspects for description and subjective interpretation (Schreier, 2014, p. 3). While categories are typically based on the explicit information, deeper

meanings and interpretations arise from the implicit content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 105). This methodology involves an in-depth examination of language to condense large volumes of text into manageable categories that convey similar meanings (Schreier, 2014, p. 3; Weber 1990, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), making it particularly well suited to the aims of this study. It enabled the systematic identification of categories within the extensive dataset of CSR-related content by analysing the underlying aims of music festivals' communication. In this analysis, all sustainability-related content was considered relevant, from the topics addressed to the framing of messages, and the tone of voice.

3.2. Sampling

The sample is represented by nineteen music festivals settled in the Netherlands. The festivals were identified through the use of a public domain search engines, Google. The choice to focus on music festivals stems from their role as prominent cultural events across Europe that increasingly communicate sustainability through their websites. As large-scale events, notably, they carry significant environmental and social impacts (Simon, 2022, p. 250; Montiel, 2008, pp. 245–260). Within this context, the Netherlands was selected as the research focus due to its strong active role in promoting sustainability, notably through the launch of the Green Deal Circular Festivals (GDCF) in 2019 (Circular Festivals, n.d., para. 1). Initiated and supported by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, the GDCF represents a partnership between the government and a coalition of pioneering European music festivals (Circular Festivals, n.d., para. 1).

The selection of music festivals for this research was guided by four purposive criteria, aimed at capturing a representative segment of Dutch music festivals that communicate their CSR through online channels. Firstly, all festivals included are situated within the Netherlands. Secondly, festivals are included only if music is clearly presented as a central component of the event. This is evidenced on the homepage of their official websites, through prominent information about the musical line-up and programme, where music is listed as the primary category. For instance, Bacchus Festival, an Amsterdam-based event, although it has a section on its website dedicated to music, presents it as the third category, after "wijn", wine, and "eten", food (see Appendix C, Image C1). Therefore, it is not included in the sample. The sample encompasses all musical genres, including electronic music festivals such as ADE, jazz festivals like North Sea Jazz, as well as indie, experimental, pop, and rock festivals such as PinkPop. Thirdly, festivals of varying scale are incorporated, ranging from large-scale international events such as DGTL to smaller, niche

festivals exemplified by Pride Amsterdam. Finally, inclusion is contingent upon the availability of publicly accessible CSR-related content on the festivals' websites. This criterion was satisfied if the music festivals provided a dedicated 'sustainability' section on their official websites or published relevant articles and reports about corporate sustainability initiatives, typically found within their 'news' or 'updates' sections. These criteria ensured sufficient and reliable data sources for the analysis of CSR communication practices.

The sampling strategy employed is purposive criterion sampling, whereby all selected music festivals meet the aforementioned criteria to ensure their direct relevance to the research question. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting units based on specific characteristics they possess (Etikan et al., 2014, p. 2). As a rule, criterion sampling involves selecting cases based on specific conditions defined by the researcher (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024, p. 97). In this study, the four criteria are specifically tailored to music festivals, and the sample consists of those that meet these predefined conditions, ensuring that the data collected are relevant and meaningful. Nineteen Dutch music festivals were identified as having a dedicated 'sustainability' page on their websites or featuring CSR-related content in their news sections. Each festival's website was systematically examined, starting with the homepage, followed by the 'sustainability' and 'news' pages. To ensure no relevant information was missed, Google's search functions were also used to look for key terms such as 'policy', 'social responsibility', and 'sustainability' within the website. When analysing articles in the 'News and Updates' section of music festival websites such as Amsterdam Dance Event, the content reviewed ranged from September 2023 to the end of April 2025. This time frame is selected to include recent content while also expanding the dataset, which would have otherwise been too limited.

3.3. Data Collection

The sample is constituted by nineteen music festivals in the Netherlands, namely ADE, Awakenings, Dekmantel, DGTL, Intends, Into The Great Wide Open, Lowlands, Motel Mozaique, Mysteryland, Mystic Garden, North Sea Jazz, Oerol Festival, PinkPop, Pride Amsterdam, Rewire, Smeerboel, Soenda, Verknipt, and Wonderfeel (see Appendix A, Table A1 for the sample). The dataset consists of forty-one units. These are textual materials sourced from the official websites of music festivals, primarily from dedicated 'sustainability' pages. For the DGTL music festivals, the analysed units are drawn from the 'sustainability' section embedded in the homepage under the label our Story.' Similarly, in

the case of the ADE music festival, the units are taken from the 'news & updates' section within the label "ADE Green", the conference focused on sustainability and social change within the festival. Among the collected data units, one does not originate from a music festival webpage. Instead, it is sourced from MOJO Concerts, the Netherlands' largest live music promoter (MOJO Concerts, n.d.). This source was included due to its direct connection to a sampled festival. The sustainability policy is, in fact, linked from the North Sea Jazz Festival's official website. The length of all analysed text units ranges between 300 and 2,000 words. The texts coming from the website's pages were transcribed into a Word document, sometimes paired with graphic elements when needed to understand the text, and then were analysed through Word's 'Comment' function. The data collection process took place during the month of March 2025.

3.4. Operationalization

The aim of the study is to explore how corporate sustainability communication about sustainability is framed on websites within the context of Dutch music festivals. The analysis primarily involves examining textual data units. To guide the categorization of this material, the study draws on the framework developed by Elving et al. (2015). Hence, the units are organized into four main themes.

The first one is 'Informative CSR Communication'. This theme encompasses data in which music festivals inform their audience using evidence-based information about their initiatives or provide knowledge to help contextualize sustainability issues. It is focused on reporting data, and in line with the framework by Du et al. (2010), addresses both issue-related and company-related information. For instance, this category includes data units where music festivals explicitly report actions taken, such as naming partner organizations, donation details, or waste reduction figures, but also explaining how much emissions generates a car instead of a train.

The second is 'Persuasive CSR Communication'. Codes falling into this category express music festivals aim to persuade the audience communicating without any evidence or data. The communication is based on values, rather than evidence, which are addressed by music festivals to convey their motives behind corporate actions undertaken. In fact, aligning this category with Du et al. (2010) CSR content communication theory, it fits within organizations expressing their initiatives CSR motives. A key indicator is the use of persuasive language, such as appeals to shared values or emotionally charged wording,

aimed at convincing the audience of the importance of sustainability to the music festivals (Hidey & McKeown, 2018, p. 5173).

The third category is 'Aspirational CSR Communication'. This includes data units in which music festivals express an intention of future change or aim to foster a sense of community. It involves two main themes: first, communication about future goals and visions the festivals intend to achieve; and second, efforts to inspire a sense of collective belonging or community. This category can be measured by the presence of future tenses, of a feeling of hope conveyed and through key words as "change", "vision", and "future".

Finaly, the fourth category based on Elving et al. (2015) framework is 'Participatory CSR Communication'. It is measured by units in which music festivals communicate directly with their audience, often marked by the use of the second-person singular to establish a direct and personal tone. The participatory category is characterized by units that encourage active audience involvement and offer stakeholders opportunities to engage in sustainability discussions. This may be manifested through call to actions, donation request, behavioural tip, guideline, request of feedback from visitors.

The analysis of website texts of Dutch music festivals applies two additional theoretical perspectives, tone of voice and message framing outlined by Oh and Ki (2019, p. 321), to each of the four categories previously established. To assess tone of voice, the presence of a 'conversational human voice' is examined, in contrast to an 'organizational tone of voice'. The former gives readers the impression of engaging with a real person, often marked by the use of first-person language or personal touches that humanize the message. In contrast, the 'organizational tone of voice' is measured by formal language and references to the festival as an institution rather than a group of individuals (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322).

According to Oh and Ki (2019), message framing can be classified as either gain-framed or loss-framed. Gain-framed messages highlight the positive outcomes or benefits resulting from the implementation of actions or initiatives. In this study, this framing is measured by identifying data units where music festivals emphasized the advantages of their sustainability efforts. Conversely, loss-framed messages focus on the negative consequences that could have occurred had the initiative not been undertaken, drawing attention to potential harm or missed opportunities.

3.5. Data Analysis

This section outlines the data analysis process, which followed the data collection. The steps undertaken are proposed by Schreier (2014). This approach is chosen for its

capacity to systematically reduce the data using a code framing, while also allowing for a personal interpretation of underlying meanings (Schreier, 2014, pp. 3-4). The first essential step is to develop a code framing to use for the analysis (Schreier, 2014, p. 9). The flexibility of this method allowed to combine data-driven and concept-driven categories within one coding frame (Schreier, 2014, p. 4). This study used an overall inductive approach to examine CSR communication content; nevertheless, following Schreier's (2014, pp. 11–12) guidance on developing a codebook within this methodology, the coding frame in this study originates from a combined approach. Notably, the four main categories were concept-driven, based on Elving et al.'s (2015) framework on CSR communication, while the eight subcategories emerged inductively from the data. The lack of a comprehensive predefined codebook about CSR online communication applied to music festivals, justified the use of this method, which allowed the combination of prior knowledge on CSR communication studies and a deep analysis of the materials collected.

The first version of the coding frame created was guided by Elving et al. (2015) framework of CSR communication into four main categories. Hence, the four major categories created to code the dataset were labelled similarly to the framework: 'informative', 'persuasive', 'aspirational', and 'participatory CSR communication'.

Subsequently, the coding frame was applied at the dataset to guide the examination of the data. Analytical questions guided the creation of the subcategories, rooted in the major categories of the preestablished coding frame. As a result, eight subcategories emerged inductively by coding the material. To provide a clearer understanding, the main category labelled 'informative CSR communication' prompted the question, "What kind of evidence-based information are the music festivals sharing with their audience?". This question generated two subcategories: 'evidence-based narrative' and 'sustainability knowledge'. The former subcategory includes cases where festivals provide specific information about their initiatives, while the latter refers to data units that conveys general knowledge about sustainability issues. This iterative process of question development and coding continued until saturation was reached, when no new subcategories emerged and all concepts relevant to the research question had been thoroughly addressed (Schreier, 2014, p. 12).

The entire process was conducted in a Word document, with data units coded using the 'Comment' function. An initial, draft codebook was developed during the early stages of analysis, containing major categories and subcategories. This draft was continuously refined throughout the coding process. During this phase, the major categories were coded with slight variations, with only 'informative CSR communication' remaining unchanged.

Once the coding was complete, a version of the codebook was produced, in which each category and subcategory was clearly defined. A trial coding was adopted to guarantee reliability, according to the coding frame is applied in two rounds, replicating the procedure intended for the full analysis (Schreier, 2014, pp. 16-17). This was carried out, conducting the process a second time, with a 10-day interval.

Finally, the completed codebook was developed, detailing each category and subcategory that emerged during coding, along with their names, descriptions, and illustrative examples drawn from the dataset (see Appendix B, Table B1 for the codebook) (Schreier, 2014, pp. 14-15).

3.6. Research Credibility

Measures were adopted to guarantee the validity and reliability of this study. The content analysis method employed requires a double coding examination of the dataset, to guarantee reliability of the analysis. The coding trial has been adopted, with 10 days between the first and second coding. However, Schreier (2014, p. 17) suggests having a second reader to mitigate bias prior assumptions during coding phase, and this was not accessible, due to limited time and any other student available to do that. Moreover, to ensure reliability, the coding frames satisfy the criteria of unidimensionality, as each category and subcategory focuses on a single aspect. They also meet the requirement of mutual exclusivity, with subcategories clearly separated within each main category. Finally, they are exhaustive, covering all relevant elements of the material, including the use of residual categories when necessary (Schreier, 2014, p. 10).

This research fulfils the criteria of Tracy's (2010, p. 839) framework for qualitative quality, such as rigour and depth. Significant time, theoretical constructs, and thoroughness were applied to ensure a comprehensive examination of CSR communication (Tracy, 2010, p. 835). The contextual knowledge provided around CSR policy is given to let understand both the regulatory obligations Dutch music festivals must follow regarding environmental protection and the voluntary efforts they undertake. Furthermore, more than three diverse theoretical frameworks are referenced, applying a triangulation of the concept to enhance the credibility and depth of the analysis (Tracy, 2010, p. 843).

4. Results

To analyse the way Dutch music festivals communicate their CSR through their online official channels, forty-one websites section dedicated to 'sustainability' of Dutch music festivals have been examined. Four major categories, drawn on Elving et al. (2015) framework about CSR communication, were identified during the first phase of data analysis. Namely, 'informative', 'value-driven', 'future-oriented' and 'audience-involvement CSR Communication'. Within these categories, eight subcategories emerged inductively from the data during the data analysis, such as 'evidence-based narrative', or 'aspirational self-description'. Additionally, theoretical concepts such as message framing and tone of voice were examined within the dataset and used to help define and describe the identified subcategories. This section illustrates each category and subcategory emerged from the analysis and provides examples to support the findings and develop a comprehensive interpretation.

4.1. Build Transparency and Share Knowledge

The first category identified is coded as 'Informative CSR Communication', as it captures data units that primarily aims to provide readers with data and knowledge related to sustainability. This category is the most substantial one found in the dataset, and it includes two subcategories. It encompasses units that focuses solely on presenting evidence about music festivals' sustainability initiatives or providing general information related to sustainability.

Pieces of evidence typically consist of specific statements in which festivals describe the steps they have taken to become more sustainable or provide data on aspects, such as energy consumption or waste management. Hence, all the topics addressed in this category are related to environmental sustainability, rather than social dimensions. For example, within this category, is found the concept of 'circular event' which referrers to the Green Deal Circular Festivals, mentioned in the introduction of this research. It is described from Into The Great Wide Open as "no waste incineration or dumping; reuse, recycle, or compost all materials. Purchased products must be second-hand, refurbished, biobased, or made from recycled materials." (Text 25). Three festivals in the dataset, all partners of the GDCF, mention it: DGTL (Text 12 & 17), Lowlands (Text 25), and Into the Great Wide Open (Text 23).

4.1.1. Evidence-Based Narrative

Across the dataset, every music festival website includes one or more sections about its efforts to be sustainable, often mentioning specific initiatives. Hence, this subtheme, namely 'Evidence-Based Narrative', holds significant weight within the codebook, as it appears in nearly all instances of online communication by music festivals. These narrative centres on the organization's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Common topics, which will be seen through examples during the paragraph, include waste management, energy consumption, CO_2 emissions, transportation use, charitable donations, support for local communities or environment, policies, developed frameworks, and offering vegan food at the festival. A recurring theme in the data is the presentation of sustainability approaches by music festivals. For instance, Smeerboel, Lowlands, and Prime Amsterdam reference the "RRR principle: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" as a model to limit the use of new materials (Text 38).

Another key topic that emerged is related to donations, often connected to environmental sustainability. In this subcategory, festivals address the topic by presenting the history of their donation campaigns, naming the third-party organizations involved, outlining the supported programs, and providing further details. A notable example is offered by Soenda Festival:

> In 2019, the donations to the Local Legacy program were used for the construction of a 500m2 bee oasis. This bee oasis was planted in the Ruigenhoekse polder where the Soenda festival takes place every year. This was done with the help of more than 35 volunteers, who also received a workshop on the importance of preserving bees for the future. For this project, we collaborated with, among others, the Recreation Board Midden Nederland and the Stichting Bijenoase. A beautiful educational board about the status of the bees has also been placed at the entrance to the Ruigenhoekse Polder (Text 39, Soenda music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

In this subcategory, music festivals frequently use numerical data and percentages to demonstrate their efforts and commitment to environmental sustainability. This strategy, often used to illustrate reductions in energy or water consumption, is a recurring pattern. For example, the festival Rewire states on its website:

> In 2016, we organized the first major festival in the Netherlands with a completely climate-neutral energy supply through the use of 100% renewable biofuel, and we didn't stop there. We achieved a reduction of 47% of our energy consumption within the first year of the smart power plan that we set up in collaboration with ZAP concepts. (Text 11, Dekmantel music festival, 'Sustainability' section).

The tone of voice used is often the 'conversational human voice,' as described by Oh & Ki (2019, p. 322). In fact, music festivals often adopt first-person language to present themselves as if they were real people. The tone of voice is neutral, not communicating either urgency or fear, while occasionally conveying a sense of hope. A hopeful and uplifting narrative in climate communication serve as a powerful motivator, especially when an organization focuses on tangible solutions (Ross, 2024, p. 25). Notably, the sense of hope is conveyed through positive message framing, referred as gain-framed message (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322). Using this approach, music festivals highlight the benefits of the action made related to sustainability issues. For instance, Lowlands adopts a comparative approach to instil hope and frame its energy consumption positively, emphasizing the amount of diesel saved compared to the 2023 edition of the festival, rather than focusing on how still needs to be reduced.

> Approximately 325,000 kWh of electricity is used per Lowlands edition. That is a lot, but less than a city with a comparable number of inhabitants, such as Assen or Hoorn, uses in three days. This year, the connection to the fixed power grid has been expanded. As a result, approximately 100,000 litres of diesel are still needed, but that is a spectacular 25% less diesel than in 2023! This reduces emissions by 142 tonnes of CO_2. (Text 25, Lowlands music festival, 'Green and Clean' Website translated in English).

Gain-framed messages, similarly to the hopeful narrative shown before, have proven effective in promoting behavioural change, but also in shaping positive attitudes toward organizations (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322; Ojha, 2023, p. 32). They are more successful than loss-framed messages in fostering behavioural intentions and positive word-of-mouth (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 327). In this dataset, the frequent use of gain-framed messages appears to strategically introduce sustainability initiatives. This communicative move not only highlights environmentally friendly actions but also demonstrates, in concrete and verifiable terms, how the music festival's commitments is being implemented. Another example is

shown by Awakenings Festival which emphasizes the number of emissions saved by its decision to make the event entirely vegetarian:

> So by eating completely vegetarian during Awakenings Summer Festival for 3 days, together we save approximately 188 kilotonnes of CO_2 emission, which you can compare to 47.000 Big Macs. (Text 9, Awakenings music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

This theme aligns with the 'informative CSR communication' of Elving et al.'s (2015, pp. 119-120), within 'strategic action'. The use of gain-framed messages, combined with a hopeful 'conversational human voice', makes the communication in this section goal-driven, aiming to influence visitors' perception of the festival commitment to sustainability. In doing so, music festivals follow the interest-driven Habermas' perspective (1984), described as a key feature of 'strategic action' of CSR communication (as cited in Elving et al., 2015, pp. 119-120). Therefore, by presenting detailed communication about their initiatives, music festivals pursue their interest in building credibility around their commitment to sustainability. For this reason, this subcategory also corresponds to Du et al.'s (2010) CSR message model 'initiatives commitment'. Namely, this subcategory includes units' data focus on the commitment of the initiatives undertaken by the music festivals. As shown in the examples, music festivals primarily highlight their own efforts toward sustainability, such as implemented policies, donations, and reductions in energy or water consumption. According to theory, they conveyed their engagement in social causes by emphasizing the extent of their contributions, the continuity of their efforts, and the consistency of their actions (Du et al., 2010, pp. 10-12). For instance, they often present their history of commitment by referencing specific years and data points, as demonstrated by the Soenda Festival's record of donations described earlier in this paragraph.

4.1.2. Sustainability Knowledge

Another substantial code that emerged from the analysis is the 'Sustainability Knowledge'. This subcategory includes the data that reports technical or scientific information about environmental issues. Therefore, its aim is to educate the audience, providing a useful background of the topics addressed in the text. The topics included are the quality of Dutch tap water, examples of marketing strategies to promote more vegetarian options, definitions of terms, such as 'circular festivals', information on global CO_2

emissions, details about emissions from food production, and information about the energy used by NS trains. Oerol Festival is given as an example of the latter topic mentioned:

> Did you know that in the Netherlands alone, more than a billion kilometres are travelled annually to (sports) events and festivals? And that as much as 60 to 85% of the CO_2 emissions from these events are caused by transportation? (Text 34, Oerol Festival, 'Sustainability' page, 'Transport' section).

Similar to the previously discussed subcategory, this one also features numerical data, often related to raw material consumption, as illustrated by the Oerol example. In contrast, the tone of voice is often organizational. As a result, music festivals avoid referencing themselves directly. Instead, they adopt formal language to address the audience from an institutional perspective (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322). In fact, the tone of voice is neutral, not conveying any feeling. The language often includes technical and scientific terms, as shown in the Amsterdam Dance Event example, which references to nitrogen and carbon emissions risks:

> If you have followed the Dutch news, you'll know that nitrogen emissions harm natural areas, more so than carbon emissions. Festivals close to a Natura-2000 area have a strict limit on nitrogen emissions, requiring them to switch to renewable energy completely in order to keep their permit. (Text 1, ADE music festival, 'News & Updates' section)

The subcategory combines both gain- and loss-framed messages; however, the overall tone leans toward gain-framed communication. This is because the emphasis is placed on the positive outcomes and benefits that result from being informed, rather than focusing on negative consequences. This messaging approach is often used in conjunction with the subcategory 'evidence-based narrative,' as it helps strengthen the credibility of the initiatives presented by music festivals. For instance, Lowlands provides data on CO_2 emissions caused by audience transport to highlight the environmental impact and to justify their efforts in promoting public transportation:

> Public transport: 43% of a festival's CO_2 emissions are caused by audience travel to and from the event. That's why Lowlands advises and encourages visitors to come by public transport. (Text 25, Lowlands music festival, 'Green and Clean' pag

In this subcategory, music festivals frequently use questions to introduce explanations about sustainability topics, as illustrated by the following example:

> What is 200,000 kg of CO_2 emissions? (Text 19, Intends music festival, 'Sustainability' page, 'Energie' section).

This subcategory, as the 'evidence-based narrative', aligns with the 'informative CSR communication' described by Elving et al. (2015, pp. 119-120). However, the use of a neutral tone, technical and formal language, and the 'organizational tone of voice' outlined by Oh and Ki (2019, p. 322) makes the communication in this subcategory less interest driven. Rather than aiming to directly influence perceptions of the festival's commitment, this approach focuses on informing the audience and enhancing their understanding of the sustainability context. Although this subcategory is sometimes paired with 'evidence-based narrative', highlighting the initiatives undertaken by music festivals, its overall function can be considered primarily informative. For this reason, it differs from the 'strategic action' perspective described by Habermas (1984).

Moreover, it corresponds to the concept of 'issue importance' of the proposed framework of Du et al. (2010). Specifically, this theme conveys content related primarily to environmental issues, not by emphasizing the music festivals' contributions directly, but by highlighting the issue itself, giving it importance through the explanation of its characteristics.

4.2. Persuasive Communication for Building Credibility

The second code identified is 'Value-Driven CSR Communication', which includes data units where music festivals rely on values and concepts, rather than concrete evidence, to strategically communicate with their audience. This subcategory primarily addresses topics related to environmental sustainability. However, some units also refer to social sustainability, such as mentions of gender gap and discrimination. Through the expression of values, such as awareness of sustainability and mission-driven statements, music festivals in this category communicate their intentions rather than actions. A key feature of this subcategory is the use of calls for trust, mission statements, and phrases that do not provide specific information to the reader. Notably, no numbers, data, or descriptions of concrete actions are included. The two subcategories will be discussed in the following sections.

4.2.1. Taking Care of Sustainability

The first value substantially portrayed by music festivals in the sample is awareness and responsibility for sustainability commitment. Accordingly, this code is named 'Awareness and Responsibility'. In this context, music festivals use statements that touch on diverse topics, such as green festivals, biodiversity protection, festivals' innovation and evolution, but also gender equality. Notably, in this subcategory, although the focus is mainly on environmental sustainability, social concerns also emerge, related to the gender gap and discrimination, inherently to the concept of sustainability model TBL, where the economic, social, and environmental dimensions are included in sustainability (Alhaddi, 2015, p. 6). An example is shown by Verknipt music festival:

> The event scene was and still is dominated by a lot of males. Since the very start of Verknipt, they aim to close the gender gap in the event industry by recruiting female freelancers in the event scene and representing more female artists on the line-up. (Text 40, Verknipt music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

Some keywords identified in the subtheme include "awareness", "to intend", and "to be aware of". All of them suggest a sense of taking responsibility toward the theme of sustainability. An example is illustrated by Intents Festival.

> We are well aware of our environmental impact and we intend to make our festivals as sustainable as possible. (Text 9, Awakenings music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

The tone of voice present is the 'conversational human voice', aiming to establish a closer connection with the reader through the use of "we" referring to the festival (Oh & Ki (2019, p. 321). The tone is often hopeful about the direction the festival will take in its future commitment to sustainability. Hence, gain-framed messages are here present, where music festivals convey positive sides of being sustainable as a planned event and contribute to the sustainability issues.

At times, a clear call for trust emerges from the music festivals toward the audience, asking them to trust the festival's commitment to sustainability, even if no supporting evidence is provided. A clear example is found in the Mystic Garden website text:

> Much more is happening behind the scenes. You might not notice what is going on, but it is sustainable! (Text 29, Mystic Garden music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

In relation to the literature, this subcategory aligns with Elving et al.'s (2015) concept of 'persuasive CSR communication' within the framework of 'strategic action', as it emphasizes the fundamental values that drive music festivals toward sustainability. The persuasive element is therefore evident. According to this theory, such communication is goal-oriented and intended to influence others to achieve specific outcomes, functioning more as a branding strategy than a form of ethical engagement (Elving et al., 2015, pp. 119–120). This subcategory also aligns with the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994) (as cited in Ham & Kim, 2019, p. 356). In fact, music festivals present the underlying motives behind their sustainability commitment, such as their awareness of the urgency of climate action. As such, it reflects the 'initiative motives' dimension described in Du et al.'s (2010) theory. By explaining the reasons that incentivize them to support sustainability, festivals in this subcategory aim to build trust and credibility with their audience, explicitly expressing a sense of responsibility and calling for trust on this issue.

4.2.2. Talk For the Future: Mission Statements

This subtheme observed in this category is 'Persuasive Future Talk', which encompasses all instances where music festivals explicitly communicate their commitment to becoming more sustainable in a rhetorical and symbolic manner. This approach reflects a forward-looking narrative in which festivals articulate ambitious visions such as becoming regenerative, fully circular, and socially responsible, marked by a desire to engage audiences in sustainable transformation, even when not yet supported by concrete actions. Therefore, this subtheme identifies cases in which the future of music festivals remains rooted in rhetoric, where transformation is presented as an idea rather than a practical commitment. Certain keywords frequently appeared in this context, such as "positive change", "mission", "society", and "inspire". Notably, this subcategory is often framed as mission statements, highlighting the importance of sustainability to the festival, as Dekmantel state:

> Taking these insights into account in initial decisions on the types of (decoration) materials, packaging options and the supply of disposables, will ultimately aid our mission of reducing waste. (Text 11, Dekmantel music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

Here, an intention is stated. However, no practical information is provided, such as evidence, data, or concrete initiatives. It is important to note the use of "our" in conjunction with

"mission", corroborating the findings of Malyuga's (2023, pp. 158-159) research on CSR communication applied to companies across diverse fields. Given that, a 'conversational human voice' is present, as the music festival presents itself as a real person in order to reduce the distance between the organization and the audience (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320).

The language used in this subcategory is typically simple and easy to understand, with no references to specific partners, frameworks, or detailed information. The tone is positive and enthusiastic, reflecting the proactive attitude of the music festival. This is supported by the frequent use of gain-framed messages, as described by Oh and Ki (2019), along with exclamation marks and keywords such as "improvements," which express optimism about the future.

> We are always open to improvements! (Text 39, Soenda music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

This code, as 'awareness and responsibility', aligns with the 'persuasive CSR communication outlined in the framework by Elving et al. (2015), as both employ a goal-driven narrative to express commitment to sustainability. This subcategory may also be linked to the 'aspirational CSR communication' within the same framework, given that the data units identified use a future-oriented communication. However, it has been classified under the persuasive approach, as the focus is primarily on commitment rather than future actions, linked with evidence. When compared with the framework of Du et al. (2010), this category emphasizes the motives and commitment behind the initiatives. This is because the data sometimes refer to the reasons festivals aim for higher sustainability, while at other times they highlight the intention to commit towards sustainability.

The main focus of this subcategory is the use of mission statements, because they are showing that sustainability causes are important for the festivals and they are included in their future missions. Hence, mission statements are framed as persuasive communication, because they do not show any concrete action or precise goal, while they are based on building trust towards the music festival image. In fact, falling within the 'strategic action' of Elving et al. (2015) framework, this subcategory has a strong aim of persuasion. According to the study of Ojha (2023, p. 32), the use of a positive tone, namely gain-framed message, in CSR communication helps shape a favourable view of corporate initiatives, emphasizing the role of strategic communication in establishing trust and credibility.

4.3. Shape the Future for the Festival and the Community

This major category, identified through the analysis, is named 'Future-Oriented CSR Communication', as its main feature is addressing topics with an eye toward the future. It primarily centres on aspirational narratives, encompassing all parts of the data units that refer to the future or aim to foster a sense of community. The latter aligns with the theory proposed by Elving et al. (2015, p. 124). This category includes themes focused on the change, such as the future impact of present actions, opportunities for future research, and the imagined creation of a community built around sustainability. The final theme emerges from the idea that future-oriented language, combined with tools such as imagination, is used to envision a collective future cantered on sustainability. The dominant themes within this category concern environmental protection and innovation. Other types of social causes are not addressed within this category. It is divided into two subcategories, which are described below.

4.3.1. Concrete Future Change Discourse

'Evidence-based aspirational narrative' is a code that reflects a piece of data that are featured by a forward-looking narrative. Here data presents concrete information, mentioning the partners music festival want to collaborate with, or the research field they want to invest in. The type of language used is not persuading the reader to enhance the brand image reputation, but giving information about research or projects planned for the future. An example is presented by Smeerboel festival, where they explicit state their projects of planting more trees in a specific area. However, the specification of the project could go further, and give ever more information.

> We are now also in discussions about planting a food forest in the same area. (Text 38, Smeerboel music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

The use of personal pronouns, as "we" or "our", is sometimes present in this code, but it is combined with a more explanatory tone and alignment with policy-oriented language. Overall, a 'conversational human voice' is provided within the subcategory, having as main focus the music festivals actions and future goals. The tone of voice is sometimes serious, to illustrate the steps that will follow for the change. An example is shown by ADE music festival illustrating its future-proof model.

Just like any other sector, the festival industry needs to anticipate the European targets, which are translated by all EU member states into national policies. It is not only a matter of complying with legislation and regulation, but also important to ensure festival organisations' future 'licence to operate'. The model aims to create a future-proof events industry, as events have proven to be a vital part of society, shaping culture throughout history. (Text 2, ADE music festival, 'News & Updates' section).

The framing used is positive, as music festivals emphasize the benefits of taking action for the future. The language conveys emotions of hope, for example, the aspiration to become a greener festival and contribute more significantly to environmental sustainability. A strong example is provided by Wonderfeel music festival, which presents a list of steps already taken toward the future goal of becoming more environmentally friendly.

To ensure that we keep up the momentum, we are having our sensible ambitions independently audited by the British organisation 'A Greener Festival'. Together we will map out where we stand and what we can improve. Steps we have already taken in recent editions include: (Text 41, Wonderfeel music festival, 'Sustainability' page translated in English).

This subcategory closely reflects the 'aspirational CSR communication' described by Elving et al. (2015), within 'communicative action'. Accordingly, it generates a concrete discourse on how music festivals can further support environmental protection through research, partnerships, and policy development in the pursuit of sustainability. In addition, following the framework by Du et al. (2010, p. 11), this subtheme is focused on conveying the 'commitment behind initiatives.' Indeed, the statements reported tend to answer the question of 'how' music festivals are planning to expand their research projects in the future.

4.3.2. Foster Community Responsibility

'Collective Responsibility' is a subcategory based on the sense of community around sustainability, at its forges this idea through aspirational future-oriented framing messages. This subtheme is occasionally marked by the use of imagery or visions created by the festival to make a stronger impact on the reader. Indeed, imagery is used in descriptive or figurative language to create unusualness, to appeal to the senses and help readers create

vivid mental pictures, enhancing their understanding and engagement with the text (Sharma Paudyal, 2023, pp. 116-117). This is the case with the ADE festival, as shown on its website.

> They are living labs, providing valuable insights into how sustainability measures affect the inhabitants of this mini-society. (Text 2, ADE music festival, 'News & Updates' section).

One of the major images conveyed is the idea of collectiveness towards sustainable initiatives. Here, music festivals emphases the importance of caring for the climate as a community rather than as individuals, giving an image of community. A clear example is shown by Soenda and Smeerboel music festival, which emphasise the need of acting together to make a change in the future:

> We would like to set a good example, provided this has an impact, and we hope that everyone wants to join in! Sustainability is a team effort! By communicating our vision and sustainability ambitions widely, we hope, together with fellow organizers and our visitors, to contribute to a sustainable and social world. (Text 38, Smeerboel music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

The audience plays a major role in the communication, as confirmed by the frequent use of the second-person singular; however, since responsibility is shared, the use of the 'conversational human voice' described by Oh & Ki (2019) is also often present. Indeed, the use of personal pronouns has been studied in research on CSR communication conducted by Malyuga (2023). This appears to be a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at minimizing the perceived distance between the corporation and its audience, thereby fostering a sense of collective identity and belonging (Malyuga, 2023, p. 166). Furthermore, the tone of voice is encouraging, consistently positive, and active. The frequent use of exclamation points also supports this, as shown by the following example:

> We can't do it alone! (Text 39, Smeerboel music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

This phrase is found four times in the entire dataset within Lowlands (Text 25), PinkPop (35), Smeerboel (Text 38), and Soenda website (Text 39).

> This subcategory, similarly to the previous discussed, corresponds to the 'aspirational CSR communication' described by Elving et al. (2015), as it is fundamentally future-oriented and aspires to foster a sense of community around the topic of sustainability. Hence, through the use of an engaging human tone of voice, enthusiastic and proactive

communication, and positive framing, this communication directly engages festival visitors to create a sense of community for the future. Moreover, in relation to Du et al.'s (2010) framework, the theme reflects the underlying 'motives behind the initiatives', namely, the belief in a collective identity, but also the recognition of the seriousness of sustainability. The outcome of these motives is to encourage active support and participation from the readers.

4.4. Involving the Audience in Sustainability Discourse

The code 'Audience-Involvement CSR Communication' was created to encompass all instances of communication focused on engaging the audience. In this theme, stakeholders are the central focus, with music festivals aiming to involve them in the discourse around environmental sustainability. In some cases, festivals provide instructions or tips to the audience; in others, they invite participation and collaboration. The topics addressed mostly concern environmental sustainability, such as practical guidelines for recycling systems or transportation options to reach the festivals. Overall, the goal is to involve the audience in efforts to reduce environmental impact during and after the festival. Additionally, a small portion of this category addresses social dimensions, such as providing codes of conduct for audience behaviour. Two subcategories are identified and discussed.

4.4.1. Guide the Audience

'Guidance and Instructions' subcategory encompasses the data that speak directly to the audience, focusing the communication on practical information that visitors need to know about sustainability initiatives. The dominant themes within this category concern environmental issues, such as cup recycle system, recycled materials or bottle of water, energy consumption, waste management. However, there was also a mention of a social topic, referred to by the festival as 'sustainable relationships' on the Soenda festival's website.

> When leaving, think of our neighbors. Don't shout, urinate in public or hang around. You wouldn't like that in front of your door either. By taking each other into account, you contribute to a sustainable relationship with the neighborhood. (Text 39, Soenda music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

This was the only case identified in this subtheme where the festival mentions the concept of sustainability not in relation to the environment, but in the context of respect of others in a public space and behavioural rules.

Regarding the type of language, the analysis revealed a common use of questions, similarly to 'sustainability knowledge' subcategory within informative CSR communication. This tool is used to capture the reader's attention, and to prepare them to the suggestion that will be given after. Hence, questions are often followed by lists or descriptions of steps for visitors, contributing to a clear and understandable communication style. Examples are presented by Awakening, Mysteryland, and Oerol festivals.

> How does it work? At the entrance, after scanning your ticket, you'll receive 1 FREE recycle token from us. With each drink you order, you hand in your recycle token or an empty cup, can or bottle. (Text 9, Awakenings music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

Although the messaging in this subcategory is framed positively, it rarely emphasizes the specific benefits the audience might gain by taking part in the initiatives. Hence, a gain-framed is outlined, but that could have been further deepen. The tone of voice is friendly, and often motivational. Hence, the 'conversational human voice' of Oh and Ki (2019) is also in this code present to support the involvement of the audience and mitigate the distance in communication. An example that illustrates this approach is shown here, as the festival uses the informal expression "Cheers!" to encourage visitors to drink the water offered at the bar, helping reduce plastic use.

> We have water bars on both the campsite and the festival grounds. You can find their locations on the floorplan. Our water is not only very tasty but this way we also save a lot of plastic. Cheers! (Text 27, Mysteryland music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

According to the theoretical framework outlined, this subcategory aligns with the concept of 'participatory CSR communication' described by Elving et al. (2015), in which music festivals engage in direct communication with the audience. In this subcategory, the use of second-person pronouns, friendly language, and gain-framed messages exemplifies a style aimed at offering tips and guidance to festival visitors. Unlike 'strategic action', this approach reflects 'communicative action'. As proposed by Habermas (1984), the intention is not driven by self-interest or the need to build a transparent image, but rather by a genuine,

open discourse with the audience, seeking to collectively achieve goals such as reducing consumption or enjoying the festival respectfully and collaboratively.

Moreover, following the model of Du et al. (2010), it is difficult to identify a single dominant type of unit conveyed in the data. However, this subcategory primarily reflects the motives behind the initiatives. By offering tips and practical guidance to the audience, music festivals implicitly communicate the reasons behind certain sustainability measures. For example, the implementation of a recycling system is not only a logistical choice but is presented as a means to actively involve the audience in reducing environmental impact. In this way, the communication emphasizes shared responsibility and engagement, revealing the underlying motive of fostering collaborative sustainability efforts.

4.4.2. Audience Activation

This subcategory, named 'Call to Action Narrative', includes all data in which music festivals involve audiences in sustainability-related initiatives. The calls to action are activated in various ways, such as through FAQs, prizes, or email invitations.

Some key phrases that emerged in the analysis include "Join us on the Road to Zero Waste!" used by PinkPop Festival (Text 35). Additionally, rhetorical questions such as "What can you do?" from PinkPop Festival (Text 35) and "Want to know more or have ideas of your own?" from Smeerboel Festival (Text 38) were also noted. The use of these questions and phrases aligns with the aim of this code: to involve readers and encourage them to become active participants in sustainability initiatives. A common technique within this code is the inclusion of an email address for further contact, allowing audiences to ask questions, provide feedback, or express interest in volunteering, as shown below:

> If you would like to become one of the GreenGuards of Intents Festival, send an
> email to greenguards@intentsfestival.nl (Text 20, Intends music festival,
> 'Sustainability' page, "Mobiliteit en Transport" and "Bewustwording" sections).

The language used in this subcategory is colloquial and friendly, with a tone of voice closely resembling that of the previously discussed subcategory. Informal language, a strong use of the second-person pronoun, and a 'conversational human voice' characterize this type of communication. Supporting this last feature, music festivals convey a sense of shared responsibility, encouraging the audience to collaborate with the organizers to promote sustainability and care for the spaces they occupy. This is exemplified in the following

instance, where Awakenings festival explicitly asks visitors to pay attention to their camping equipment before leaving the site, since the festival already does its best.

> We do our best to decrease our ecological footprint and protect our surroundings, so we kindly ask our visitors to take care of their used camping equipment after the party's over. (Text 10, Awakenings music festival, 'Camping' section).

Another instance is provided by PinkPop Festival, which emphasizes the importance of its visitors. The language communicates a strong sense of cooperation between the festival and the audience, calling on them to act sustainably. Overall, this subcategory presents a gain-framed messaging style, as it encourages the audience to act in order to generate positive outcomes for the environment.

> Water-saving showers: On the campsite, your shower water flows from water-saving showerheads. In short: You, as a visitor, are incredibly important! Thanks to your cooperation with our sustainable initiatives. (Text 35, PinkPop music festival, 'Sustainability' page).

According to the framework of Elving et al. (2015), this subcategory, like the one previously analysed, aligns with 'participatory CSR communication' within the broader category of 'communicative action'. What distinguishes this code is its stronger appeal to audience engagement, achieved through motivational language, rhetorical questions, and interactive features such as email links. Following Du et al.'s (2010) model, as with the previous subcategory, it is difficult to assign it exclusively to one component of the model, as it addresses multiple aspects. Notably, they show their commitment to sustainability by presenting initiatives that involve the audience and encourage their participation. Nonetheless, they also stress the importance of the issue by highlighting the need for active audience engagement.

4.5. Similarities and Differences from the Adopted Framework

The main framework applied to analyze the data was the CSR communication model of Elving et al. (2015), which is based on Habermas's broader theory of CSR communicative actions. Comparing the findings to the theory, the four categories outlined in the theory similarly emerged in the data. Although they were coded slightly differently, 'informative CSR communication' did not change the name, while persuasive communication was labeled as 'value-driven CSR Communication.' Similarly, within

communicative action, aspirational approach was referred to 'future-oriented CSR communication', and participatory to 'audience-involvement CSR communication'. Each major category is here discussed and linked to the theory.

4.5.1. Informative CSR Communication

'Informative CSR communication' is linked to informative approach of Elving et al.'s (2015, pp. 119-120) framework, included in 'strategic communication'. The main focus of this category is for music festivals to communicate their CSR initiatives and related knowledge clearly, transparently, and in an evidence-based manner. Festivals aim to provide credible explanations and justifications to inform audiences about their sustainability efforts. Habermas' (1984) concept of 'strategic action', which describes communication driven by organizations' self-interest to enhance their brand image, is partially reflected in this major category. The first subcategory aligns with this perspective, as festivals communicate their CSR efforts to build credibility and demonstrate transparency. Through the use of gain-framed messages and an overall hopeful, conversational human voice this subcategory suggests a goal-oriented approach, informing about the festival's commitment towards sustainability. The second subcategory, however, involves the dissemination of general, publicly useful information, such as content on climate change, emissions, and waste (Elving et al., 2015, pp. 119–120), which appears less directly goal-driven. This subcategory tends to adopt a more neutral tone, using technical and formal language consistent with the 'organizational tone of voice' described by Oh and Ki (2019). This tone of voice, in contrast to the previously outlined conversational style, creates greater distance between the festival and the reader, thereby hindering the ability to establish a sense of connection that could foster trust in the festival. Nevertheless, since it often appears alongside the first subcategory, it may still serve to build trust by reinforcing the festival's expertise and concern for the atopic. Thus, the interest-driven nature of informative communication described by Habermas remains a significant aspect of this category.

4.5.2. Value-Driven CSR Communication

The second major theme, 'value-driven CSR communication', aligns with the persuasive approach in the framework of Elving et al. (2015), within 'strategic action'. According to this study, communication is used to influence perceptions and enhance brand image rather than engage ethically (Elving et al., 2015, pp. 119–120). Some sociolinguistics

suggest that, while argumentation aims to provide knowledge through reasoning, persuasion seeks to convince, often using emotional appeals (Hidey & McKeown, 2018, p. 5173). Similarly, in this theme, emphasis is placed on music festivals that articulate their commitment to sustainability through value-driven narratives, such as awareness towards the topic, and mission statements. Rather than providing tangible evidence, these festivals seek to influence audience perceptions by aligning their messaging with ethical and environmental principles. Notably, mission statements, which serve as persuasive tools by emphasizing the importance of sustainability for the organization, functioning more as slogans for the present and future than as declarations of specific actions. The messages in the category are consistently using a 'conversational human voice' and gain-framing, aiming to generate a positive audience attitude and strengthening credibility toward their image (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 327). Hence, in this category, similar to 'informative CSR communication', persuasiveness is probably used to enhance perceive credibility on the music festivals' motives behind their efforts.

4.5.3. Future-Oriented CSR Communication

'Future-oriented CSR communication' is linked to aspirational approach of Elving et al. (2015) framework, falling within 'communicative action'. This category conveys aspirations for future change, whether related to research and innovation or to strengthening the sense of community around sustainability. This category reflects the aspirational approach in nearly all its aspects, prioritizing the use of future tense and aiming to transmit hope, through an enthusiastic and proactive communication. In fact, in Elving et al. (2015, p. 124) framework, this approach is focused on a dialogue about future visions, often aiming to influence social norms and inspire a sense of community. In this category there is a substantial use of positive framing and 'conversional human voice', aiming to reduce the distance with the audience and make their communication more realistic and engaging. Linked to Elving et al.'s (2015) framework, this category corresponds to 'communicative communication,' but only the subcategory focused on collective responsibility represent open communication free of self-interest, prioritizing sustainability itself. In contrast, the other subcategory similar to 'evidence-grounded narrative,' represents a form of self-interested communication aimed at enhancing the festival's transparency.

4.5.4. Audience-Involvement CSR Communication

The last category, 'audience-involvement CSR communication,' aligns with the participatory approach within the same framework, under 'communicative action'. This category, consistent with the proposed theory, focuses on actively involving the audience in the conversation, either by providing them with sustainable guidelines for the festival or by requesting their contribution to the cause. In both cases, the communication is characterized by a strong use of the second person and a relaxed, human tone of voice, reflecting the concept described by Oh and Ki (2019, p. 321). In the digital environment, this approach aims to enhance online interactions by fostering more personal relationships between organizations and their audiences, as demonstrated by music festivals in this study (Oh & Ki, 2019, pp. 321-322). All these communication features confirm that this category uniquely represents 'communicative action.' In fact, the music festivals show no interest beyond collaborating with event visitors to promote sustainability and jointly achieve the shared goals.

5. Conclusions

In an increasingly digitalized music festival landscape, festival organizers have begun integrating sustainability into their online communication, particularly through their official websites, recognizing the role of CSR in shaping brand image and stakeholder relationships (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 320; Du et al., 2010, p. 13). Within the music festival industry, where large-scale events often carry significant environmental and social impacts, CSR communication has become a key tool for engaging with audiences (Dodds et al., 2020, p. 475). For some festivals, such as DGTL, it has even evolved into a core element of their organizational identity. Given this context, the following research question was formulated: *How is CSR communication about sustainability framed on the official websites of Dutch music festivals?*

To address the research question, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on forty-one online texts sourced from the websites of nineteen music festivals in the Netherlands. These festivals were selected based on the presence of one or more sections dedicated to sustainability on their official websites. The analysis revealed four main categories, based on Elving et al. (2015) framework, and eight subcategories emerged inductively from the data, each characterized by specific features and objectives. The codes identified, combined with previously published literature, provide valuable insights for answering the research question.

CSR communication of Dutch music festivals addressed four type of communication, namely 'informative', 'value-driven', 'future-oriented' and 'audience-involvement', according to the framework outlined by Elving et al. (2015). The first one includes music festivals that communicate their initiatives or generally provide knowledge about sustainability, aiming to inform and educate their audience through concrete and data-driven content. Subsequently, value-driven communication shows that music festivals convey values, such as being aware and responsible for sustainability, aiming to strengthen the image of festival' commitment towards sustainability and trust of readers. Then, future-oriented approach illustrates the intention of music festivals to speak about the future through forward-oriented communication, which conveys hope for innovation and further commitment, and fosters a sense of community among readers. The last category involves visitors in the discourse around sustainability, providing them with information to actively contribute to initiatives related to sustainable development. All four major categories reflect the model developed by Elving et al. (2015), both in their features and intended purposes.

Given this, it is possible to conclude that Dutch music festivals convey CSR communication on their websites by consistently adopting four main approaches. The combination of these approaches shapes their communication strategy, in which they refer to past and present initiatives, express aspirations for future change and improvement, foster a sense of collectiveness, and engage their audiences in their activities.

According to the major division of 'strategic action' and 'communicative action' of Elving et al. (2015) framework, some differences emerged from the analysis. In this research, the 'strategic action' is individualised as the communication oriented at building trust and credibility towards the music festival sustainability commitment. This approach was found in four subcategories: 'evidence-based narrative' within informative communication, both the ones of 'value driven' major category, and in 'evidence-based aspirational narrative', within 'aspirational communication'. Conversely, 'sustainability knowledge' subcategory of 'informative, 'collective responsibility' subcategory of 'aspirational', and the major category participatory are characterized by a 'communicative action', since they educate or involve the readers in a collaboration with the festivals towards sustainability. Hence, the original distinction proposed by Habermas (1984), and later adapted by Elving et al. (2015), has been reinterpreted in this study. Here, the nature of the communicative action is not determined by the major categories alone, but rather by the subcategories, that is, the more specific ways in which sustainability is addressed.

With regard to the subcategories, tone of voice and the framing messages were consistently analysed. Notably, all subcategories are characterized by gain-framed messaging. Such messaging highlightes the benefits of initiatives undertaken by music festivals, for instance, demonstrating the energy savings achieved from specific actions undertaken. These findings support previous research on CSR communication by Oh and Ki (2019), which suggests that gain-framed messages generally elicit higher audience engagement and are more effective in fostering positive attitudes toward organizations (Oh & Ki, 2019, p. 322; Ojha, 2023, p. 32).

Furthermore, the tone of voice used is consistently 'conversational human voice', where music festivals communicate as if they are real people, using personal pronouns to reduce the distance between the organization and the audience. This approach appears to be a strategy to increase audience engagement with the organization and is sometimes used to foster a sense of collective identity (Malyuga, 2023, p. 166). 'Sustainability knowledge' is the only subcategory in the dataset which uses an 'organizational tone of voice', where the festival presents itself as an institution, avoiding personal pronouns and personification.

Given that, this subcategory is probably aimed at only educate audience and do not engage with them. Overall, each subcategory differs in its use of keywords, and rhetorical questions, and numerical references, offering distinct communicative strategies that reflect varying intentions and audience engagement levels.

The topics addressed by Dutch music festivals in their websites were primarily focus on environmental topics, such as energy and water consumption, materials and waste management, travel and transport, food and beverages, and donation practices. Additionally, the social dimension of sustainability emerges in two specific subcategories: 'awareness and responsibility' and 'guidance and instructions'. For example, some festivals address issues like gender imbalance in DJ recruitment and promoting respectful behaviour in camping areas. This outcome highlights a limitation in addressing social issues, such as discrimination, the gender gap, and safety at music festivals, indicating a need for greater focus on these topics.

Regarding the content orientation of the subcategories, according to Du et al.'s (2010, pp. 10-11) model, it was not possible to generalize or link them to specific communication aims. The only explicit finding is that subcategories categorized within 'initiative commitment', according to the same model, are directly linked to fostering transparency in CSR initiatives. Specifically, this applies to the 'evidence-based narrative' and the 'evidence-based aspirational narrative', which convey evidence about present or future CSR initiatives of music festivals. Moreover, contrary to the theory surrounding 'issue importance', which associates it with audience scepticism (Du et al., 2010, p. 10), the findings highlight its potential educational purpose in communication, particularly as observed in the 'sustainability knowledge' subcategory. This aligns more closely with Habermas's (1984) concept of 'communicative action'.

In summary, to address the research question, Dutch music festivals balance communication that conveys transparent information about their sustainability initiatives with messages aimed at shaping a sustainable brand image, while also fostering a sense of collective responsibility around the topic. By examining the features of the emerging subcategories, the analysis offers a deeper understanding of CSR communication practices, highlighting the use of positive framing and a generally conversational, human tone in the way Dutch music festivals engage their audiences.

5.1. Social and Theoretical Implications

The findings of this research contribute to the fields of CSR communication, message framing, and communicative action within the music festival industry. By examining how CSR content is framed and delivered on Dutch music festival websites, and the outcomes it aims to generate, this study offers insights into the strategic and communicative intentions behind such messaging. It extends the framework proposed by Elving et al. (2015), providing a deeper understanding of how Dutch music festivals balance authenticity with strategic goals in their sustainability communication. Several practical and theoretical implications emerge from the findings of this research, as various existing frameworks were applied together to uncover consistent, though nuanced, results.

In terms of social implications, the analysis of CSR communication revealed an approach to structuring language, tone of voice, message framing, content focus, and the overall action of the discourse. Having established the importance of addressing corporate social responsibility within organizations as music festivals, the framework developed in this research can now be applied by any music festival, or festivals in general, to structure their online communication on websites. It is essential that all four categories emerged in the findings are communicated in a balanced and integrated manner by the music festival.

With respect to theoretical implications, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature on CSR communication. Notably, it is the first to apply a qualitative analysis using multiple frameworks to examine the language of CSR communication within the music festival industry. As a result, a refined framework has been developed, which partially diverges from the model proposed by Elving et al. (2015). This new framework has been thoroughly explained and linked to framing theory, tone of voice, and content focus in CSR communication, providing a comprehensive understanding of the four dimensions originally cited by Elving et al. (2015). By filling a notable gap in the literature, the framework offers a foundation for future research on online CSR communication, particularly on websites, within this and related sectors.

5.2. Limitations and Further Research

During the research process, several limitations were encountered. Firstly, no existing framework was found that offers a comprehensive analysis of CSR communication in online contexts. In fact, Elving et al. (2015) framework does not deeply discuss features, contents, or framing of messages of CSR communication approaches. Consequently, a

combination of multiple theories, such as Oh & Ki (2019) findings on tone of voice and framing, Du et al. (2010) on contents, and Elving et al. (2015) framework, was used to construct the theoretical framework applied to the data. This approach ensured that the analysis remained both comprehensive and academically rigorous. Future research could apply the framework developed in this study to music festivals in other countries to evaluate its accuracy and adaptability across different national contexts.

Another limitation encountered during the research concerns the availability of CSR communication on the websites of Dutch music festivals. Although over thirty festivals were reviewed, only nineteen featured a dedicated section on sustainability. As a result, the dataset consists of just forty-one textual units, which may limit the development of such an articulated and specific framework for CSR communication. This finding also indicates that CSR communication is not yet widespread among music festivals in the Netherlands. Future research could consider including more European countries to obtain a larger dataset for analysis, to proof or mitigate the application of this framework to also other music festivals. Furthermore, it would be valuable to investigate festival visitors' trust in CSR communication through an experimental study, aiming to determine which of the four framing categories is most effective in enhancing the festival's brand image.

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Appendix A Sample

Table A1

List of Music Festivals Analysed

Data Unit Analysed	Music Festivals	Website Content Analysis (WC)
Unit 1	ADE	Yes
Unit 2	Awakenings	Yes
Unit 3	Dekmantel	Yes
Unit 4	DGTL	Yes
Unit 5	Intends	Yes
Unit 6	Into The Great Wide Open	Yes
Unit 7	Lowlands	Yes
Unit 8	Motel Mozaique	Yes
Unit 9	Mysteryland	Yes
Unit 10	Mystic Garden	Yes
Unit 11	North Sea Jazz	Yes
Unit 12	Oerol Festival	Yes
Unit 13	PinkPop	Yes
Unit 14	Pride Amsterdam	Yes
Unit 15	Rewire	Yes
Unit 16	Smeerboel	Yes
Unit 17	Soenda	Yes
Unit 18	Verknipt	Yes
Unit 19	Wonderfeel	Yes

Appendix B Codebook

Table B1

Framework Developed from Content Analysis

Category	Subcategory	Definition in Context of this Research	Example Quote
Informative CSR Communication: This main category includes the data where music festivals communicate through evidence and data their initiatives or knowledge about sustainability.			
	Evidence-Based Narrative	This code refers to communicating festival initiatives supported by data or evidence.	"Rewire has teamed up with European Festivals Forest to offset CO2 emissions. Find more information." (WC14)
	Sustainability Knowledge	This code refers to background information given about sustainability.	"Good to know: the NS trains run entirely on wind energy." (WC12)
Value-Driven CSR Communication: This main category includes cases where music festivals. communicate persuade the audience using messages based on values or mission statements, without supporting data or evidence.			
	Awareness and Responsibility	This code shows the festival's value of awareness and responsibility toward sustainability.	"We believe in an equal world. We care for the environment and the people around us" (WC8)
	Persuasive Future Talk	This code conveys the festival's mission for future sustainability.	"We are always open to improvements!" (WC17)
Future-Oriented CSR Communication: This main category includes data where music festivals express their hopes for future change, whether for research or building community.			

|		
Evidence-Based Aspirational Narrative	This code covers the festival's information about future research and commitment to sustainability.	"In the future, the plan is to further expand this bee oasis." (WC17)
Collective Responsibility	This code pertains to the aspiration of fostering a sense of community..	"By communicating our vision and sustainability ambitions widely, we hope, together with fellow organisers and our visitors, to contribute to a sustainable and social world." (WC16)

Audience-Involvement CSR Communication: This main category includes data where music festivals involve the audience in sustainability activities.

Guidance and Instructions	This code refers to practical information or tips given to the audience to be more sustainable.	"We have water bars on both the campsite and the festival grounds. You can find their locations on the floorplan. Our water is not only very tasty but this way we also save a lot of plastic. Cheers!" (WC9)
Call to Action Narrative	This code refers to requests for audience involvement around sustainability initiatives.	"If you would like to become one of the GreenGuards of Intents Festival, send an email to greenguards@intentsfestival .nl" (WC5)

Appendix C Images Exemplification

Image C1

Bacchus Festival example for the second sampling criteria
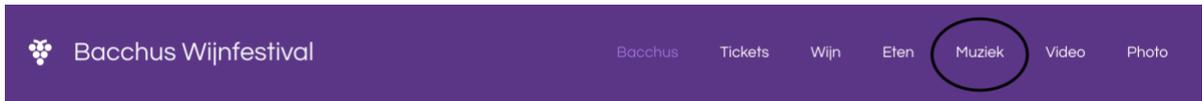
Appendix D AI Declaration

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Valeria De Vill
Student ID: 744132
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Jasper Vanhaelemeesch
Date: 26/06/2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically [ChatGPT, Grammarly], in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity

☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Declaration Page: Prompt used with AI Tools in Thesis

- "Check English grammar in this section, but do not change the meaning"
- "Cite this paper in APA 7.0 format 'author name, year of publication, title of the article, journal of publication, DOI"
- "Give me information about what is MOJO Concerts"
- "Find me an academic, but creative, subheading for a paragraph where I say…"
- "Give me synonyms for this word"

Signature: Valeria De Villi

Date of Signature: 26/06/2025