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REFRAMING FESTIVAL COMMUNICATION: TOWARDS A THEORY OF NETWORKED SUSTAINABILITY STORYTELLING

Abstract

In an era shaped by climate consciousness, platformisation, and shifting media ecologies, cultural festivals are reconfiguring their modes of communication to articulate sustainable futures. This article proposes a theoretical framework for understanding how digital narratives enable festivals to construct and circulate sustainability discourses, positioning them as agents within broader affective and networked publics. Moving beyond normative sustainability standards such as ISO 20121:2024, we theorise the emergence of what we call *networked sustainability storytelling*: a communicative paradigm through which festivals mobilise digital media to perform authenticity, cultivate community, and negotiate ecological responsibility. Anchored in van Dijck's platform society theory, Castells's networked communication model, and Bennett and Segerberg's connective action framework, this study also integrates insights from digital affect studies – especially Papacharissi's notion of affective publics – and Markham's approaches to digital ethnography. These tools can be used to question the role of festivals not only as cultural events but as important nodes in a communicative infrastructure that involves environmental values, stakeholder relationships, and narrative authority. The article contributes to current academic literature on cultural studies, considering the intersections of media, sustainability, and collective meaning-making in reorienting festival communication as a place of narrative experimentation and socio-technical engagement.

Keywords

Festival communication; affective publics; environmental discourse; platform society; digital ethnography.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Festival's communication and promotion nowadays need to consider a significantly transformed media landscape compared to the past, with hybrid, networked ecosystems, in which traditional media intersect with digital channels¹. Within what van Dijck, Poell,

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¹ A. Romano, T. Bonini, C. Capineri, "Interfacing the Space of Flows and Places in the Platform Society: Ten Years of Airbnb in Florence", *Rivista geografica italiana*, 130, 2 (2023): 61-82. DOI: 10.3280/rgioa2-2023oa15923.

and de Waal² called the “platform society”, social media and digital platforms have become core infrastructures for community storytelling and mobilisation. The present contribution focuses on constructing a theoretical framework applicable to cultural festivals in a broad sense, understood as arenas for the production of collective meaning. Whilst acknowledging the specificity of individual contexts (e.g., music, arts, film), the objective is not to analyse a particular festival typology but to conceptualise the transversal communicative dynamics of sustainability in today’s platform society.

Considering how festivals have become prominent platforms for engaging audiences with sustainability discourses, their organisers are now challenged not only to communicate sustainability through artistic programming and on-site experiences, but also via networked digital narratives that consider the connective potential of platforms.

Even considering the number of eco-conscious festivals and the significant social media activities surrounding them, current academic literature lacks a robust theoretical framework explaining how these events employ digital storytelling to advance sustainability. Existing research on “green” events typically emphasises best operational practices or their behavioural impacts³, while literature on online activism addresses network dynamics but almost never recognises festivals as key actors.

To bridge this gap, the researchers propose the concept of *networked sustainability storytelling* as a novel analytical lens for investigating festival communication. This concept refers to the collaborative construction and dissemination of sustainability narratives across digital networks, done by organisers, artists, participants, and online publics. The paper introduces the possibility that festivals function as nodes within broader narrative networks, with stories related to climate change, inclusivity, and resilience circulating via hashtags, posts, videos, and interactive content, linking on-site experiences with online communication.

While the paper’s objective is to establish a solid theoretical framework that integrates interdisciplinary perspectives to develop the concept of networked sustainability storytelling, it also proposes a possible methodology that could be used for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Platform society

The rise of platformed media ecosystems profoundly shapes the contemporary landscape of cultural communication. As van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal⁴ highlight, digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become central communication infrastructures that strongly impact how information is produced, distributed, and consumed.

² J. van Dijck, T. Poell, M. de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

³ A. Wilmink-Thomas, *Greening of Open-Air Festivals: Drivers and Barriers of Selected Music Festivals in Europe* (Doctoral dissertation, Universität zu Köln, 2021); C. Smith, C. Bucke, D. van der Horst, “Green Hydrogen Powering Sustainable Festivals: Public Perceptions of Generators, Production and Ownership”, *International Journal of Hydrogen Energy*, 48, 23 (2023): 8370-8385. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhydene.2022.11.171>.

⁴ Dijck, Poell, de Waal, *The Platform Society*.

As Nieborg and Poell⁵ observe, platform logic permeates cultural production, creating new dynamics of monetisation, content selection, and the attention economy.

Increasingly reliant on these infrastructures, festivals use them extensively to promote and narrate their values in real-time. In this context, communicating sustainability becomes a mediated negotiation of public values, filtered through algorithmic cultures and datafied publics⁶.

This dynamic can lead to what Bouvier and Machin term *strategic authenticity*⁷, the calibrated performance of ethical or sustainable identities, carefully crafted for digital audiences. Adopting van Dijck's perspective, it is understood that sustainability narratives at festivals are not merely content to communicate but are fundamentally constituted and conditioned by the infrastructures that carry them. Public values, such as ecological responsibility, are not expressed in isolation but co-constructed through platforms' technical, economic, and social affordances. This framing encourages analysis beyond examining what festivals communicate regarding sustainability, focusing instead on how platform logics enable, distort, or constrain these messages.

2.2. Networked communication and communicative nodes

While van Dijck's model foregrounds infrastructural transformations, Manuel Castells' theory of networked communication⁸ draws attention to the structural reorganisation of communicative power. Castells argues that shifting from mass communication to *mass self-communication* has enabled individuals and non-institutional actors to influence public discourse. This transformation is particularly valuable for understanding festivals as nodes within the network society – entities embedded in distributed, digitally mediated information flows, interaction, and affect.

As communicative nodes, festivals are situated within what Bennett and Segerberg defined as *connective networks*⁹: horizontal, fluid structures characterised by porous organisational boundaries and distributed agency between actors and artefacts.

Castells' emphasis on the dynamics of symbolic power helps understand how festivals can function as mediators of environmental values. Various authors¹⁰ noted that digital spaces transmit information and directly shape affective and political imaginaries.

This aligns with the hybrid media system¹¹, which describes how old and new media coexist and influence one another. Traditional media coverage, live experience, and dissemination through digital platforms must be balanced within this hybrid condition.

Understanding festivals as nodes within Castells' networked communication thus

⁵ D.B. Nieborg, T. Poell, "The Platformization of Cultural production: Theorising the Contingent Cultural Commodity", *New Media & Society*, 20, 11 (2018): 4275-4292. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818769694>.

⁶ S. Milan, E. Treré, "Big Data from the South(s): Beyond Data Universalism", *Television & New Media*, 20, 4 (2019): 319-335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419837739>.

⁷ G. Bouvier, D. Machin, "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media", *Review of Communication*, 18, 3 (2018): 178-192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2018.1451795>.

⁸ M. Castells, *Communication Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁹ W.L. Bennett, A. Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

¹⁰ G. Meikle, S. Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; T. Highfield, *Social Media and Everyday Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016; E. Treré, *Hybrid Media Activism: Ecologies, Imaginaries, Algorithms*, London: Routledge, 2021.

¹¹ A. Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

allows sustainability storytelling to be conceptualised not as a discrete proclamation, but as a participatory, mediated process of symbolic negotiation.

2.3. *Connective action and affective publics*

Bennett and Segerberg introduced the concept of *connective action*¹² – a digitally mediated form of collective mobilisation characterised by personalised content sharing, emotional resonance, and weak organisational ties. In this model, meaning is co-constructed by individuals in networks, not through formal institutions.

This dynamic intersects with Papacharissi's notion of *affective publics*¹³ – networked collectives activated and sustained by emotionally driven narratives. According to Papacharissi, digital storytelling gains political potency not through rational argumentation but through affective intensity: shared emotions, moral appeals, and lived experiences. By their very nature, cultural festivals are sites of dense affective exchange. When their sustainability narratives tap into these emotional intensities, through stories about local ecosystems, endangered species, or climate justice, they can engender what Anderson describes as¹⁴, capable of shaping collective environmental sensibilities.

Highfield¹⁵ observes that live events increasingly unfold as hybrid experiences, where real-time experiences, emotional expression, and symbolic participation coexist across multiple platforms, and this hybridisation allows sustainability narratives to exist beyond the confines of the festival, extending engagement and activism into post-event digital traces.

2.4. *Discursive ecologies of sustainability*

Current literature on environmental communication¹⁶ has shown how sustainability discourse is often employed to reconcile ecological goals with institutional interests. This tension emerges in festival planning and organisation, where “green” rhetoric may enhance public image or attract funding, even as organisers genuinely seek to reduce their ecological impact. The resulting narratives are hybrid and occasionally contradictory, aligning with what Dryzek¹⁷ calls the *discursive democracy of environmentalism* – a terrain in which multiple, often competing narratives coexist, from ecological modernisation to radical degrowth.

Moreover, festivals operate within what might be called *discursive ecologies* – complex semiotic environments composed of visual, spatial, and digital registers. Hansen¹⁸ highlights the role of media in constructing the environment as a public issue,

¹² Bennett, Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*.

¹³ Z. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

¹⁴ B. Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres”, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 2 (2009): 77-81. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005>.

¹⁵ Highfield, *Social Media and Everyday Politics*.

¹⁶ R. Cox, P.C. Pezzullo, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (6th ed.), New York: Sage Publications, 2021; A. Carvalho, eds., *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (5th ed.), New York: Sage Publications, 2023.

¹⁷ J.S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental discourses* (3rd ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁸ A. Hansen, *Environment, Media and Communication* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge, 2019.

noting that visual media simplify complex ecological processes into emotionally legible formats. Festivals contribute to this simplification through visual storytelling – green-themed scenography, ecological symbols, choreographed performances – that embeds environmental values in immediately recognisable codes. These semiotic choices are never neutral: they reflect and reproduce power dynamics, as not all narratives or communities enjoy equal access to visibility or media platforms¹⁹.

2.5. From ISO standards to narrative negotiation

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards have become a cornerstone of global sustainability governance, providing technical frameworks that help organisations manage environmental, social, and economic impacts. These voluntary, consensus-based instruments are designed to ensure consistency, accountability, and continual improvement across industries. Among them, the ISO 14000 series, dedicated to environmental management, has been particularly influential in promoting structured approaches to sustainability.

Sustainability in festivals has traditionally been approached through such normative instruments, with specific frameworks such as ISO 20121:2024, which offers standardised yet specific guidelines for sustainable event management, in opposition to ISO 14.000 standards, that would have been too generic for festivals. These frameworks play a significant role in institutional accountability and benchmarking²⁰. However, as a purely metrics-driven approach, they fail to capture the narrative and affective dimensions through which sustainability is communicated to the public. As Raj and Musgrave note²¹, compliance frameworks need to be applied in a culturally appropriate narrative context if they want to successfully involve the local public. Current academic literature also calls for a shift from a normative to a narrative perspective on sustainability²², as narrative allows environmental practices to be contextualised within culturally resonant stories that foreground identity, emotion, and community²³. Page²⁴ notes that digital storytelling practices on social media often involve a form of “co-constructed narration”, where institutional messages are reshaped and blended with personal experiences.

Various digital ethnographers²⁵ emphasise the need to analyse embodied, affective, and situated practices in online storytelling. Their methodologies help understand how sustainability messages are produced, circulated, and received, considering physical spaces (e.g., the festival site), emotional energies (euphoria, urgency), and technological

¹⁹ T. Milstein, E. Dickinson, “You Are What You (Deep) Eat: Responsibility and Resistance in Food-Related Social Media”, *Environmental Communication*, 6, 2 (2012): 190-208. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2012.688059>.

²⁰ M. Jones, *Sustainable Event Management: A Practical Guide* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge, 2014.

²¹ R. Raj, J. Musgrave, eds., *Event Sustainability: Theory and Practice*, Wallingford: CABI, 2020.

²² A.N. Markham, “Digital Ethnography as Embodied Practice”, in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, edited by U. Flick, New York: Sage Publications, 2020, 511-526; M. Caracciolo, *Narrative, Ecology, and Ethics*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2021.

²³ N.K. Baym, “The New Shape of Online Community: The Example of Swedish Independent Music Fandom”, *First Monday*, 12, 8 (2007). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v12i8.1978>.

²⁴ R. Page, *Narratives Online: Shared Stories in Social Media*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

²⁵ S. Pink, H. Horst, J. Postill, L. Hjorth, T. Lewis, J. Tacchi, *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (2nd ed.), New York: Sage Publications, 2022; Markham, *Digital Ethnography as Embodied Practice*.

affordances (hashtags, filters, reels). This approach reframes sustainability as an affective and communicative experience enacted through bodies and media.

3. CONCEPTUALISING NETWORKED SUSTAINABILITY STORYTELLING

The convergence of climate urgency, digital media, and cultural production has generated new forms of environmental communication that call for more nuanced theoretical frameworks. In response, this article introduces *networked sustainability storytelling* as an interpretive tool for examining how festivals craft and circulate environmental narratives within socio-technical systems. Given the problems tied to solely relying on normative standards such as carbon audits or ISO compliance, this concept highlights the narrative and social dimensions through which sustainability acquires meaning, generates value and shapes collective identities.

3.1. *Defining the concept*

Networked sustainability storytelling is a communicative practice through which festivals articulate sustainable goals, actions, and imaginaries across digital platforms in participatory, emotionally engaging ways, rooted in relational infrastructures. Whilst many of the communicative strategies analysed (e.g., storytelling, social media use) are now established in cultural promotion, the novelty of networked sustainability storytelling lies in their application to an object, sustainability, that is inherently complex, contested, and politically charged. This transforms communication from simple promotion into a genuine act of symbolic negotiation and ethical positioning. This form of storytelling is networked in at least three interrelated senses:

- *technically networked*, as it circulates through digital platforms²⁶;
- *socially networked*, via participatory practices that involve a plurality of actors²⁷;
- *symbolically networked*, as it connects environmental action to broader cultural narratives²⁸.

3.2. *Storytelling as communicative infrastructure*

Festivals increasingly function as communicative infrastructures in the sense described by Couldry and Hepp²⁹ as systems that enable and shape symbolic exchange. Within this framework, storytelling emerges as a strategic tool for conveying values and performing institutional identity. Sustainability narratives serve multiple communicative functions: they inform (e.g., about energy usage), legitimise (e.g., through partnerships with environmental NGOs), mobilise (e.g., encouraging green behaviours), and represent (e.g., aligning the festival with climate justice movements).

²⁶ van Dijck, Poell, de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*; Nieborg, Poell, "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorising the Contingent Cultural Commodity".

²⁷ Bennett, Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*.

²⁸ Carvalho, eds., *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*.

²⁹ N. Couldry, A. Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.

3.3. *Performing authenticity and negotiating narrative authority*

A central dimension of networked sustainability storytelling is the performance of authenticity, as the credibility of sustainability practices is strongly based on their perceived sincerity³⁰. Page observes that authenticity on social media is achieved through narrative devices such as first-person storytelling, emotional appeals, and an informal aesthetic. These strategies are particularly effective in festival settings, where participants document sustainable practices, such as refilling water bottles, using shared transport, and attending eco-workshops. However, the ecological identity that emerges from such narratives is never fixed. As Anderson³¹ argues, identities in digital environments are shaped through iterative storytelling, where each post contributes to an evolving sense of self. For festivals, sustainability narratives must be reiterated, adapted, and at times renegotiated in response to audience feedback, unexpected events (e.g., extreme weather), or shifts in the sociopolitical landscape.

This negotiation of identity is intrinsically linked to the dispersal of narrative authority in networked environments. In traditional models, institutions typically control narrative production, but in the shift from top-down (one-to-many) to bottom-up or many-to-many communication³², narrative authority is dispersed in networked environments. As Bennett and Segerberg note, *connective action* enables multiple centres of narrative production, challenging the primacy of the institutional voice. Distributed storytelling promotes inclusivity and pluralism, yet, as Marres³³ warns, datafied platforms can distort deliberative processes by privileging visibility over substance.

Festivals must therefore engage in ongoing narrative negotiation: a process of alignment between institutional messaging, user practices, platform norms, and shifting cultural discourses. Success in this domain depends not solely on message design, but on the festival's capacity to function as a *nodal communicator* – a strategic actor facilitating the circulation, reworking, and legibility of sustainability narratives across diverse social contexts.

3.4. *The festival as a phygital infrastructure and its ethnographic study*

Based on Couldry and Hepp³⁴, we understand infrastructures as systems stabilising and distributing communication across time and space. Festivals fully meet this definition, as they shape the conditions under which cultural meanings are produced, circulated, and received. They are public interfaces facilitating networked exchanges among organisers, artists, participants, sponsors, and digital communities.

This infrastructural perspective helps explain why festivals occupy a central role in sustainability communication. They offer ritualised spaces where environmental values can be performed and legitimised, simultaneously generating digital traces, as videos, posts, and hashtags, that extend their symbolic reach. In this sense, festivals function as

³⁰ K. Moloney, C. Walker, "Talking Green but Acting Mean? Environmental Reputational Risks and the Rise of Authentic Communication", *Public Relations Inquiry*, 9, 1 (2020): 77-95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X19888729>.

³¹ B. Anderson, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2019.

³² H. Jenkins, S. Ford, J. Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2013.

³³ N. Marres, *Digital Sociology: The Reinvention of Social Research*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.

³⁴ Couldry, Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality*.

points of connection between situated practices and global media flows, where sustainability emerges not only as responsible management but as a narrative embedded within infrastructure³⁵.

Understanding how these infrastructures operate requires methods capable of capturing lived experience, media ecologies, and embodied practices. In this regard, digital ethnography offers a fitting approach for examining how sustainability is communicated across the online/offline continuum of the contemporary “phygital” experience³⁶, as it allows us to explore how users experience, interpret, and co-produce sustainability narratives within digital environments.

Applied to festivals, this methodology clarifies how institutional messaging, user-generated content, and ambient media contribute to creating affective atmospheres.

This methodology also highlights the networked visibility of festivals. As Rogers³⁷ notes, visibility on social media is algorithmically modulated and strategically curated, often privileging specific aesthetics, temporalities, or actors. Digital ethnography makes it possible to trace which sustainability messages gain traction, which are ignored or contested, and how meaning circulates through platform-native narrative formats such as stories, reels, and ephemeral content.

3.5. *Affect and infrastructure: building the festival feeling*

In addition to being technical and discursive, festival infrastructures are also affective: spaces where collective emotions are generated, circulated, and experienced. Drawing on Berlant, we understand these as *affective infrastructures*³⁸ that sustain shared moods, desires, and attachments.

A concrete example of affective infrastructure can be found in the DGTL Festival (Amsterdam), internationally recognised³⁹ for its integration of circular design and sustainability storytelling. Through its spatial configuration, featuring reusable stage materials, solar-powered installations, and zero-waste zones, the festival constructs an environment where ecological values are not only communicated but sensorially and emotionally experienced. Digital tools track participants’ individual carbon footprints and travel behaviours, feeding into live communal metrics that visually represent the festival’s shared environmental impact. DGTL exemplifies how affective infrastructures can be deliberately staged: where material systems, spatial aesthetics, and digital rituals work together to produce emotional attachments to sustainability, mobilising publics through both symbolic resonance and embodied participation.

Networked sustainability storytelling thus unfolds within infrastructures that are at once technical, symbolic, and emotional. By conceiving festivals as socio-technical and affective infrastructures, we move beyond content-based analyses to explore the material, spatial, and affective conditions that enable or constrain their communicative capacity around sustainability.

³⁵ S. Mattern, “Infrastructural Tourism”, *Places Journal*, 2013. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22269/130701>.

³⁶ L. Wacquant, *Phygital: A Vision for a New Customer Experience*, L’Atelier, 2020.

³⁷ R. Rogers, *Doing Digital Methods*, New York: Sage Publications, 2019.

³⁸ L. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

³⁹ M.P. de Brito, E. Cavagnaro, “Leeuwarden Cultural Capital 2018”, in *Green Events and Green Tourism: An International Guide to Good Practice*, edited by H. Seraphin and E. Nolan, London: Routledge, 2018.

4. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGIES FOR TRACING NETWORKED STORYTELLING

Although the paper's objective is the creation of a theoretical framework, it is helpful to outline potential methodological applications through which *networked sustainability storytelling* might be explored empirically. The aim is not to present an exhaustive research design, but to offer preliminary guidance.

4.1. Population of the study

An empirical application of the proposed theoretical framework could focus on festivals that explicitly declare a commitment to sustainability, whether in the music domain or broader artistic and cultural contexts, to observe how sustainability practices are represented, mediated, and narrated across various media and communication channels.

4.2. Data types

Networked storytelling unfolds along an online/offline continuum, requiring a multi-sited and multi-modal approach. Table 1 below illustrates how the key categories of empirical data can be organised.

Table 1 - *Key data types for empirical analysis*

<i>Data type</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Digital content</i>	Social media posts (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter), promotional videos, stories, official hashtags, and user-generated content.
<i>Institutional communication materials</i>	Press releases, programmes, official websites, and policy documents relating to sustainability.
<i>In situ observation</i>	Ethnographic fieldwork within festival spaces, focusing on narrative infrastructures (e.g., environmental signage, artistic installations, information booths).
<i>Qualitative interviews</i>	Semi-structured interviews with organisers, communication managers, volunteers, participants, and local stakeholders.
<i>Affective traces</i>	Comments, reactions, and online engagement reflecting the emotional dimensions of participation.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4.3. Methodological approaches

Table 2 below illustrates the various methodological approaches that an empirical study on networked storytelling may utilise.

Table 2 - *Networked storytelling methodologies*

<i>Methodological approach</i>	Purpose	Key authors
<i>Digital ethnography</i>	To observe interactions between physical and digital festival environments; to analyse distributed communicative practices between institutions and publics.	Markham; Pink <i>et al.</i>
<i>Discourse analysis</i>	To examine the rhetorical strategies through which sustainability is represented, normalised, or contested.	Fairclough; Carvalho.
<i>Digital methods</i>	To collect and visualise social data online; to analyse visibility and narrative circulation dynamics.	Rogers.
<i>Affective analysis</i>	To map the emotions embedded in narratives; to explore the formation and mobilisation of <i>affective publics</i> .	Papacharissi; Anderson.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This article has advanced the conceptualisation of *networked sustainability storytelling* as a framework for interpreting how cultural festivals engage with environmental discourse in an age defined by digital connectivity and ecological urgency. By drawing on theories of the platform society, networked communication, connective action, and affective publics, it is proposed that festival communication is no longer reducible to promotional or logistical functions. Instead, it emerges as a complex socio-technical and affective infrastructure through which sustainability is narrated, contested, and experienced.

One of the central theoretical contributions of this study lies in its interdisciplinary integration of media studies, communication theory, sociology, and environmental discourse analysis. In reframing sustainability as a narrative and infrastructural phenomenon, the article shifts the analytical focus from compliance-based models (e.g., ISO 20121:2024) to the communicative processes through which sustainability values acquire legitimacy and affective traction.

From a managerial point of view, the framework presented in the paper can be used by: (i) festival organisers and managers, that can use it a strategic planning tool, (ii) communication and marketing professionals, that can use it as practical guide to navigating the complexities of digital discourse, particularly in mitigating accusations of “greenwashing”⁴⁰, and (iii) policymakers and funding bodies, as the framework suggests re-evaluating assessment criteria for artistic and cultural events.

The limitations of the study lie in the lack of empirical validation. The proposed theoretical framework and its ethnographic and methodological approaches remain

⁴⁰ M.A. Delmas, V.C. Burbano, “The Drivers of Greenwashing”, *California Management Review*, 54, 1 (2011): 64-87.

speculative and require field-based application to prove the model's validity. Furthermore, they may not fully account for regional, political, or technological variations in festival communication practices, particularly in contexts where access to digital infrastructure is uneven or platform governance imposes distinct constraints.

Future research would benefit from applying this framework to specific case studies across diverse cultural and geographical settings. Comparative analyses could explore how festivals negotiate narrative authority, perform authenticity, and mobilise ecological imaginaries in contextually specific ways.

Ultimately, the paper positions cultural festivals as dynamic spaces of environmental storytelling, where infrastructures, emotions, and publics converge to produce meaning. In an era when the urgency of the climate crisis demands new modes of engagement, *networked sustainability storytelling* offers a critical lens to understand how culture, communication, and sustainability intersect in pursuing more just and ecologically attuned futures.