

DIGITALES ARCHIV

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft
ZBW – Leibniz Information Centre for Economics

Rausser, Gordon C.; Strielkowski, Wadim

Article

An economic analysis of the Burning Man festival's marketing evolution

Reference: Rausser, Gordon C./Strielkowski, Wadim (2023). An economic analysis of the Burning Man festival's marketing evolution. In: Marketing i menedžment inovacij 14 (4), S. 176 - 187.

https://mmi.sumdu.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/13-A765-2023_Strielkowski-et-al.pdf
doi:10.21272/mmi.2023.4-13.

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/652859>

Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics
Düsternbrooker Weg 120
24105 Kiel (Germany)
E-Mail: [rights\[at\]zbw.eu](mailto:rights[at]zbw.eu)
<https://www.zbw.eu/econis-archiv/>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieses Dokument darf zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen. Sofern für das Dokument eine Open-Content-Lizenz verwendet wurde, so gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

<https://zbw.eu/econis-archiv/termsfuse>

Terms of use:

This document may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes. You are not to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public. If the document is made available under a Creative Commons Licence you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the licence.

AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE BURNING MAN FESTIVAL'S MARKETING EVOLUTION

Gordon Rausser,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0647-128X>

Professor, University of California, USA

Wadim Strielkowski,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6113-3841>

Professor, University of California, USA

Czech University of Life Sciences, Czech Republic

Corresponding author: Wadim Strielkowski, strielkowski@pef.czu.cz; strielkowski@berkeley.edu

Type of manuscript: Research paper

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the economic and marketing analysis of the Burning Man event (also known as the “Burning Man festival”). It is doing so by tracing the festival’s evolution from a small bonfire ritual on San Francisco beach in California in 1986 to a globally renowned art festival held for the whole full week before the Labor Day weekend in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert. The festival has gradually become one of the world’s top “must-see” and “must-attend” attractions (often getting various nicknames by the press and researchers - from the “magic circus in the desert” to the “lucrative circus” or “Silicon Valley playground”). Currently, Burning Man is attracting more than 60,000 participants (who call themselves “Burners”) annually and making over \$8 million in tickets and donations (there has been a cap implemented on the maximum number of participants due to the environmental and land protection concerns since the current venue is located in the National Conservation Area). It has also served as an inspiration for a series of similar festivals or smaller events organized in other parts of the world, from Lithuania to Spain (or even Israel), helping to create and sustain the global “Burning Man” worldwide community. Drawing on data from more than 500 surveys conducted at the different Burning Man festivals between 2012 and 2018 by the authors, this paper explores the transformation of the Burning Man event into a high-end event characterized by significant expenditure and participation from upper social echelons. Contrary to popular perception, Burning Man emerges not as a ‘hippie’ Woodstock-type gathering but as an elite networking hub, highlighting the interplay of luxury and ‘radical expression’. The research reveals that average spending per participant ranges from \$5,000 to \$6,000 (including tickets, travel costs, gear, supplies, and gifts), challenging the festival’s accessibility. Furthermore, despite the allure of the event, the demanding Black Rock desert environment distinguished by the severe temperature changes and alkaline dust storms often happening on a dry lakebed (or “playa”) seems to deter repeat attendance among wealthier participants. Our paper contributes to understanding the dynamics of popular festival marketing and the shifting demographic profile of the Burning Man festival, offering insights into its exclusivity and the economic implications of its ‘radical expression’ ethos.*

Keywords: economic analysis; festival marketing; social stratification; elite networking; burning man.

Received: 20 June 2023

Revised: 23 November 2023

Accepted: 13 December 2023

Funding: There is no funding for this research.

Publisher and Founder: Sumy State University, Ukraine

Cite as: Rausser, G. & Strielkowski, W. (2023). An Economic Analysis of the Burning Man Festival's Marketing Evolution. *Marketing and Management of Innovations*, 14(4), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2023.4-13>



1. Introduction. The Burning Man event, renowned as a captivating and globally celebrated festival of art and performance, annually unfolds over a week surrounding Labor Day in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada, USA. What began as a modest bonfire gathering among friends has blossomed into a world-renowned art extravaganza. The festival's relocation to the Nevada Desert in 1996 marked its transformation; every year, it draws a multitude of attendees arriving in cars, campervans, and buses to construct a Black Rock City. This temporary city, which became an officially recognized settlement in Nevada state records, came to life for approximately ten days each year. Affectionately termed by some the "magic circus in the desert", the festival is celebrated for its unique spirit and ambiance. However, some people refer to it as the "lucrative circus", hinting at its popularity among the Silicon Valley elites and celebrities of all kinds that come there for networking (Strielkowski, 2018).

Burning Man festival showcases a diverse array of artistic expressions, prominently featuring the large wooden effigy known as "The Man", a mystical symbol and emblem of the festival. This includes an array of sculptures, art installations, interactive artworks, numerous art cars, and temporary exhibits, as well as a variety of entertainment venues such as concert stages, bars, cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs, not only the world's largest wooden structure, "The Temple". Most of these art pieces, meticulously crafted over months in the desert by volunteer teams, are traditionally burned or dismantled as the festival concludes. The festival has seen a significant increase in attendance over the years, growing from 50,000 in 2011 to 65,000 in 2014, and it generates more than \$8 million annually through ticket sales and donations (Rausser et al., 2021).

Since its inception, the Burning Man has been the subject of scholarly discourse across various fields, exploring its social and cultural significance and broader implications (Gilmore & Van Proyen, 2005; Chen, 2009; Turner, 2009; Rowen, 2020). The festival's activities have sparked debates among academics and critics, particularly over the perceived 'immorality' associated with it. As the event has expanded, its minimalistic approach to conventional rules and norms has evolved. Notably, the festival is known for its liberal attitudes toward nudity, sexual expression, and revelry, largely because nudity is permitted and, in line with the principle of radical expression, is often considered a form of costume (Spratt & Williams, 2019).

This paper endeavors to cast the Burning Man event in a different light, portraying it as an upscale, exclusive event primarily catering to society's upper echelons. In contrast to the stereotypical image of a poorly organized gathering, this paper posits that the Burning Man festival has evolved into a meeting ground for modern-day elites to socialize and entertain each other.

2. Literature Review.

2.1. The Burning Man festival from its origins to the present

The Burning Man festival refers to a gathering that takes place annually at Black Rock City in the Black Rock Desert, Pershing County, in the State of Nevada, USA. The Black Rock City emerges annually as a temporary yet transformative community hosting the globally renowned Burning Man festival, known for its large-scale, impactful experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2021). The festival's origins trace back to 1986 at Baker's Beach in San Francisco (Brill, 2023), but after a 1990 intervention by park police aiming to prevent the burning of the statue, the event relocated, altering its location, timing, and significance (Brooks & Soulard, 2022).

Originally, the Burning Man was a small, intimate gathering organized by Larry Harvey, Jerry James, and their friends during the summer solstice (St John, 2020). Annually held from the last Sunday of August to the first Monday of September, the event initially featured the burning of a nine-foot wooden man and a smaller dog, a spontaneous act of radical self-expression as described by Harvey (Doherty, 2006). Before 1986, Larry's girlfriend's friend, Mary Grauberger, hosted solstice gatherings at Baker Beach, events that Larry sometimes attended. Once Grauberger ceased hosting, Harvey and James initiated their own event in June 1986, constructing the first effigy from scrap wood, which was then set alight that evening. Over the years, the effigy grew in size—from fifteen feet in 1987 to forty feet by 1988, when the ceremony was officially named the "Burning Man" (Burning Man Project, 2023a).

Each year, the festival adopts a new theme, influencing Man's design and overall artistic expression. For instance, themes such as "Hope and Fear" in 2006, "The Green Man" in 2007, "Rites of Passage" in 2011, and "Fertility 2.0" in 2012 have shaped festivals' aesthetics. While the basic design and construction of the Man have remained consistent, the structure supporting it varies according to the annual theme. These themes are reflected in the artworks, costumes, camps, and vehicles of participants, often featuring outsider and visionary art styles. The event is characterized by themed camps and residential areas set up by participant subcommunities, incorporating artistic and design elements to foster community engagement, in line with the event's interactivity standards (May, 2005). Musical performances; guerrilla street theatre; sculptures with

kinetic, electronic, and fire elements; and isolated art installations enhance the festival's landscape. Many of these artworks are created by artists using their resources, with the Burning Man community's Art Department offering partial grants. To qualify for these grants, artists must align their creations with the event's themes and interactivity requirements (McDowell & Crooke, 2019). The festival also features mutant vehicles, decorated bicycles, and temples, often culminating in ritual burnings following the burning of The Man.

The major layout and infrastructure of Black Rock City (BRC) were constructed by the Department of Public Works residing within the city for several weeks prior to the event and several weeks after the event. The remaining part of the city, consisting of theme camps, villages, art installations and individual camping sites, was the work of the participants (Burning Man Project, 2023b). The city's Center Camp, located along the midline, offers a central meeting place for the entire city. The villages and theme camps are located along the innermost streets and provide entertainment services to all participants. Theme camps include groups of participants who use a single identity to represent themselves. Villages include groups of smaller theme camps banded together with the aim of sharing resources to enable better placement. During this period, the BRC has local and state law enforcement agencies and the Bureau of Land Management Rangers patrolling to ensure that there is no drug use, often imposing fines on those found. There are also firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) teams on the ground, which are provided by the BRC Emergency Services Department (ESD). In late 2013, the FBI communicated to the organizers that it would begin patrolling the BRC to curb terrorist activities and drug use as well as enabling intelligence collection as well as aiding in crowd control. Transport within this event was carried out through the Reno-Tahoe International Airport and the San Francisco International Airport. There is also a temporary airport on Playa (known as the Black Rock City Municipal Airport), which was established prior to each event (Kay et al., 2023). These airports normally serve prepaid shuttles to and from the event. Other participants taking part in the event also use vehicles and bikes, while others opt to hitchhike.

2.2. Burning Man Concepts and Principles

Radical self-expression and radical self-reliance are at the forefront of the values that the organizers of the festival hold in high esteem. Annually, the Burning Man festival emerged as a unique social experiment within a transient community. This event was driven by a desire to break away from conventional societal structures characterized by institutional influences, service industries, and commercial interactions. At the Burning Man, these norms are subverted, creating a space where individuals from diverse backgrounds are empowered to freely express themselves (John, 2017).

At the heart of the Burning Man experience is the pursuit of artistic self-expression aimed at cultivating a celebratory environment for festival attendees. Central to achieving the festival's primary objective of maximizing participant enjoyment is the active involvement of the attendees, often referred to as 'Burners'. Participation stands as a fundamental tenet of the Burning Man community.

Rather than being centered on a singular theme, the festival embodies a multitude of objectives brought forth by its participants, the 'Burners'. Guided by a set of ten principles, these individuals collectively shape the festival's cultural ethos. These principles, initially conceptualized by Larry Harvey in 2004 as guidelines for regional organization, have evolved into universal tenets reflecting the broader cultural philosophy of the movement. These include radical inclusion, gifting, decommmodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, and civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, or immediacy.

One of the activities that is encouraged and reinforced actively is the individual's selfless giving of talents that are unique to a person. Generous outpourings of creativity often tend to consist of shared as well as experimental sculptures. The organizers of the event chose a yearly theme that inspired the creations that were on show at the festival. The burning man moniker given to the event comes from the symbolic and ritual burning of the large wooden effigy that occurred during the culmination of the event. The burning of "the man" has been a constant feature of the event since its inception approximately thirty years ago.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Burning Man festival is the fact that each year, the Black Rock City is built every year from scratch under some of the most inhospitable weather conditions (White, 2013). After the event ends, the temporary city is demolished and completely undone. In black rock city, the rules that govern the outside world are apparently put on hold. Here, there are no employees, no transactions involving the exchange of large amounts of money, and no spectators. In place of the laws that are enforced in the outside world are ten principles that were authored by the cofounder of the festival Larry Harvey in 2004 (who passed away in 2018). These principles were created to act as guidelines for the newly formed regional network. The intention of developing these principles was not to dictate how the people who came to the festival conducted themselves or acted but rather to reflect the ethics and culture that had been originally developed over a long time since the event was developed.

The principles of the Burning Man include the following: radical inclusion (Robinson, 2015). This principle implies that anyone who wishes to be part of the festival shall not be barred from participating. New visitors as well as strangers involved in the festival for the first time are welcomed and treated with respect. For individuals to take part in the festival, there are no prior requirements for participation. The other principle of the festival is the principle of gifting. Organizers of the event place much emphasis on and devote themselves to giving gifts. Under this principle, the unconditional value of a gift is stressed in that giving a gift does not anticipate the return of the gift or the exchange of such a gift for something else that is of equal value. The third principle of the Burning Man festival is the principle of decommodification (Karlin, 2016). This principle is aimed mainly at preserving the spirit of gifting, which forms the core of the festival. The Burning Man community aims at creating a social environment that is devoid of interruptions from commercial sponsors or any form of advertising, and such manipulation is not accepted. The commodity that the Burning Man community upholds is the experience that comes from participating in the event, and it cannot be substituted for consumption.

Radical self-reliance is another principle that is vital to maintaining the burning man experience (White, 2013). Under this principle, an event is meant to encourage and push individuals to participate in the process of discovering, exercising, and relying on their inner resources. In addition, radical self-expression is one of the foremost principles upheld, and it is what makes this festival unique, unlike other festivals of its kind. This principle emanates from the unique and salient gifts that are inherent in the individual, of which no one other than that particular individual or collaborating group can determine the content. Communal effort and civic responsibility represent another pair of principles related to fostering the need for the entire community to collaborate and cooperate. The essence of cooperating and collaborating arises from the need to produce, promote and protect the basic tenets that foster interaction, such as social networks, communication methods and channels, as well as the works of art.

The responsibility for the maintenance of public welfare and the responsibility for upholding civic responsibilities are placed within an individual. The implication of this is that individuals are expected to conduct themselves and the practices they engage in lawful manner in accordance with the rule of law. Leaving no trace is another vital principle to which all participants are expected to adhere (Robinson, 2015). The Burning Man community respects the environment, and participants are expected to leave no physical trace of the activities. Participation and immediacy are also principles that guide festival activities.

3. Methodology and research methods

3.1. Research hypotheses

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the attraction of the Burning Man festival and to determine whether this attraction is based on personal and cultural factors or rather conventional socioeconomic determinants in light of the festival's marketing evolution and increasing mainstream popularity. This task corresponds to many similar relevant studies (see, e.g., Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019; Choi & Burnes, 2022; Vujicic et al., 2023).

The main research hypotheses of our investigation were as follows:

H1: *The initial financial investment in attending the Burning Man festival becomes an emotional attachment and influences the decision to attend the event more frequently.*

H2: *Higher personal income might be relevant for a higher frequency of attending the Burning Man festival.*

H3: *The level of education and family status are relevant in explaining the decision to attend the Burning Man festival.*

We employed a Poisson regression model to explain the frequency of attending the Burning Man festival by using income, sex, education level, family status, and the price of the tickets (the first, the last ticket, as well as the information on all expenses associated with attending the first and last Burning Man festival) as predictors and conducted our regression analysis to test the results.

3.2. Data

The study employs our own data obtained from more than 500 surveys conducted at the festival between 2012 and 2018. The data collection was conducted at the Burning Man festivals by the authors themselves and with the help of local volunteers. The data were collected mostly at the Central Camp (the large tent comprising the center point of the Burning Man festival, which constitutes a large covered public area with seating arrangements and a coffee bar). We applied quasi-random probability sampling, with participants approaching every third respondent and attempting to interview only one representative of a family, a couple, or a group of friends.

A significant majority of our survey participants, constituting 88%, had experienced the Burning Man festival at least once. The participants' average age in our study was 32 years. The gender distribution in our sample consisted of 65% male and 35% female respondents. Approximately 63% of those surveyed were single, and a substantial 83% did not have children. Approximately half of our respondents held higher education levels, either at the bachelor's or master's level, and some even possessed advanced degrees, such as PhD or MBA. These qualifications were obtained from renowned institutions both in the United States and internationally, such as the University of California Berkeley, Columbia University, King's College London, and the University of Sydney.

Figure 1 reports the annual household incomes (all family members together) for our sample of Burning Man participants. Approximately 38% of the respondents belonged to the higher earning group (the cluster between \$71,000 and \$110,000).

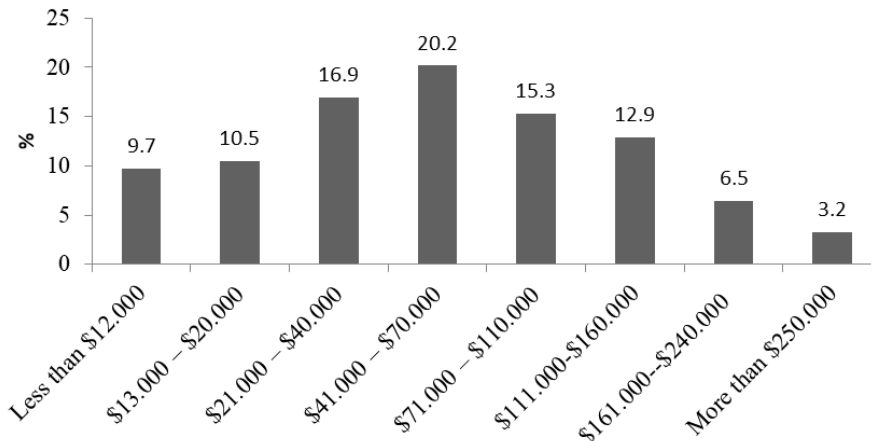


Figure 1. Annual household income (all family members together)
Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Regarding the personal earnings of the Burning Man attendees, 52.9% of the visitors earned between \$71,000 and \$110,000 and attended the Burning Man festival only once. Half of the people who earn \$161,000--\$240,000 and half of those earning more than \$250,000 annually attended the Burning Man event at least once. Approximately 25% of the respondents earning more than \$250,000 annually were at the Burning Man event 3 times, and 25% of them were even 4 times. There is only one person in our sample who attended Burning Man 10 times, and this person had an income between \$41,000 and \$70,000.

Moreover, Table 1 lists the average per-person spending for the first and last Burning Man festivals the respondent in question attended listing the key items (car/truck rental, supplies, and gifts).

Table 1. Average per-person spending for the first and last Burning Man festivals

My first Burning Man		My last Burning Man	
Item	Cost in USD	Item	Cost in USD
Car/truck rental	\$180	Car/truck rental	\$47
Supplies	\$351	Supplies	\$216
Gifts	\$61	Gifts	\$48

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Finally, Table 2 reveals the structure of the earnings of Burning Man attendees.

Table 2. Structure of Burning Man attendees' earnings

		times * income Crosstabulation								
		income								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
0	Count	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
	% within income	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	4.2%	0.0%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%
1	Count	5	3	8	9	9	5	4	2	45
	% within income	45.5%	25.0%	42.1%	37.5%	52.9%	33.3%	50.0%	50.0%	40.9%

Table 2 Continued

		times * income Crosstabulation									
		income									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total	
times	2	Count	3	4	5	5	2	3	1	0	23
		% within income	27.3%	33.3%	26.3%	20.8%	11.8%	20.0%	12.5%	0.0%	20.9%
	3	Count	3	2	3	2	0	1	1	1	13
		% within income	27.3%	16.7%	15.8%	8.3%	0.0%	6.7%	12.5%	25.0%	11.8%
	4	Count	0	2	2	1	1	3	0	1	10
		% within income	0.0%	16.7%	10.5%	4.2%	5.9%	20.0%	0.0%	25.0%	9.1%
	5	Count	0	1	0	3	2	2	2	0	10
		% within income	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	12.5%	11.8%	13.3%	25.0%	0.0%	9.1%
	7	Count	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
		% within income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	11.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%
10	Count	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	
	% within income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

4. Results. We commenced our empirical model by employing a Poisson regression model to explain the frequency of attending the Burning Man festival using income as a predictor (Table 3). Overall, we did not find a significant correlation between the decision to attend the Burning Man festival and personal income. Therefore, we cannot state that wealthier people tend to attend to burn men more frequently than do less wealthy people. People with an income range of less than \$12,000 went one time, 2 times or 3 times.

Table 3. Results of the Poisson regression model for income

		Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	0.811	0.3333	0.158	1.464	5.918	1	0.015
income=1	-0.213	0.4014	-1	0.574	0.282	1	0.595
income=2	0.105	0.3801	-0.64	0.85	0.077	1	0.782
income=3	-0.2	0.3737	-0.933	0.532	0.286	1	0.593
income=4	0.231	0.3547	-0.465	0.926	0.422	1	0.516
income=5	0.288	0.3616	-0.421	0.996	0.633	1	0.426
income=6	0.065	0.3727	-0.666	0.795	0.03	1	0.863
income=7	0.054	0.4047	-0.739	0.847	0.018	1	0.894

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

The results reported in Table 3 above also indicate that people with higher incomes tend to go to Burning Man more often than individuals with lower incomes. However, people with less than \$12,000 went one time, 2 times, or 3 times.

Consequently, factors such as gender, level of education, and family status were also irrelevant in explaining the decision to attend the Burning Man festival (see Tables 4-6 below).

Table 4. Results of the Poisson regression model for sex

		Parameter Estimates					
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	1.014	0.099	0.82	1.208	104.887	1	0
gender=1	0.085	0.5858	-1.064	1.233	0.021	1	0.885
gender=2	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
Scale	1						

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Table 5. Results of the Poisson regression model for family status

Parameter Estimates							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	1.012	0.2132	0.594	1.429	22.513	1	0
family_status=1	-0.172	0.2611	-0.684	0.34	0.433	1	0.51
family_status=2	-0.318	0.5436	-1.384	0.747	0.343	1	0.558
family_status=3	-0.198	0.2268	-0.642	0.247	0.76	1	0.383
family_status=4	0.318	0.2736	-0.219	0.854	1.347	1	0.246
family_status=5	-0.606	0.6155	-1.812	0.6	0.97	1	0.325
family_status=6	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
Scale	1						

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Table 6. Results of the Poisson regression model for the level of education

Parameter Estimates							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	-1.096×10 ⁻¹³	1	-1.96	1.96	0	1	1
education=1	1.099	1.0111	-0.883	3.08	1.181	1	0.277
education=2	0.889	1.0028	-1.077	2.854	0.786	1	0.375
education=3	0.738	1.0108	-1.244	2.719	0.532	1	0.466
education=4	1.096×10 ⁻¹³	1.2247	-2.4	2.4	0	1	1
education=6	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
Scale	1						

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

However, our results also revealed that the price of the first ticket for the Burning Man festival was a significant predictor of the frequency of attending the festival for a number of consecutive times. The overall model was valid at the 5% level of significance since the significance is 0.001, which is less than 0.05 (see Table 7 below).

Table 7. Results of the Poisson regression model for the price of the Burning Man ticket

Parameter Estimates							
Parameter	B	Std. Error	95% Wald Confidence Interval		Hypothesis Test		
			Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Intercept	1.17×10 ⁻¹³	0.4472	-0.877	0.877	0	1	1
price1=0	-1.17×10 ⁻¹³	1.0954	-2.147	2.147	0	1	1
price1=110	1.099	0.7303	-0.333	2.53	2.263	1	0.132
price1=120	2.303	0.5477	1.229	3.376	17.673	1	0
price1=160	-1.17×10 ⁻¹³	0.8367	-1.64	1.64	0	1	1
price1=180	0.693	0.8367	-0.947	2.333	0.686	1	0.407
price1=195	1.099	0.7303	-0.333	2.53	2.263	1	0.132
price1=200	1.099	0.7303	-0.333	2.53	2.263	1	0.132
price1=220	1.504	0.5578	0.411	2.597	7.272	1	0.007
price1=240	0.956	0.5262	-0.076	1.987	3.297	1	0.069
price1=250	1.099	0.5323	0.055	2.142	4.26	1	0.039
price1=270	1.609	0.6325	0.37	2.849	6.476	1	0.011
price1=280	1.609	0.6325	0.37	2.849	6.476	1	0.011

Table 7 Continued

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
price1=290	-1.17×10 ⁻¹³	1.0954	-2.147	2.147	0	1	1
price1=300	1.099	0.5578	0.005	2.192	3.879	1	0.049
price1=320	1.099	0.4976	0.123	2.074	4.874	1	0.027
price1=340	0.788	0.5394	-0.269	1.846	2.137	1	0.144
price1=350	-1.17×10 ⁻¹³	1.0954	-2.147	2.147	0	1	1
price1=360	0.693	0.8367	-0.947	2.333	0.686	1	0.407
price1=370	1.946	0.5855	0.798	3.094	11.044	1	0.001
price1=380	1.946	0.5855	0.798	3.094	11.044	1	0.001
price1=390	0.405	0.5578	-0.688	1.499	0.528	1	0.467
price1=400	0.405	0.7303	-1.026	1.837	0.308	1	0.579
price1=405	-1.17×10 ⁻¹³	1.0954	-2.147	2.147	0	1	1
price1=420	0	.	.	.	.	.	.
Scale	1						

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Every participant who spent a minimum of \$110 on their initial Burning Man ticket returned to the festival at least three times. Specifically, those who invested \$110 in their first ticket were present at the festival on 10 separate occasions. Attendees who were allocated between \$370 and \$380 for their inaugural ticket typically experienced the event more than seven times. However, unexpectedly, the majority of individuals who spent \$390 or more attended the festival only once, as detailed in Tables 8 and 9. This trend might suggest that wealthier attendees, despite spending a considerable amount of money on their first ticket, chose not to revisit the festival. One plausible reason could be that the festival's networking possibilities or amenities do not warrant substantial expenditures, leading some to opt out of attending a second time for this reason.

Table 8. Results of the Poisson regression model for the price of the first Burning Man ticket

Price of first ticket (\$)	0	110	120	160	180	195	200	220	240	250	270
0 Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
1 Count	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
% within price1	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	25.0%	0.0%
2 Count	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3 Count	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0
% within price1	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	40.0%	25.0%	0.0%
4 Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	20.0%	50.0%	0.0%
5 Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
7 Count	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
10 Count	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
% within price1	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Table 9. Results of the Poisson regression model for the price of consecutive Burning Man tickets

Price of first ticket (\$)	280	290	300	320	340	350	360	370	380	390	400	405	420
0	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%
1	0 0.0%	1 100.0%	1 33.3%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%	1 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 66.7%	1 50.0%	1 100.0%	3 60.0%
2	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	3 42.9%	3 60.0%	0 0.0%	1 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 16.7%	1 50.0%	0 0.0%	1 20.0%
3	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%	2 28.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
4	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 14.3%	1 20.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
5	1 100.0%	0 0.0%	1 33.3%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
7	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 100.0%	1 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
10	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%

Sources: developed by the authors based on our own survey data.

Furthermore, the price of the last ticket was not relevant in deciding whether to attend the Burning Man festival. Overall, our estimations revealed that people with high incomes did not necessarily choose to attend the Burning Man festival more often. On the other hand, the price of the first ticket proved to be relevant in explaining the decision to buy a consecutive ticket for the Burning Man event.

5. Discussion. The results of this study present an intriguing perspective on the Burning Man festival, challenging the common perception of it as an event primarily for the "hippie" demographic and instead positioning it as a luxurious experience potentially targeted at the upper social strata. The key findings from the regression model used in the study are as follows:

- First, our hypothesis on the correlation between income and attendance frequency was not verified. We did not find any significant correlation between personal income and the frequency of attending the Burning Man festival. This finding suggested that higher income does not necessarily predict a greater likelihood of attending a festival multiple times. Additionally, while the study considered demographic factors such as sex, level of education, and family status to be possible predictors of successive visits, we did not find these factors irrelevant in explaining the decision to attend the festival. This can be explained by the fact that the Burning Man has long profiled itself as a place where whole families can go, and children often attend the event with their parents (children aged 12 and under are admitted for free provided they are accompanied by their parent or legal guardian).

- Second, our study revealed that the first ticket price could be a predictor of attendance at the Burning Man festival. The price of the first ticket purchased for Burning Man was found to be a significant predictor of attendance frequency. This implies that initial financial investment during a festival influences the decision to attend it more frequently. In addition, this financial investment might easily become an emotional attachment that predetermines the decision to attend Burning Man more frequently in the future.

Furthermore, our empirical results revealed distinct patterns in attendance based on the price of the first ticket. For instance, all respondents who paid \$110 or more for their first ticket attended the festival at least three times. However, most respondents who paid at least \$390 attended only once, indicating that a higher ticket price does not guarantee repeated visits. In contrast to the first ticket price, the price at which the last ticket was purchased due to the Burning Man event appears to be irrelevant in determining whether to attend the festival again.

6. Conclusions. Our findings suggest that while the Burning Man might be seen as an expensive event, its appeal transcends simple economic stratification, as people from various income levels attend the festival. The significant role of the initial ticket price implies that the decision to repeatedly attend a Burning Man might be more related to the perceived value or experience of the festival rather than purely its cost. The fact that wealthier individuals do not necessarily attend more frequently could indicate that Burning Man's appeal is based on factors other than luxury or exclusivity. The lack of correlation between last ticket price and demographic variables such as gender, education, and family status further underscore that the festival's attraction might be rooted in unique personal or cultural factors rather than conventional socioeconomic determinants.

It should be mentioned that the Burning Man festival is full of instances where people overindulge in drugs, nudity, and obscenity, but the festival is also a hub where creative minds can congregate and show their art. The celebrated doctrine of self-reliance encompasses a concept in which all participants are given the power and responsibility of creating their individual visions in a natural unembellished environment, which promotes a high degree of collaboration and creativity. Artists involved in the festival are given the freedom to express themselves independently from a validating system that controls their work; they are free to fully express themselves in their artwork and creativity.

In addition, the Burning Man event itself and the larger interconnective network that is formed through the internet are used to expose the work done by artists to wider public audiences that are larger and more diverse. This may not necessarily be the case or the reality in the established art world whereby the self-limiting nature of the art world may make it hard for ordinary artists to carve out a niche for themselves. In so doing, it makes it possible for artists to directly market their work to interested parties. In this way, artists can subvert the existing marketplace altogether.

Therefore, even though the Burning Man festival may be perceived to be a hippie get-together rife with abnormalities such as public nudity and obscenity as well as activities such as drug indulgence, the festival is also an avenue through which creative minds are able to show off their craft away from the judging eyes of the rest of the world. The Burning Man is one of the most popular art festivals in the world, and this is good because it represents a platform for artists to share their creations and a place to meet for innovative, artistic, and creative people from all over the United States of America and around the whole world.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, G. R. and W. S.; methodology, W. S.; software, W. S.; validation, G. R. and W. S.; formal analysis, G. R. and W. S.; investigation, G. R. and W. S.; resources, G. R.; data curation, W. S.; writing-original draft preparation, G. R. and W. S.; writing-review and editing, G. R. and W. S.; visualization, W. S.; supervision, G. R.; project administration, W. S.; funding acquisition, G. R.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data availability statement: The data can be made available upon request.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all the subjects involved in the study.

References

- Brill, M. (2023). The first Year in the Desert. [\[Link\]](#)
- Brooks, C., & Soulard, J. (2022). Contested authentication: The impact of event cancellation on transformative experiences, existential authenticity at Burning Man. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 95, 103412. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Burning Man Project (2023a). On the Playa. [\[Link\]](#)
- Burning Man Project (2023b). Playa living. [\[Link\]](#)
- Chen, K. K. (2009). *Enabling creative chaos: The organization behind the Burning Man event*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- Choi, H., & Burnes, B. (2022). Market legitimation in countercultural market change. *Marketing Theory*, 22(1), 41-65. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Doherty, B. (2006). *This Is Burning Man*. Dallas: Benbella Books.
- Frey, B. S. (1994). The economics of music festivals. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 18(1), 29-39. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gilmore, L., & Van Proyen, M. (eds.). (2005). *AfterBurn: Reflections on Burning Man*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- John, G. S. (2017). Blazing grace: The gifted culture of burning man. *NANO: New American Notes Online*, 11, 1a-1a. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- Karlin, S. (2016). Burning man's tech mastermind. *IEEE Spectrum*, 53(1), 22-22. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Kay, G., Rains, T. & Hart, J. (2023). Charter planes are descending on the Nevada desert — and the pop-up Black Rock City airport — as tech bros and billionaires gather for Burning Man. [\[Link\]](#)
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from Burning Man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), 20-38. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kozinets, R. V., & Sherry Jr, J. F. (2004). Dancing on common ground: exploring the sacred at Burning Man. *Rave Culture and Religion*, 287-303. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- May, M. (2005). Theme Camps. [\[Link\]](#)
- McDowell, S., & Crooke, E. (2019). Creating liminal spaces of collective possibility in divided societies: Building and burning the Temple. *Cultural Geographies*, 26(3), 323-339. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Neuhofer, B., Egger, R., Yu, J., & Celuch, K. (2021). Designing experiences in the age of human transformation: An analysis of Burning Man. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 91, 103310. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rausser, G., Strielkowski, W., & Korneeva, E. (2021). Sustainable tourism in the digital age: Institutional and economic implications. *Terra Economicus*, 19(4), 141-159. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Robinson, R. (2015). 'No Spectators' at Burning Man. In: *Music Festivals and the Politics of Participation*, London: Routledge. [\[Link\]](#)
- Rowen, I. (2020). The transformational festival as a subversive toolbox for a transformed tourism: lessons from Burning Man for a COVID-19 world. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 695-702. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Shister, N. (2019). *Radical ritual: How Burning Man changed the world*. Berkeley: Catapult Press. [\[Google Scholar\]](#)
- Sprott, R. A., & Williams, D. J. (2019). Is BDSM a sexual orientation or serious leisure? *Current Sexual Health Reports*, 11, 75-79. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- St John, G. (2020). At home in the big empty: Burning man and the Playa sublime. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 13(3), 286-313. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Strielkowski, W. (2017). Social and economic implications for the smart grids of the future. *Economics and Sociology*, 10(1), 310-318. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Strielkowski, W. (2018). Lucrative Circus in the Desert: Economics of Burning Man. *Preprints*, 2018080399. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Tonga Uriarte, Y., Antognozzi, T., & Catoni, M. L. (2019). Investigating tourism impacts of festivals: an exploratory case study of a big-scale Comic-Con. *Event Management*, 23(6), 817-833. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Turner, F. (2009). Burning Man at Google: a cultural infrastructure for new media production. *New Media & Society*, 11(1-2), 73-94. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Vujičić, M. D., Šaćirović, D., Stankov, U., Ali, F., Kovačić, S., Besermenji, S., & Bratić, M. (2023). Emerging cities and travel motivation: A latent profile analysis approach. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 13567667231188872. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- White, C. L. (2013). *The Burning Man festival and the archaeology of ephemeral and temporary gatherings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [\[Google Scholar\]](#) [\[CrossRef\]](#)

Гордон Рауссер, професор, Університет Каліфорнії, США

Вадим Стрельковський, професор, Університет Каліфорнії, США; Чеський університет природничих наук у Празі, Чеська Республіка

Трансформація маркетингової парадигми фестивалю Burning Man

Ця стаття присвячена дослідженню еволюції маркетингової парадигми фестивалю Burning Man – від невеличкого обряду з вогнищем на пляжі Сан-Франциско у 1986 році до всесвітньовідомого мистецького фестивалю, який щорічно збирає понад 60 000 учасників (бернерів) в пустелі Блек-Рок (Невада, США) та приносить понад 8 мільйонів доларів виручки від продажу квитків та благодійних внесків (з моменту започаткування фестивалю встановлено обмеження на максимальну кількість учасників у зв'язку з необхідністю збереження навколишнього середовища та території, що знаходиться в межах Національної заповідної зони). Ставши джерелом натхнення для серії аналогічних фестивалів та менших заходів у різних куточках світу, від Литви до Іспанії (а навіть Ізраїлю), цей захід сприяв створенню та підтримці глобальної всесвітньої спільноти "Burning Man". Базу даних для дослідження було сформовано на основі понад 500 опитувань учасників фестивалю Burning Man з 2012 по 2018 роки. Метою статті є дослідження трансформації події Burning Man у високопрофільну мистецьку атракцію, яка має значні капіталовкладення, а її учасники є представниками

населення з високим рівнем доходів. На відміну від загально прийнятого уявлення, фестиваль Burning Man набув статусу не просто 'хіпівське' зібрання типу Вудсток, а елітного центру соціальної мережевої взаємодії, головним принципом якого є єднання розкоші та «радикального самовираження» учасників. У статті авторами систематизовано основні фактори, що негативно впливає на подальший розвиток фестивалю Burning Man. По-перше, емпіричні результати дослідження дозволили сформулювати висновок, що у середньому витрати учасників фестивалю Burning Man коливаються від 5 000 до 6 000 доларів США, що тим самим обмежує доступність до нього для осіб з низьким та середнім рівнями доходів. Крім того, авторами наголошено, що не дивлячись на те, що фестиваль Burning Man приваблює учасників своєю унікальністю, важкі умови пустелі виявилися обмежувачим фактором для повторних відвідувань, особливо серед учасників з високими рівнями доходів. Відповідно до отриманих результатів дослідження, автори наголошують на тому, що ця стаття вносить вклад у розуміння еволюції маркетингових підходів під час промоції та проведення мистецького фестивалю Burning Man, а також трансформацій у демографічному профілі його учасників та їх соціально-економічному портреті, розкриваючи особливості його ексклюзивності, а також економічних ефектів його етносу «радикального вираження». Отримані висновки мають практичне застосування для організаторів подій та маркетологів, сприяючи розробці стратегій, що враховують ексклюзивність та економічні виклики мистецького фестивалю.

Ключові слова: економічний аналіз; маркетинг фестивалю; соціальна стратифікація; елітні мережеві зв'язки; Burning Man.