

**Peak-nic Electronik: Following the Formation & Culmination of Social Atmospheres
Through Temporally and Spatially Spread Group Consumption Settings**

Christina Zaidan

A Thesis

in

John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Administration (Marketing)

Concordia University

Montreal, QC, Canada

March, 2023

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By: Christina Zaidan

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MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

complies with the regulations of this University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

_____ Chair

Dr. Sharlene He

_____ Examiner

Dr. Kamila Sobol

_____ Examiner

Dr. Sharlene He

_____ Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Zeynep Arsel

Approved by

Dr. Mrugank Thakor

Graduate Program Director

Kathleen Boies

Associate Dean

Date ____

ABSTRACT

Peak-nic Electronik: Following the Formation & Culmination of Social Atmospheres Through Temporally and Spatially Spread Group Consumption Settings

Christina Zeidan

Atmospheres crafted by a range of personal, social, and material stimuli imbue consumption spaces with “qualities of feeling” that inform consumers’ behaviors and emotions (Böhme, 2008; Hill et al., 2021). During collective live events, the experience of atmosphere is shared among the consumers present in the space. Through the lens of sociological interaction ritual theory, a four-stage process underlining the emergence and intensification of social atmospheres was conceptualized demonstrating how the entrainment of consumers’ emotions and behaviors by a shared focus results in lively expressions of collective effervescence (Hill et al., 2021). The interaction ritual chain informing the creation of the social atmosphere was only evaluated within the context of spatially and temporally bound collective live events, leaving out its exploration in live events whereby consumers flow through the space along their own timelines. My qualitative study uses the context of music festivals to examine this gap with research rooted in an ethnography of Piknic Electronik, a seasonal Montreal festival. My findings reveal how spatially and temporally spread contexts distract shared focus among the consumers present, weakening the intensification of the social atmosphere and breaking down the collective manifestation of effervescence into smaller, lower-intensity peaks experienced to different extents among attendees. For practitioners, this research provides insight into managing points of tension that interrupt consumers’ entrainment and facilitating the flow of social atmosphere build up through the design of atmospheric cues in seasonal music festival contexts.

Keywords: interaction ritual chains, social atmosphere, music festivals, group consumption

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to start off by thanking Dr. Zeynep Arsel for her unwavering support and understanding during all phases of this thesis. My work process as a neurodivergent person tends to fluctuate between intense highs and stressful lows. Over the past year, I also experienced circumstances that interrupted my daily life and forced me to take time off for recovery. Dr. Arsel nurtured a safe space by encouraging me to always consider my mental health first and going out of her way to match my work flow, despite the inconvenience it caused. I truly feel blessed to have had her as my advisor and will always be grateful to her for this milestone. Dr. Arsel, thank you for the fun conversations during our meetings. Thank you for your support during my lows. Thank you for making this process fun. For answering my late-night emails. For calming me down when I spiraled. And for being a wonderful mentor from the start.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my parents, without whom I wouldn't be here in Montreal completing a Masters' degree. They'll always be my lifeline and their continuous waves of warm love and encouraging words from across the ocean inspired me to complete this research during the hardest times. Every accomplishment in my life will always be a win for us as a family. Mom & dad, I'm so blessed to have you on my team. I'm also grateful to my sister who reminded me of my past accomplishments and renewed my faith in my abilities when I needed it the most. Thank you for always listening to my rants and cheering me on. To my brother, thank you for being on my team and virtually studying with me from Lebanon, suffering through your physics exam revisions while I suffered through late nights of writing.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends who encouraged me through the whole process. You distracted me a lot, but patiently listened to every rant and reminded me of the finish-line. I can't wait to celebrate with you.

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1. INTRODUCTION

From Woodstock and Glastonbury in the 1970s to current times' Tomorrowland, Cercle, and Brunch in The Park, music festivals are memorable extraordinary experiences of escapism, community, and self-actualization (Yolal et al., 2016; Brown and Sharpley, 2019). Festivals attract thousands of attendees by fostering a space of connection with the arts and musical immersion in aesthetic spaces in which facilities and stage set ups are designed to inspire a sense of "awe", triggering consumers' positive emotions and elevating them into a flow state of self-transcendence made possible by the event's aspect of spatial and temporal liminality (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To; 2020). In addition to the personal exploration of identity, festivals provide the space for the formation of *communitas*, bringing groups of people together through community interactions and cultivating feelings of belonging (Jahn et al., 2018). These experiences elicit feelings of highest happiness and fulfilment culminating in peaks of intense emotional energy (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To; 2020). As a result, festival contexts are charged with thick atmospheres of passion, elation, and positive energy that inform consumers' movement through the space leaving lasting emotional impressions, driving them to seek such experiences again and again. Research into different aspects of festival experiences have permeated literature on marketing, hospitality, and event management. Festivals have been examined from the context of the transformation economy, bridging literature on experience design and positive psychology to guide practitioners in designing consumption spaces that elicit positive human experiences (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To; 2020). Research spanned the economic impact of music festivals on the region in which they're hosted (Leenders, 2005), the social community networks formed as a result of on-site communal place-making (Jarman, 2018), and the social meanings behind the

proliferation of illicit substances through rave settings (Goulding et al., 2009). The tangible and intangible factors behind the success of music festivals were also explored, revealing that brand features such as image, atmosphere, and emotions attract attendance and cultivate a loyal consumer base (Leenders, 2010). On a similar note, research on festival attendance and behavior highlight that adjunct aspects of music festivals beyond the music itself, namely atmosphere and socializing aspects, are of prime importance to consumers' decisions to participate (Gelder & Robinson, 2009; Ballantyne, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2014). However, despite the proved relevance of atmosphere on festival attendees' consumption of such events, existing research has yet to be conducted on the factors underlying the formation and flow of atmosphere through the event grounds. My research seeks to explore this gap by following Hill et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of social atmosphere formation through a four-phased interaction ritual chain. This process begins in private spaces, flows through the service ecosystem, and culminates in the event space as consumers detect a shared focus among each other resulting in the subconscious entrainment of their behaviors and emotions (Hill et al., 2021). Hill et al.'s research (2021) on social atmospheres followed its formation in spatially and temporally bound settings where ritual participants consume the same event along a single timeline, such as a football game or a concert. My research rooted in the context of music festivals entails more spatially and temporally porous consumption spaces that participants flow through along their own schedules, providing a different experience of social atmosphere formation along the dispersed masses. Thus, my research question is as follows: how do interaction ritual chains unfold in contexts characterized by spatial and temporal flux and what factors inform the intensification and dilution of group social atmospheres?

The exploration of this research question is supported by an ethnography on Piknic Electronik, a seasonal Montreal music festival. My data set consists of in-depth interviews, participant observation sessions, and secondary data. This study informs literature on atmospherics in music festival contexts as the factors influencing the formation of social atmospheres are examined. It enriches work on interaction ritual theory by following the formation of interaction ritual chains through less structured group consumption contexts characterized by a spatial and temporal flux. For practitioners, this research sheds light on the factors distracting shared focus among consumers and offers recommendations for the alleviation of such points of tension, leaving space for social atmosphere to intensify and culminate in emotional energy that resonate with consumers and drive attendance in future events.

The remainder of this thesis flows as follows. First, extant literature exploring atmospherics and interaction ritual chains is discussed to contextualize the gap that my research bridges. Next is the research context section where the reasons informing the choice of Piknic Electronik as a research angle are discussed. The following section highlights the methodology for data collection before the findings are revealed. Finally, limitations and future avenues of research are brought forth after the discussion of this study's implications in theory and in practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Atmospheres

Atmospheres' reflections of consumers' embodied experiences within various consumption settings has rendered them a valuable avenue of research across multiple streams of marketing literature (Hill et al., 2014; Steadman et al., 2021). However, their exploration proved

challenging due to their “uncertain, disordered, shifting,” and “indeterminate” nature (Anderson, 2009: 78-79; Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2012: 170).

Returning to the roots of the word, *atmos* highlights the tendency of a quality to fill up a space much like gas or vapor, while *sphere* indicates the spatial organization into a circular shape, implying the spatial settings that make up the world where people interact and exist (Anderson, 2009). Thus, atmospheres are, in essence, “qualities of feeling” that fill up a space as a result of various personal, social, and material stimuli (Böhme, 2008; Steadman et al., 2021: p.136).

Consumers’ individual emotions, visible expressions of affect and demeanor, interrelationships, and social dynamics interweave with the various physical and sensory stimuli making up a space to culminate in a curated experience of place that informs an atmosphere (Hill et al., 2021).

Atmospheres are at the intersection of the subjective and objective (Anderson, 2009), infusing consumers’ moods while simultaneously being extensions of consumers’ own emotional states as established by Böhme (2002) who later posited that an atmosphere is null without the “sentient subject” (Böhme, 2008: 2). In addition to extant work exploring the link between affect and atmosphere, a dimension of corporeality is discussed under the new aesthetics school of thought, which highlights that one “breathes the aura” of an atmosphere, absorbing it bodily (Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2012: 170) all while contributing to its formation. Anderson (2009) contends that atmospheres never fully achieve a final form – they are “perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another” (p. 79). As they emerge and transfer, they become part of the subjects’ feelings and emotions, and these feelings and emotions may then feed back into the atmosphere itself, contributing to its continuous flow (Anderson, 2009) as it radiates off one person to the other. To illustrate, a warm atmosphere of

being with old friends can turn cold and tense upon seeing the arrival of a scorned ex-lover to the reunion event.

Atmospheres comprise the background of everyone's daily life, but "rather than being inert, ephemeral" backdrops, they potently influence our experiences and movement within spaces by facilitating or restricting certain practices, thus defining our structures of feeling (Bissell, 2010, p. 272). "Ethereal" yet "palpable" (McCormack, 2008: p. 418), they permeate all spatial contexts but in various degrees of intensity (Bissell, 2010). Some atmospheres can be powerful enough to draw us in and "take possession of us like an alien power" (Böhme, 2008: 3; Anderson, 2009) while others diffuse through the air, affecting our bodies and emotions to a lesser extent (Edensor, 2012). Perceptions of atmospheres provide context for the social setting one is present in, informing behavior and generating events, actions, feelings, and emotions (Bissell, 2010). The potency of atmosphere on behaviour has spurred the academic and commercial exploration of "atmospherics", which entail the effort of designing consumption settings that instill specific emotional affect in consumers for the purpose of enhancing purchase probability (Steadman et al., 2021). Retail and service atmospherics literature is anchored in Bitner's 1992 servicescape model that set the stage for influencing consumer behavior in service environments by encouraging the consideration of atmospheric variables such as spatial layout, ambient conditions, and physical cues such as signs, symbols, artefacts (Steadman et al., 2021). In addition to these material considerations, marketing research found that interactions between service staff and customers socially construct atmosphere (Arnould & Price, 1993; Hill et al., 2021) leading to a stream of literature promoting the enactment of service performances to transform places into "separate and contained worlds" (Kozinets et al., 2004, p. 662). Building on the theorizations of these "contained worlds", most literature on the importance of material

considerations in atmospherics conceived atmospheres as confined within spatially bound service environments, characterizing them as enclosed, managerially controllable entities, and guiding atmospheric interventions within the present service encounter (Dacko, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021). However, recent research posits the porous nature of consumption environments with atmospheric boundaries permeable to the influence of past experiences and anticipations of the future (Steadman et al., 2021). In other words, consumers' experience of atmospheres within a consumption setting are molded by their experiences inside and outside of the place on a spatial note, and during and beyond the encounter on a temporal note (Steadman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, extant research uncovered social dimensions to crafting atmospheres as consumers were found to have individual experiences of firm-led atmospheric interventions while also informing each other's experiences of atmosphere by their mere presence, absence, and interactions in consumption settings (Dacko, 2012; Steadman et al., 2021). A predominant citation in this research avenue would be Tombs & McColl-Kennedy's "social-servicescapes model" (2003) that discusses how atmospheres are collectively generated and experienced in consumption settings with high social density. However, the literature leaves out the contexts in which consumers share atmospheric experiences in groups, such as at football stadiums, nightclubs, music festivals, and religious ceremonies. Hill et al. (2021) addressed this gap, examining the factors underlying the creation of group experiences of atmosphere by basing their research on extant work relating to consumer co-creation of place experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993), consumption rituals (Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002), convivial "spirits of place" (Bradford & Sherry, 2015; Higgings & Hamilton, 2019), and socially-constructed place attachments (Borghini, Sherry, & Joy, 2020; Seamon, 2018). Extending literature on the emergence and dissipation of social experiences (Coffin &

Chatzadakis, 2021; Hill, Canniford, & Mol, 2014) and intensifications of shared emotion and behavior (Goulding et al., 2009; Kozinets, 2002), they applied Collins' theory of Interaction Rituals (2004) to uncover the tensions causing atmospheres to fail, and thus, how the social dimensions of atmosphere can be managed to alleviate these tensions. Their study was explored within the context of a football stadium, but their findings are said to be applicable to social atmospheres in large, organized events such as music festivals as well. While the grounding of Hill et al.'s (2021) research on Interaction Ritual theory acknowledges the porous nature of atmospheres whereby past experiences inform consumer behaviors and engagement in future experiences, their work exclusively caters to group atmospheres conceived within spatially and temporally bound service environments in which a shared focus is predominant and a unified timeline of events is experienced by all consumers. In other words, their findings apply to recurring events with a "main act" that all consumers are simultaneously tuned into, albeit with varying perceptions of intensity and feelings of passion. Other than live sports games, typifying such consumption contexts are concerts, ceremonies, and theatrical performances. Group social atmospheres in spaces where consumers flow freely along their own timelines within a place are excluded from this narrative. Notably, group consumption contexts characterized by a spatial and temporal flux (such as music festivals, carnivals, amusement parks) have yet to be examined under this lens.

I thus extend Hill et al.'s findings (2021) on the creation and maintenance of group social atmospheres to a spatially and temporally spread context through the lens of music festivals, namely Piknic Electronik, a seasonal Montreal-based music festival. The relevance of this particular music festival for my study is discussed in the "**Context**" section to come. Returning to the discussion on variance in atmospheric intensity, Casey (2001) distinguishes between

“thick” and “thin” places, where “thick” places are imbued with a sensual, emotional, and affective belonging cultivated over time through repetitive embodied engagement (Edensor, 2012). To explore the factors underlying the collective experience of these “thick” atmospheric contexts, I will follow Hill et al. (2021) conceptualization of Collins’ (2004) Interaction Ritual theory to inform the social processes behind consumers’ participation in repetitive embodied behaviors that generate atmospheres.

2.2 Interaction Ritual Chains

Hill et al.’s (2021) conceptualization of interaction ritual chains is based on Collins’ (2004) interaction ritual theory. With foundations in Durkheim’s sociology of religion, Collins’ original Interaction Ritual theory (2004) depicts interaction rituals as a set of causally connected processes informed by feedback loops. The interaction ritual (seen in **Figure 1**) has four main ingredients that serve as initiating conditions, a key process, and four outcomes whose intensity depends on the extent that the ingredients were successfully combined. Interaction rituals are spurred when a high degree of intersubjectivity (in other words, a mutual focus of attention) among two or more people present in a consumption setting is combined with a high degree of “emotional entrainment”, observed through emotional and behavioral synchronizations (Collins, 2004: p. 42). Such situations culminate in high points of collective experiences defined as “collective effervescence”. Termed by Durkheim (1995) and adopted by Collins (2004), “collective effervescence” describes moments of intensified passion and powerful sensations when ritual participants become “hyper excited” (Durkheim, 1995: p. 424), resulting in feelings of group membership, positive emotional energy, the formation of sacred, group-related symbols, and heightened feelings of morality (Collins, 2004).

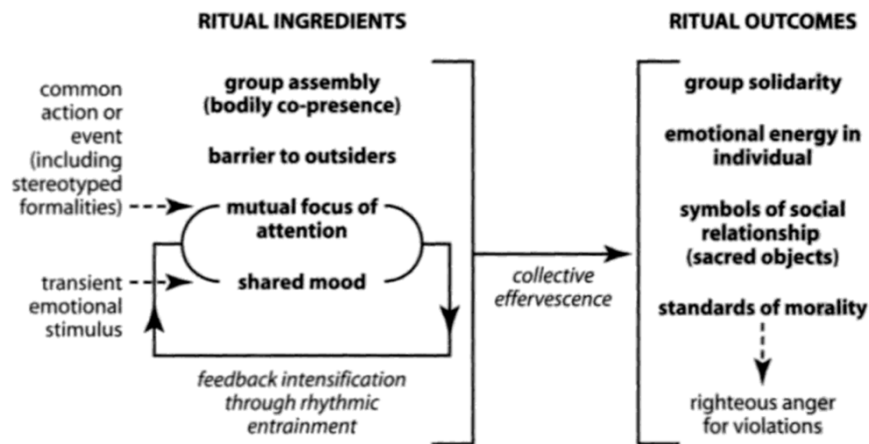


Figure 1 - Collins' interaction ritual chain (2004)

In essence, this sociological theory follows how emotions are intensified into emotional energy that inform consumers' participation in future rituals. Interaction ritual theory has guided academic research across multiple disciplines since its conceptualization and remains a widely relevant precedent for academic research. Recent work rooted in interaction ritual theory uncovered how hospitality services can take on a transformative role in inspiring people towards socio-mental resistance, as observed through heightened levels of group solidarity, emotional energy, and morality (Wong et al., 2023). Presenting a widely adopted international training competition in the field of law (Jean-Pictet Competition) as an interaction ritual, researchers in humanitarian law found that conscious engagement with emotions, reflected by high emotional energy, has the potential to enhance the compliance with and development of international humanitarian law (Sutton & Buis, 2023). Furthermore, Scheffels et al. (2023) analyzed the prevalent use and social meaning of vaping among Nordic teenagers to find that its consumption stands out as a social interaction ritual not only in physical social settings but also in teenagers' digital lives, which helps health practitioners and lawmakers control its widespread across young, impressionable generations.

Hill et al. (2021) source this theory to examine the creation of shared behavior and emotions during collective live events. Their findings can be observed in **Figure 2** which illustrates how the creation of social atmospheres begins in private spaces before its climax in the event space and build up / recovery in the service ecosystem (Hill et al., 2021).

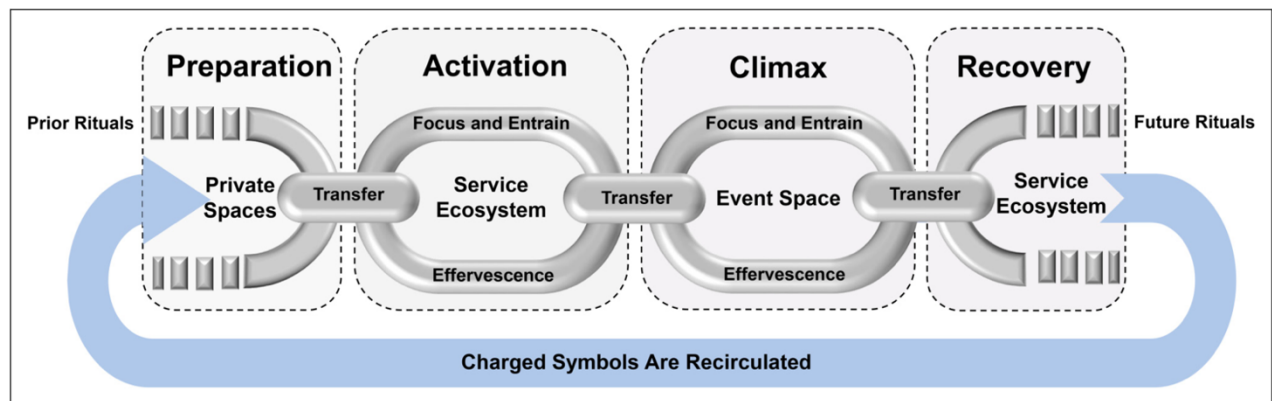


Figure 2 - Social atmosphere formation through interaction ritual chains (Hill et al., 2021)

The process begins at the **Preparation** phase during which consumers engage in mood-setting activities in private spaces, such as when veteran ritual participants teach newer consumers the behaviors they're expected to enact (Hill et al., 2021). This phase also includes the creation of visual and aural symbols that represent the participants' alignment with the ritual as well as the rehearsal of "entrained behaviors" (Hill et al., 2021: p. 127). Entrained behaviors involve the stimulation of common emotional responses, vocalizations, and movements which reflect the alignment of behaviors and emotions among ritual participants (Hill et al., 2021). The next phase, **Activation**, begins to shape when shared focus and entrainment condense individual consumers to small groups at the site of the service ecosystem. Next, in the step Hill et al. (2021) termed "intensification through collective mobility" (p. 127), emotional energy gets charged up as crowds gather and move towards the event space together. Upon arrival to the entrance, strong feelings of past emotional experiences are activated, spurred by objects and symbols that activate

memories of past social atmospheres (Hill et al., 2021; Higgins and Hamilton, 2019; Sherry et al., 2001). Collective live events culminate in an **Atmospheric Climax** in the third stage of social atmosphere creation. This climax can either be “formal”, the result of firm-led activities uniting participants’ focus and triggering entrainment through a spectacle, or “natural”, when consumers’ expressions of shared emotions spread through the crowd, spontaneously uniting them and forming social atmospheres (Hill et al., 2021). In the final stage of **Recovery**, these experiences of collective effervescence charge up symbolic objects related to the ritual, which then store this emotional energy, inspiring ritual participants to consume the experience again. A summary of these findings can be found in **Table 1**.

Preparation	Activation	Climax	Recovery
• Learning to participate • Making symbolic resources • Rehearsing entrained behaviours	• Activating focus & entrainment • Intensification through collective mobility • Activating prior emotional experiences	• Formal climax • Natural climax	• Emotionally charged objects • Remembering atmosphere

Table 1 - Social atmosphere creation in collective live events (Hill et al., 2021)

Hill et al.’s (2021) research thus explores how group dynamics impact alignments of behavior and emotion during the consumption of collective live events, and how group activities in one space reflect on the atmosphere in different parts of the service ecosystem. However, as discussed earlier, their work is exclusively applicable to events experienced within a unified timeline and a singular shared focus. Hence, my research question seeks to extend their findings to explore how interaction ritual chains unfold in contexts characterized by spatial and temporal flux, informing the factors behind the intensification and dilution of group social atmospheres.

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.1 Music Festivals

To understand how atmosphere is constructed in collective live consumption experiences characterized by a spatial and temporal spread, I focus on the context of music festivals. As put forth by Packer & Ballantyne's (2011) conceptual model, there are multiple layers to the enjoyment of music festivals: the social experience allowing for interactions among attendees, the music which serves as the common ground for attendance, the experience of separation from everyday life, and finally, the festival's atmosphere (Ballantyne, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2014). This highlights the diversity of experiences sought by loyal music festival lovers.

While typically hosting a “main act” that most consumers are tuned into, music festivals provide attendees with the freedom to wander around the event grounds as they consume live music, activities, substances, food, and social experiences at the intensity of their choosing during the time of their choosing (Skandalis et al., 2021). Across the world, most music festivals host a large line up of DJs spread out over a minimum of two stages with performances beginning at various times during the day or night. **Figure 3** showcases the DJ line-up across seven different stages at DGTL, an international techno music festival taking place in multiple locations across the world with events in Amsterdam, São Paulo, Mumbai, and other cities. Festival attendees customize their visits to catch their preferred DJs, experience all stages, or choose a favorite scene and stay there for their entire stay. This sense of agency offered by music festivals characterizes them as spaces of both individual and collective consumption (Steadman et al.,

2021) as well as temporally and spatially spread contexts, making them an interesting avenue of research with regards to the creation of group social atmospheres.

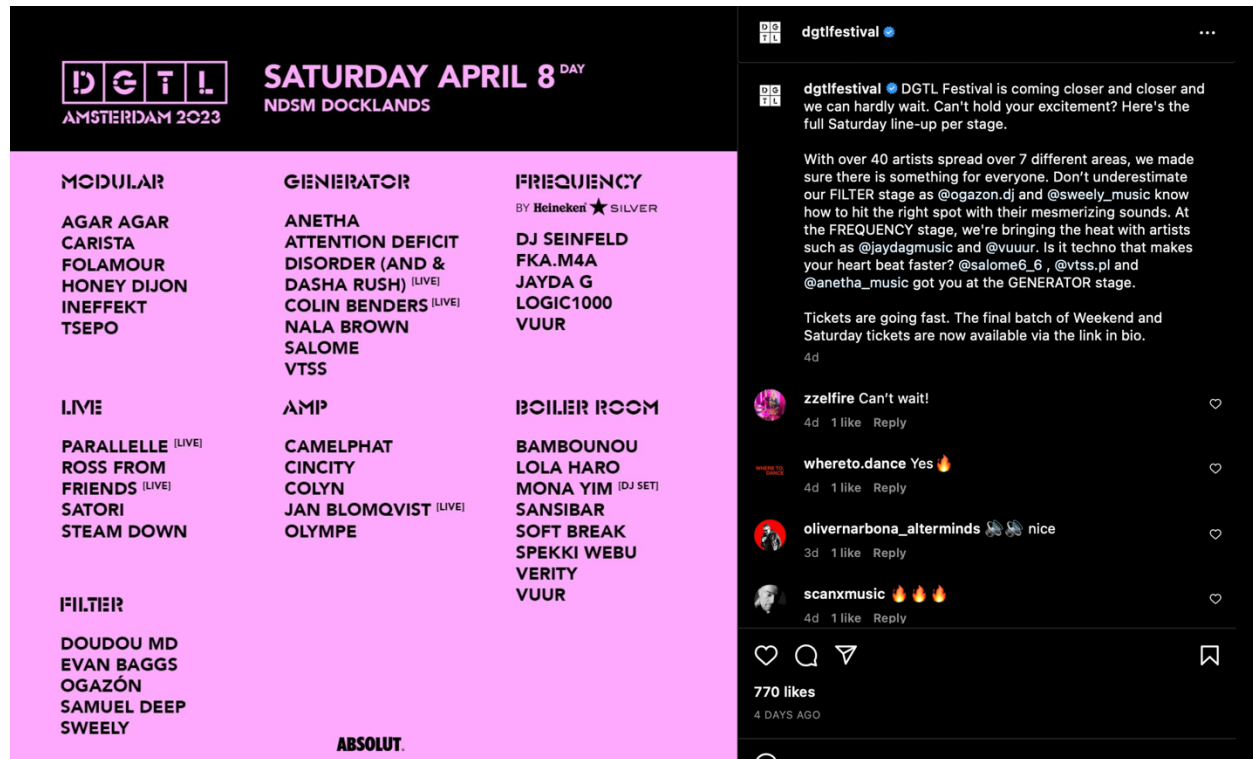


Figure 3 - Screenshot from DGTL's Instagram account revealing their artist line-up

3.2 Piknic Electronik

To explore my research question, my work takes on the scope of Piknic Electronik, a seasonal festival taking place in Montreal from late spring until early fall. Their tagline boasts “Your Rhythm Ritual” as they encourage attendees to “put adulting on hold” and head over to Parc Jean Drapeau, the site of the event since its conception (Piknic Electronik official website, 2022). Parc Jean Drapeau is the third largest park in Montreal, spread across two islands across the shore from the Old Port. It’s accessible by all forms of public transportation including bus, metro, and even maritime shuttles. The site can be accessed by biking across the Saint Lawrence River and by car as well, with parking spots and bike racks available onsite. This festival is an

exemplar case in the exploration of collective social atmosphere creation for several reasons.

Retrieved from the “About Us” section of the festival’s website, the following messaging summarizes Piknic Electronik’s branding, mission, and relevance:

Piknic Electronik Montreal is an outdoor electronic music event aiming to offer immersive, social experiences in a friendly environment. Located in an urban park just 10 minutes from downtown Montréal [Parc Jean Drapeau], it brings together thousands of electronic music enthusiasts every Sunday from May to September. Piknic Electronik’s diverse programming has made it a highlight of the Montreal summer cultural circuit for over 15 years.

As proclaimed, Piknic Electronik is a “summer ritual” for Montrealers, Canadians, and international guests alike. Long anticipated by its attendees, the festival signals the start of the summer season with its first event scheduled towards the end of May. Around April, the festival’s marketers utilize footage from past events to promote the upcoming edition and drop the seasonal line-up, opening tickets up for purchase and offering multiple packages. Pricing is reasonable true to the brand’s mission of being an inclusive event. This pricing strategy, in addition to the festival’s proximity to the city and accessibility by Montreal’s metro system, factors into its convenient nature for most Montrealers, enforcing it as a ritual for both its loyal and casual attendees. Adding to the inclusion factor and diversifying the customer base, Piknic Electronik has a “Petit Piknic” section where parents can drop their kids off to the care of counsellors to enjoy books and activities while the grownups party. This is possible due to Piknic Electronik’s unique timing. Events usually take place on Sundays with gates opening at 2PM and the last DJ set ending between 9:30 – 11PM “to ensure everyone is fresh for the office Monday morning”, as reported in the messaging on their website. This daytime scheduling offers attendees the opportunity to enjoy a laidback, summer day while also partying intensely after the

ritual chains manifest in collective consumption settings. The event schedule from 2PM until 9:30PM creates to the temporally spread aspect of the context as participants are able to relatively consume the same experience at the time of their choosing and for the duration of their choice. The wealth of services available on the event grounds and its division across two stages creates the spatially spread aspect as consumers can choose to indulge in the activities of their choosing while at the event. Both of these characteristics are possible as there's no main event to which attendees must attune to or direct their focus on. Thus, the consumption of Piknic Elektronik is temporally and spatially porous.

4. METHODOLOGY

I investigated Piknic Elektronik's atmospherics using a qualitative approach, with a combination of the following ethnographic analysis methods: fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and secondary data. The data was collected over a span of seven months (August 2022 until February 2023) and captured festival goers' experiences and interactions within the service ecosystem. The data set comprises 11 interviews, 5 field sessions of participant observation, and 20 pages of secondary data collected from online resources. The scope of the study was limited to Montreal and the atmospheres observed were of the 2021 / 2022 editions of the festival. Participant observation sessions were conducted on Piknic Elektronik's festival grounds during the summer of 2022 and later, at Igloofest in January 2023. In terms of secondary data collection, I filtered out all sources related to the festival's Melbourne, Santiago, and Miami editions and relied on sources that clearly referenced the Montreal edition.

The data collection process occurred as follows: first, I collected secondary data through an online scan of the brands' own social media posts from the past, PR publications, and a deep

dive into all branded media posted to establish a clear understanding of Piknic Electronik as a festival (value proposition, mission, positioning, history, sponsors...). Second, I engaged in participant observation sessions during different weekends of the festival. After the season had concluded, I conducted interviews with festival attendees to gain insights into consumers' lived experiences of the event and anchor the data derived from the fieldnotes. Finally, I collected another round of secondary data from online conversations, user-generated media, and Piknic Electronik's social media posts before examining them and merging them with my data.

4.1 Primary Data

4.1.a Participant Observation

To establish a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Piknic Electronik's atmosphere, I attended the event on three Sundays and one Saturday between August and October 2022, arriving at various times given that the event starts at 2PM and ends at 9PM. The experience was known to differ between daytime and nighttime. During the daytime, it was all about a nature escape during the warm summer weather, with the music being an added benefit rather than the main driver of attendance. The daytime experience encompassed lounging on the grass, dancing, enjoying a picnic, exploring the food trucks, and playing the on-grounds games as electronic music filled up the air. During the nighttime, the focus was more about the music element as the more anticipated (and in general, more known / celebrated) DJs were scheduled for the evenings. The crowds in front of the Videotron & Boisé stages become more condensed and there was less of a focus on any of the other Piknic offerings (food trucks, lounging areas, on grounds games...).

The difference also extends to Saturday's events in comparison to Sunday's, as events on Saturday are part of "OFF-Piknic" where the headliners are international DJs as opposed to the local, lesser-known artists typically headlining on regular Piknic Sundays. International DJs drive a higher attendance resulting in much bigger crowds at the event. The spirit with which festival goers experience the event differs as well, as there's more anticipation and excitement than for a regular Piknic Sunday. The main reason for attending OFF-Piknic is typically watching the international DJs live, rather than experiencing Piknic Electronik for the ambiance it offers. The music is more likely to be (or be perceived) as better than a regular Piknic as well, given that a widely loved international artist is behind it.

Of my participant observation sessions at Piknic Electronik, two highlight my experience attending the festival with friends while the other two highlight my experience attending alone, solely for the purpose of participant observation. While with friends, I experienced and enjoyed the event for myself. I was able to record my own organic feelings and insights about the levels of atmospheric immersion afforded at the space. While attending solo purely for research purposes, I was able to experience the event as a fly on the wall, observing other actors' reactions, interactions, and experiences within the service ecosystem. Having both perspectives enriched my understanding of the atmospheric dynamics, Piknic Electronik's community of attendees, and the varying motives behind attending the event.

My participant observation sessions roughly amounted to 14 hours. After each session, I wrote a rich field report recounting my observations. This data revealed festival attendees' interactions with different stimuli within the space as well as other members in the community, capturing instances of co-production / destruction of atmosphere. I supplemented my observations with photographs and videos that documented sensory aspects of the experience. The media were then

documented in separate folders and each batch was linked to the specific site visit and corresponding fieldnotes. In total, I wrote 33 pages of expanded fieldnotes supported by 43 pictures and videos recorded onsite.

To record these firsthand experiences, I jotted down brief observations on my iPhone Notes app while at the event and expanded them upon returning home, with context support from memory. My quick jots recounted descriptions of the space, people’s demeanors and behaviors, overheard conversations, and observations of crowd dynamics (directional flow, crowd energy, crowd oneness, reception to stimuli) across all settings in the service ecosystem. An example of the note-taking process can be observed in **Table 2**.

On-Grounds Notes	Excerpts from Fieldnotes
awkward older couple standing at crowd periphery sheepish slight head bobs	<i>“On the right side of the wall, a couple of middle-aged white men were huddled together. It seemed like they were giving the place a shot - sheepishly trying to enjoy the music and the Piknic vibes.”</i>
friends in circle group dance guy in the middle break dancing friends cheering from the circle one guy pulled phone flashlight spotlight vibes	<i>“A group of friends in the middle of the dance floor formed a circle around a guy who did a little break dance situation. They were all hyping him up while one of the friends flashed a smartphone flashlight over him, bobbing it energetically to create a strobe light effect over his friend.”</i>

Table 2 - Excerpts from participant observation session notes and fieldnotes

I’m particularly dexterous when typing on my iPhone keyboard, so using the Notes app was the most efficient and convenient method. After the event, I was able to automatically access the Notes entry on my laptop since it’s stored on a shared iCloud between my devices, which allowed for a seamless experience when expanding my quick jots. Given that the setting was a music festival, I could not resort to other methods of documentation. On one hand, audio

recordings were ruled out due to the loud atmosphere. On the other hand, handwritten scribbles on a notepad were not practical. Furthermore, scribbling on a notepad in the middle of the dancefloor would have made me stand out from the crowd. To ensure a thorough observation, I wanted to blend in with the participants. That said, just having my Notes app brightly lit on my cellphone screen in the middle of a dancing crowd did indeed make me feel like I was sticking out. It even warranted some quizzical glances from other attendees. Whenever I would feel too perceived by others in the crowd around me, I would walk over to a different spot and continue observing from there. The reason was that I did not want to alter anyone else's experience by making them feel as though they were being surveilled.

In January 2023, I attended Igloofest, Montreal's winter festival ritual and "the coldest music festival in the world" as per their tagline. This festival is organized by the same management company as Piknic Electronik and shares the exact same branding style but with a winter feel. The context is similar to the summer festival: both events have two stages, share the same protocol (entrance procedure, items prohibited on grounds, card payments only) and offerings (branded items, alcohol shacks by the same sponsors, on-grounds activities). While Piknic Electronik occurred every weekend from May until October, Igloofest covered five weekends only, starting in January. The event timing differs as well – Igloofest starts at 7:30PM and ends at 12:30AM – but both end relatively early compared to other music festivals. The main difference (other than the stark contrast in weather conditions) is that Igloofest is exclusively like OFF-Piknic, with only international DJs headlining and lesser-known local or international artists as opening acts. Experiencing this event shed further insights on Piknic Electronik's atmospherics.

I attended with friends and undertook the same fieldwork procedure of observing, recording photographs and videos, jotting down quick notes on my Notes app, and expanding my scribbles into fieldnotes upon returning home from the event.

Igloofest accommodated a much larger audience as the festival grounds was spread out over the Quays of Old Port and the atmosphere was arguably more intensified than was observed at Piknic Electronik. The main factor was that, while other on-grounds activities such as photo booths and bonfires were offered at the winter festival, the main focus for all attendees was watching the international artists perform.

To conclude, my research session at Igloofest added 7 pages of fieldnotes, 6 videos, and 4 photographs, bringing my participant observation data to a total of 40 pages of fieldnotes and 53 pieces of visual recorded media.

4.1.b In-depth Interviews

Seeking insights into attendees' experiences of atmosphere, 11 interviews were conducted between October 2022 and February 2023, after Piknic Electronik had closed for the season. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of why community members attended the event, how they perceived the festival, what their experience was across all spaces in the service ecosystem, what resonated with them, the points of tension they encountered, and how they perceived other festival attendees. To sum up, I sought to use participants' narratives to examine the presence and intensity of Piknic Electronik's interaction ritual chain.

Concordia University's ethical research procedures were complied with, and the study was approved by the University's Ethics Committee prior any interaction with interview participants. To recruit interview participants, I relied on my network of acquaintances as well as online

forums. First, I posted an Instagram Story from my personal account and asked whether people who had been to Piknic Electronik this summer or the year before were interested in discussing their experiences. Next, I posted on two active Facebook groups whose members were students, which would make them more likely to have attended the festival. Finally, I moved on to Reddit. I tried to post on the “*r/montreal*” forum as it would have the most reach and most diverse following, but I was blocked by the moderators as they don’t allow surveys or recruitment posts. I then decided to use the “*r/Osheaga*” forum after failing to find any Piknic Electronik-specific forum. Osheaga is another big summer festival anticipated by Montrealers every year, so I figured the audience there would match my target as they would be interested in music festivals and would have most likely attended Piknic Electronik at some point. From the list of responses I received, I secured a sample of 11 participants – 4 from my personal network, 5 from Facebook groups, and 2 from Reddit. To ensure experience recollection, I only chose volunteers who had attended Piknic Electronik during the 2021 or 2022 editions. The sample demographics can be seen in **Table 2** and all participant recruitment posts can be found in **Appendix A**.

Aa Pseudonym	Age Range	Occupation	Type of Visit	Frequency of Visits	Commitment	Driver of Attendance
Matt (M)	mid-20s	Masters' Student	with friends	2-3 times per seasons	Casual	Outing with Friends
Pearl (F)	mid-20s	Supply Chain Consultant	with friends	between 15-20 times across the last two summers	Regular	Outing with Friends
Ralph (M)	mid-20s	Tax Consultant	with friends	2-3 times per season	Casual	Outing with Friends
Greg (M)	mid-20s	Agricultural Demand Planner	with friends alone	between 15-20 times across the last two summers	Passionate Regular	Socializing
Beth (F)	mid-20s	Accounting Student	with friends	frequently, except for the most recent edition	Regular Passionate	Outing with Friends
Aaron (M)	early 20s	Finance Student	with friends alone	10 visits out of the total 13 events	Regular Passionate	Music
Jake (M)	early 30s	Finance Student	with friends	2-3 times per season	Passionate	Music
Clemence (M)	early 20s	Urban Planning Student	with friends	3 times this past season	Casual	Outing with Friends
Marsha (F)	mid-20s	Mechanical Engineer	with friends	2-3 times per season	Indifferent	Outing with Friends
Mary (F)	mid-20s	Actress	with friends	frequently, except for the most recent edition	Regular	Socializing
Rob (NB)	early 20s	Server	with friends	once	Casual	Socializing

Table 3 - Sample of Participants

To maintain informants' anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to interviewees while the gender identity with which they present is revealed. The sample consisted of attendees with varying degrees of devotion to Piknic and music festivals in general, as observed in the **Commitment** column. While some were casual attendees who sought a fun outing in the sun and appreciated Piknic for its convenience and chill nature, others were driven by the desire to party to their favorite DJs live and expressed their passion for attending raves and music festivals. The latter were labeled with "Passionate" as being a Piknic "Regular" did not always entail a deep love of electronic music and rave settings. Only one participant (Interviewee #9) expressed a nonchalance towards the festival, likening it to any other night out with friends at a club setting. This information also informs the **Type of Visit** column, which addresses whether attendees visit the festival alone or exclusively with other friends. Furthermore, respondents were of various professional backgrounds. Some were still students while others were either early in their careers or seasoned in their roles. All student respondents reported working alongside their studies over the summer, either in internships, full-time industry roles, or part-time gigs (ex. Jake was a Bank Teller, Beth worked in event gigs over the summer for pocket money, Aaron worked at a family firm as an Investment Analyst). This information proved necessary because it highlighted the varying degrees of convenience participants felt Piknic afforded re: the festival's day-time / Sunday schedule. Additionally, conversations with participants proved that attendees were driven to attend the laidback festival for a variety of needs as observed in the **Driver of Attendance** column. Finally, participants were spread out along the 20s age range with the youngest being 21 years old and the oldest being 31 years old.

Having researched the foundations of Piknic Electronik as a Montreal ritual and experienced it through multiple participant observations sessions, I was able to begin designing the interview

protocol following Arsel's (2017) guidelines. The main research question was loosely defined around observing the presence of Piknic Electronik's interaction ritual chain and participants' shared experiences of atmosphere. The interview questions were semi-standardized, allowing for open discussions and follow-up probes. Some of the latter had been predefined in the interview protocol to ensure that all key concepts are covered during the session, while others arose naturally based on the narratives shared. After two interviews, the data (in addition to the netnography collected at that point and the past four fieldnotes) was triangulated in comparison to Hill et al.'s (2021) theory on atmospheric intensification within interaction ritual chains. This reflexive approach allowed for a reassessment of the original interview protocol to ensure richer data collection in the following interviews. The "analyze, revise, repeat" (Arsel, 2017) principle was then applied after every third new interview, leading to a compact final interview protocol of 20 general questions and 26 follow up prompts, related to the following themes:

1. Demographic information (lifestyle, hobbies, interests, partying habits...)
2. Relationship with Piknic Electronik
3. Preparation for event attendance
4. Experience on event grounds
5. Commute to and from event

The interview protocol can be found in **Appendix B**.

All interviewees were asked variations of questions around these six key concepts, with custom probes to derive deeper answers.

The interviews averaged a duration of 45 minutes with the shortest being 20 minutes (conducted with the indifferent attendee) and the longest being 90 minutes, though most were scattered around the mean, as seen in **Appendix C**. The interviews were conducted in a hybrid format for

participants' convenience – some were over Zoom while others in person across various places in Montreal. At the beginning of each interview, I shared the Consent Form with the interviewee and explained the context of the study (defined loosely as “your experience of Piknic Electronik” to avoid creating a bias). I highlighted the anonymous nature of their participation and let them know that they can choose to back out and retract their participation at any point during the process. Given that the context was a music festival where illicit substances and uninhibited behaviors are likely to be observed, I anticipated that some participants might be reserved about what they choose to share, so as a final step before launching into the interview, I let them know to speak freely without fear of judgement. All the interviews were audio recorded and stored in a Dropbox folder that only my supervisor and I had access to. The audio recordings were transcribed using Happy Scribe. I then edited the transcriptions manually to ensure accuracy before beginning the interpretation process.

4.1.c Coding

Coding the data was a multi-step process through which I was guided by (Spiggle, 1994) and (Berg & Lune, 2017) resources. At first, I went through the fieldnotes and left general comments on the themes that stood out. As I went through each of the fieldnotes and interviews, I compiled the themes into a list. The first list was 46 codes long, categorized under “General”, “Crowd-related”, “Piknic-specific”, “Atmosphere”, and “Commute”. I then went over the data a second time, this time extracting the quotes into a Notion database that organized the quote, the relevant code(s) associated to it, and the source of data from which it was extracted. This step allowed me to reduce the code count into a more compact list of relevant themes. On a separate document, I defined each code to delineate its conceptual boundaries and ensure an accurate analysis. The

codes database on Notion was over 1,500 rows long and served as a convenient resource for data extraction.

4.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data sourced from online sources encompassed content curated and designed by Piknic Electronik's management (in which they controlled the narrative) as well as content generated by a third-party narrative reflecting community forums, PR pieces, and social media discourses about the event. Piknic Electronik's controlled online presence comprises their social media pages (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok) and the brand's website, on which an archive of blog posts dating back to when the event was first established was published. The online discourse around Piknic Electronik consisted of consumer discussions about the brand on Reddit, PR releases on well-known media sources in Montreal such as CultMTL and MTLBlog, and the comment sections of their social media pages. To find said online discourse related to Piknic Electronik, the following variations of keywords were searched: "Piknic Electronik", "Piknic Montreal", "Piknic MTL", "Piknic Electronik MTL", "Piknic Electronik Montreal" as well as common misspellings of the name, notably, "picnic" instead of "Piknic" and "electronic" instead of "Electronik". This approach was applied to the search function of Google and common social media platforms. Saturation was quickly reached as most articles online (whether Piknic's blog posts or media outlets' publications) simply revealed the line up or announced the start date of the event. On social media, the conversation was not very deep as only a few exchanges discussing the event were observed every year. This could be attributed to the event's smaller scope in comparison to larger, international raves. Organized on a Notion board, articles referencing the event (whether sources from the personal

blog or media outlets) were labeled with keywords reflecting their content, the main data source they were extracted from, as well as the date of publishing. **Appendix D** contains screenshots of the various boards on which the secondary data was organized. The secondary data collected inspired primary data collection by delineating the boundaries of the event's context and helping build the understanding of the elements that comprise the Piknic Electronik experience as well as their development throughout past editions of the festival.

5. FINDINGS

The findings are discussed in comparison to Hill et al.'s (2021) framework of social atmosphere creation through interaction ritual chains in group consumptions settings. To start off, Piknic Electronik reflects a group consumption setting whereby shared focus, a core precursor to entrainment and collective effervescence (Hill et al., 2021; Collins, 2004), is dispersed as a result of the variety of experiences sought by the music festival's attendees. Occurring every Sunday from May until early October at an affordable ticket rate, Piknic is a convenient summer outing especially since it's easily accessible through Montreal's public transportation system. These factors have allowed the festival to attract a wider, more diverse crowd of participants in comparison to other music festivals, opening the event up for Montrealers who would just like to have a good time in an outdoor setting with their friends, to families with younger kids, and to people just looking to socialize. Pearl explains how easily the plan to attend Piknic is formed among her friend group:

Because we have the season pass, it's kind of a given sometimes, so it just takes one person out of the group to suggest it and we'd all be in because it's that easy. Because you just have the pass, you just need to go there, hop on the metro and you're there. Usually, if you're not too tired from the night before because Saturday is also a party night, if you feel like you want to just enjoy some music, you feel like going out but not really making a lot of effort, Piknic is always there.

On the same note, Aaron explains how he sometimes finds himself randomly attending the festival even when he did not initially plan to.

Some days I would be just doing my own thing at home or wherever I will be on Sunday and then I look at my Instagram story and see some of my friends there so I'll be like 'oh, I'm coming'. I just leave my stuff and go for an hour or two. Just like a break from my day to listen to music and relax under the sun and that's it. It doesn't have to be like go hard, you just enjoy the day and go back to work next morning.

Furthermore, the event's line up of widely loved DJs appeals to those seeking an intense, rave-like partying experience. The presence of laidback attendees could have been a point of tension for rave aficionados and music lovers as a casual attitude towards the focus of attention (the music) makes consumers appear "irreverent" and even disrespectful towards the ritual experienced (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Hill et al., 2021). However, Piknic's division of stages and lounging spaces fosters a friendly ambiance that bridges these differences among consumers. To illustrate, Jake, a particularly passionate electronic music lover and Piknic regular, reports the following:

I saw a bunch of people who were there, and, like, you know, they're not turned towards the DJ. They're just looking at each other. They're chugging drinks. They're like... they're spending 2 hours at the Merch booth. I'm just like, you're not a real fan. You're here because it's trendy to be here, and other people, you're just there to party, but you're not there for the music. As time has gone on and as I started going to Piknic more and more, I realized that Piknic is just, like, the whole day is just a good vibe. I don't know. It sounds very vague but I've been to Piknic where I really wasn't feeling it, and all I did was, like, grab a beer and sit on the little, like, bit at the end of the main stage and then just listen to the music and have a fantastic time. Like, I'm right in front of the DJ booth dancing my ass off and I still have a fantastic time. Most of the ones [Piknics] I go to are for the DJs that I particularly like, but especially last year I've gone to a lot where I don't really care who's playing, I'm just like, yeah, I've got nothing better to do. I have the season pass. This is going to be fun regardless. And it ends up being a really chill vibe, even though I don't even know who's playing.

Nevertheless, the effect of this dispersed shared focus permeates every phase of the interaction ritual chain created within this context, essentially weakening the opportunity for collective

effervescence as the “collective” itself becomes fragmented across different experiences within the space.

The interaction ritual chain experienced by Piknic attendees is formed of four interlinked stages as observed in Hill et al.’s (2021) model. The process begins with individual preparations in private places before consumers condense into friend groups to engage in preparatory activities together, later moving onto collectively commuting towards the festival’s destination. At this stage, ritual members are dispersed within the space as most attendees take the same means of public transportation to arrive to the event. Stepping out onto the island where the event is hosted, sensory atmospheric cues complemented by a steady flow of participants in and out of the festival grounds boost consumers’ anticipation levels, further activating the atmosphere. The experience culminates in various peaks of effervescence before the dissipation of the atmosphere during a short-lived recovery phase encompassing the commute back from the event. I will unpack each stage of this process in comparison to the corresponding phases of Hill et al.’s interaction ritual chain to explore how social atmospheres in group consumption settings characterized by a spatial and temporal spread unfold.

5.1 Preparation for Atmosphere

Similar to Anfield fans on game day (Hill et al., 2021), consumers attending Piknic Electronik engage in preparatory activities that begin in private spaces, namely: completing Sunday errands, fine-tuning details, and getting together for the pre-game.

5.1.a Completing Sunday errands

For most adults, Sundays are reserved for weekly reset activities whereby one partakes in the errands necessary to ensure a smooth work week ahead. To illustrate, Matt highlights the following when asked about his typical Sunday schedule.

I usually reserve my Sunday for, like, chores and other personal stuff or studying or whatever. And I do my going out both on Saturday and Friday. So, for me, Sunday is like a chores day.

However, Piknic Electronik's unique scheduling normalized festival Sundays in summer.

Attendees often work through their task list early in the day to be able to enjoy a few hours at Piknic. The afternoon timing gives participants ample time to get laundry done, go through leftover homework, or even recover from a wild Saturday night out. This phase kickstarts the interaction ritual chain as participants finalize their errands and responsibly prepare for the upcoming week ahead before indulging in the music festival. The fact that the event ends early compared to traditional parties (around 9PM) also reduces the barriers for attendance as everyone can be back in time to wake up fresh on Monday morning, a fact that most participants appreciate. When asked about his opinion regarding the Sunday schedule, Jake highlights:

I like that you can go on a Sunday and you don't feel like you're ruining your Monday. I feel like that's a really big thing. A lot of these shows, obviously they try and put them on the Fridays and Saturdays, but Sunday is a weekend day too. Sometimes internationally recognized DJs who you expect to get large, large followings don't get their due because people got to wake up on Monday morning. Well, now you have the opportunity to do both. Yeah, I'm for it. It's late enough in the afternoon where you could take care of your stuff on Sunday morning. You can watch some, I don't know, whatever, do your homework, and head over and it's only part of your day. You get back home, it's like 9-10 and you're just, it's fine.

With multiple artists lined up per event, Piknic affords a flexible atmosphere allowing participants to come and go as they please, making the event easy to base one's day around. Greg reports the following:

I would like to wake up whenever I want to wake up, start my day slow, not being rushed, sometimes go to the pool, sometimes just enjoy the sun, sometimes do my groceries and everyday things that I didn't do Saturday or Friday. And after all that is done, I would head out to Piknic.

This laidback approach to attending Piknic delays the process of atmosphere build up as participants individually go through the motions of their daily lives on their own timeline.

5.1.b *Fine-tuning The Details*

As the task list grows shorter and the afternoon looms closer, participants begin getting into the spirit of attending Piknic by logistically planning out the details of their festival experience with friends. Usually occurring over text chains, this process entails checking on who will be joining, where the group will be meeting up, and what time the gathering will be as Mary explains below. For the more casual attendees who have not purchased the season pass, this step also includes buying tickets online.

So, when I have my season pass, which is more regularly than not having it, this was the only year I didn't have it, it was pretty much like either me or my sister or whoever else is in the group would shoot the message, like, 'you guys down for a Piknic?' And it was like, we'd see who would bite, who is interested. And then from there we start to plan a little bit like, okay, where are we doing the pre? And it's usually really easy and quick because it tends to become like, I had mentioned a routine, so it's usually like, are we doing it here? Are we doing it here? And then occasionally I'll bring in people who've never been, and I'd be like, a friend from something else, or a friend I met on a movie or a friend I met at a gym class. And I'd be like, 'oh, do you want to go out? We're going, so if you feel like joining, here's the link to the day.' Right? If they don't have the pass, because not a lot of people have the pass, then they would just buy the ticket for the day and show up as well.

Here, consumers are still in their private spaces within the context of their individual daily lives but they're preparing to meet up with their friend groups and begin the socializing aspect of the experience. When the details are confirmed, the next decision point is the choice of outfits. With event spaces designed to foster a sense of escapism, festivals afford attendees the opportunity for self-expression through outfits and costumes (Goulding & Saren, 2009). From Coachella to

Tomorrowland, Burning Man, and even smaller-scale festivals, participants often go all out with colorful outfits, kinky accessories, and even the masquerading of their gender identity (Pielichaty, 2015). Incidentally, Piknic Electronik fosters a place of creative expression through clothing, accessories, and props but not to the extent typically experienced in the context of festivals. A colorfully branded summer event located in the middle of the woods, Piknic witnesses fun bucket hats, colorful sunglasses, tropical-print shirts, and even ‘unicorn onesies’ as seen during one of my participant observation sessions, but the general outfits remain on the more toned-down range when it comes to the norm for music festivals. Mary explains how this can be attributed to the casual nature of the event’s consumption.

For Piknic, I tend to wear, like, more ripped jeans and maybe bring a cardigan, but I really like the crop top and jean look... like the festival, sort of, really light and summery colors, which is so much fun because the festival itself is decorated like that. The colors are all neon. It's pink, yellow, orange, green, blue. Like, it's really fun. And I have quite a few, like, fun outfits that I wear to Piknic, but it's definitely not the same energy as, like, for example, when I went to Veld [a larger music festival], which was, like, me and my friends got outfits, because it's three days. You get there at noon, you leave at ten. Like, you're there all day, and it's three days only. And it was in Toronto, so we were doing funky makeup, we were dressing up in, like, crazy clothes, some of us matching. We did a theme -- three days that were themed [...] So we actually shopped a bit for the festival. I bought clothing appropriate for our theme. So that was a little bit more intricate in terms of the festival because it's so condensed and different. And there's bigger, bigger artists. Right? Piknic is known to be a little bit more... like unique artists that you don't see all the time. And because it happens so regularly, you can't really buy an outfit for every Piknic, because it's just unreasonable. So I'll tend to recycle outfits. I tend to like the fun and crop top energy with shorts or jeans or something like that. And I'll pack a light cardigan because Canada can still get pretty cold at night.

Given Piknic’s recurring schedule and its perception as a laidback outing in comparison to destination music festivals where more sunk costs are attributed to experiencing the time-bound, limited event, attendees’ choices of outfits at the festival depend on their personality types. For instance, when asked about the considerations for deciding his outfit for the event, Jake’s practical nature is reflected by his choice of the oldest, most comfortable clothes:

Yeah, I wear shitty clothes. I wear my oldest, crappiest shoes. I wear clothes that don't really fit anymore. I do not care. I do not go there to meet people. If we meet people, cool. But I do not care whatsoever. I'm there for the music. I'm there to have a good time. As long as I'm comfortable with what I'm wearing, who gives a shit? I do see a lot of people, for lack of a better word, peacocking at Piknic. But yeah, I don't know. I've never really been someone to express themselves through what they wear. [...] I look like a well-dressed homeless person.

On the other extreme is Rob who appreciates any opportunity to dress up, yet expressed investing more time and effort for their Osheaga (a 3-day summer festival in Montreal) outfits compared to Piknic's:

Well, there's a part of me that, like I mentioned earlier, I believe I don't really like any basic stuff. I like to be more extravagant, interesting, or anything that sticks out. I don't know. I don't want to just have a floral little shirt and that's it, or like shorts. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that. But it's just that I like to make it a little bit more inspiring, a little more cute, for sure. Especially this summer, I had, like, very Coachella-esque outfits planned for every day of Osheaga, which I didn't have for Piknic, but I was still in that mindset. [...] I don't really like any basic stuff. I'm more like kind of extra. Of course, I mentioned the glittery moment – I did not like get that shit Dollarama glitter. I had, like, cute glitter that actually reflected off all the outfits and a little gloss moment. And then yeah, it was actually a pretty fun like I'm trying to remember exactly what I wore, but it was mostly just like the same color scheme with friends. There was nothing more than that.

Known to fluctuate even during the summer, Montreal's weather was reported as the most common consideration in choosing outfits. While attendees layer on their glitter and choose their props, anticipation begins to build as they get more into the “vibe” of the event they're about to experience. However, the reservation in outfit choice compared to other non-recurring music festivals contributes to the low intensity of atmospheric activation experienced this far during the Preparation phase. All dressed up and prepared to leave their private spaces, participants move onto the next essential step where atmospheric activation finally commences as they get together with their friends for the pregame.

5.1.c Getting Together for The Pre-Game

After the timing and setting of the friend group gathering are sorted, participants get together before they head over to Piknic. This “pre-game” is a necessary precursor for event attendance as it entails two mood-setting activities required to smooth over the transition from a regular Sunday to party mode, those being substance consumption and socializing. Ralph highlights the importance of this phase, maintaining that skipping it would affect his enjoyment of Piknic

Elektronik later on:

I feel like if I'm not in that state of mind, if I haven't prepared and entered that state of mind, whatever it was that is required of me to do to enter it, I wouldn't enjoy it as much. Whether it's drinking or meeting with people before... I need to put myself in that zone. I'm not someone that can be put in a situation and automatically, a switch will turn around and I can be on a party mode. It needs to be built up.

Raves are designed around a musical aesthetic embodying “a combination of electronic musical forms, new technologies, the drug ecstasy, and dancing spaces” (Jowers 199, 381-382; Goulding et al., 2009) and Piknic Elektronik is not an exception. Predominant across industries of hedonic consumption, both illicit and legal mind-altering substances were perceived as essential to the enjoyment of Piknic by all informants, allowing them to feel more “loose”, let their guards down, and disassociate from their daily lives to tap into their “true selves”. Clemence, though more reserved with regards to substance consumption, reflects on its value from a societal angle.

I think it's a cultural thing. The way we act in festivals or in festive context says a lot about our society and how we interact on the daily and why is that, though? Well, I think the substance abuse, it's a gateway into what people really want. The way when you have fun, it's like you, I don't know, when you take drugs, you're not yourself or like you're a version of yourself that's like very deep in you. Usually this happens at festivals, so I feel like festivals are like a more honest representation of what people are and want to be. I'm not saying that everybody wants it to party all the time, but it's like you can tell a lot by how they act.

As music playing in the background is drowned out by the friend group's chatter, solo cups filled with spirits are passed around to get a light buzz going before the attendees head out to Piknic.

The consumption of alcohol beforehand is fueled by social motives but is also largely due to the expensive price point of alcohol at Piknic as reported by most informants.

It's just like meeting new people and we're just drinking, really. Just getting a little bit tipsy so that when we get there, we're not sober. And also, drinks are a little expensive, so it tends to be a pretty common thing where we'll pre, we'll drink a few drinks, head over to the metro, and then when we get there, we'll get like a bucket¹. And that's it usually, because we usually won't go more than a bucket because they're expensive, they're not cheap, so it's like on top of the season pass, it's bad, if you're doing it regularly, like, it gets pricey. So that's usually what happens at the pre. We'll catch up too. We'll hang out. It's just like, really just a group of friends chilling. *(Mary)*

On another hand, Aaron and Mary maintain that the social angle of the pre-game is essential to getting the small talk out of the way and properly catching up with friends (even meeting new ones who were invited to join) to avoid having to do it at the event itself.

I enjoy the pregame before as part of the experience, too. It's usually way more fun because you get to socialize and catch up with everyone before you go. So, when you are at the stage, you don't have to be like, hey, how have you been? How was that? How is this? You already did all the talking before. And also, reading the room - so you can read how everyone is doing. You get to do that before. You don't have to do it at the festival. You know how everyone is feeling so you know how to deal with them. *(Aaron)*

As the group is finally together and spirits (in liquid and emotional form) are high, the social atmosphere is activated. **Figure 1** compares the Preparation phase of Piknic's interaction ritual chain with Hill et al.'s model (2021). While consumers' "emotional and behavioral expectations are modeled" as they take on the moral responsibility of enacting rituals in the context of time- and spatial-bound group consumption settings (Hill et al., 2021; p. 125), Piknic's attendees are still going about their own timelines, getting mundane tasks out of the way to enjoy the event at their convenience later on. This flexibility added onto the convenient, recurring nature of Piknic takes away the need to prepare symbolic resources, observed in this context by outfit planning, as a more personalized attribution of importance (as opposed to moral responsibility) is placed on the experience of the event. The social atmosphere is then activated in the final step of the

preparation phase as consumers indulge in mood-setting activities akin to the rehearsal of entrained behaviors observed in Hill et al.'s model (2021). Here, the temporal aspect of the consumption of the Piknic Electronik experience delays the formation of atmosphere until the last step of the Preparation phase unlike in the context of Hill et al.'s (2021) research where the atmosphere begins to build from the first step.

	Hill et al. (2021)	Piknic Electronik
Preparation	Learning to participate	Completing Sunday errands
	Making symbolic resources	Fine-tuning details
	Rehearsing entrained behaviors	Getting together for the pregame

Figure 5 - Preparation Phase

5.2 Activating the Atmosphere

Defined as “the creation of social atmospheres among smaller groups prior to a main event” (Hill et al., 2021; p. 127), the beginning of this next phase of Piknic’s interaction ritual chain is blurred with the final step of the preceding phase where the physical assembly of a group, albeit a smaller one instead of the full crowd characterizing the collective consumption setting, is seen. This “starting point of human bodies coming together in the same space” underlines the sociology of a ritual (Collins, 2004; p.33) and manifests in Piknic’s loosely defined service ecosystem contextualizing the commute to the event. However, this is only the case for attendees utilizing the metro system to get to Parc Jean Drapeau. The social atmosphere activated in the pregame is spurred along as emotional energy and anticipation bubbles within individuals upon

the detection of other attendees heading to the festival, evoking an unspoken sense of community. Anticipation reaches an all-time high with the arrival to the island where sensory atmospheric cues can be felt and a collective mobility towards the event space is experienced. I will expand on the two steps of this Activation phase within the context of Piknic Electronik before comparing them to the corresponding section of Hill et al.'s interaction ritual chain (2021).

5.2.a Recognition of Other Attendees

With their moods attuned, consumers head over to the nearest metro station towards the direction of Berri UQAM, where they'll make a platform switch to the yellow line leading to Parc Jean Drapeau as discussed in the **Research Context**. On this part of the journey, an unspoken guessing game adopted by all Piknic community members begins as they try to figure out which of the other passengers are also heading towards the event.

I think just the commute is part of the experience too. Whenever I think of Piknic I think part of the memories are always the commute and how funny it is. Just in the metro, whatever we talk about, and interacting with people in the metro too because everyone is going to the same place, right? And they all have similar interests in a way. And just like meeting people at the metro and talking to them, it's always fun. You just get to guess and maybe you're right, maybe you're wrong. It's like part of the fun – the guessing game. (*Aaron*)

Clues that inform the guessing game include outfits and accessories, general demeanor, and energy levels as Piknic attendees typically exhibit excitement and engage in loud banter and laughter within friend groups. Often, attendees will also conceal alcoholic drinks in subtle containers to continue feeding their buzz during the commute. The results of the guesses can be inferred from whether the candidates take the same path towards the Jean Drapeau platform.

I think just from going so many times, the way people stand or hold their stuff or dress as well. Also, like me and my friends, we just dress a bit differently when we go there - more funny outfits and we're

just like a different vibe. Sometimes we would wear overalls or like colorful fun shirts. Yeah, that's pretty much it. Sometimes like glitter or makeup. (Aaron)

On the way to Berri UQAM, the guessing game is more difficult as the metro stops experience higher passenger traffic whereas the yellow line is significantly more intimate as it only leads to two other stops with Jean Drapeau being the most frequented one. This section of the commute is characterized as “a private shuttle towards Piknic”, as described by Pearl, expressing that “it's nice because everyone, like, the whole crowd is going to the same place. You feel the energy, everyone's singing, everyone's hyped, everyone's drinking, everyone's having fun.” Furthermore, Beth describes the experience as “a big party on the metro from Berri UQAM to Jean Drapeau.” On this note, Greg highlights the importance of the metro ride in maintaining the good energy established in the pre-game and compares it to the alternative of commuting by Uber, which he deems as “pretty lame”:

The most important part after the pre is to go by metro. I would strongly encourage you to go by metro. You have all of these people that are also going to the festival next to you, all of these chants. You're not the only one drinking on the metro, though, it's illegal... but it is a fun thing to do. And yeah, like, the whole vibe starts in the metro, you know, and then you go from there, you go to Jean Drapeau. [...] Whenever I used to go by Uber, I would be a bit bummed because Uber, okay, you go up in the car, you try to sing, the driver lowers the volume or just looks at you weirdly, like, okay, let's settle down a bit. And then you arrive, you go out of the Uber, you walk to the line. I mean, the [entrance] line process is still the same, but I mean, you don't have this hype of the metro that you already built up for about 10-15 minutes. So that's the main difference.

Seeing others dressed in a similar fashion, engaging in the same activities, and sharing the same interests creates an unspoken bond and fosters feelings of belonging to a bigger community between attendees of the festival. My first experience attending Piknic Electronik alone informs this, as revealed through the following fieldnotes excerpt:

A big group of young friends carrying drinks were also waiting in a far corner. Every person in that group sported sparkly or expressive accessories. One of the guys had a flowery red bucket hat. Some girls had glitter on their face. I felt relieved - I have two safe bets of people going to Piknic now.

[Later at the event]

[...] As I scanned this crowd, a red bucket hat grabbed my attention - it was the group of friends I had seen at Berri UQAM waiting for the yellow metro. For a second, I felt like disappointed in their choices (like, really, this?) *[referring to acid techno type of music played at the second stage]* but I also felt a sense of warmth at the familiarity (maybe it was also because I had come here alone). I had only seen them for a solid 7-10 extra minutes other than here, but it still felt like something.

Within this space of the service ecosystem, the social atmosphere thickens, informed by the core ritual processes of intersubjectivity and shared emotion unfolding through community members' awareness of each other (group assembly) and highlighting a collective consciousness towards a "mutual focus of attention" (Collins, 2004; p. 49). These core processes entailing the ritual ingredients necessary for the formation of successful social atmospheres in group consumption settings are complemented by the atmospheric stimuli experienced by festival attendees upon arrival to the island.

5.2.b Arrival to the Island

Arriving to Jean Drapeau, the eager crowd of passengers swarms up the stairs and out of the metro station, greeted by the evening air on the island. The location of the event frames the atmosphere further, offering a welcome change from the industrial city vibes to a nature aesthetic all while still being conveniently close to downtown. This factor imbues the experience with a sense of escape from everyday life. When prompted about his opinion regarding the event's setting, Ralph shared the following:

That honestly adds to the experience even more. Because I think what Montreal brings to... what differentiates Montreal from any big city is the proximity of the nature and the green escapes you have inside of the city. And basically, Piknic is like a summary of what you can have when you have that big of a green space and you have people that enjoy music that much. So, it brings together these two kinds of two things. It feels like it to me because I don't think you'd see that in, let's say, Paris, Italy, or in the US. Like California. You won't see that even in Berlin, one of the biggest electronic scenes. You won't see that space. Basically, you'd see the vibe but not the space.

Thumping music can be heard from a distance as participants begin the walk towards the event grounds, amplifying feelings of anticipation. Along the path, there's a steady flow of festival attendees heading towards and away from Piknic Electronik, as people often attend on their own schedules.

Welcomed by the evening air as the sun started to set, we found subtle signage indicating the direction of the Piknic stages and heard the thumping beats of the music from afar. We walked ahead with the crowd of attendees and I noted the hoards of people walking back from that direction. The acts at Piknic had started at 2PM and we had arrived around 7:40PM, so it was understandable that some people were calling it a day. The thumping music grew louder as we got closer. Of the attendees leaving the event, some were engaged in animated, lively conversation (including two Piknic volunteers wearing purple "Piknic Electronik" T-shirts who seemed to have finished their shifts for the day), some seemed drained and ready to get home as drudged along the dirt path quietly, some were trying to find missing friends, phones glued to their ears as they perked their heads around in different directions to detect them. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

The weather and location-specific stimuli, the music thumping in the distance, and the perception of others along the path all contribute to the feelings of emotional energy that build up the social atmosphere. At this point, attendees have been long pulled out of their daily Sunday routine, amped with social energy, slightly inebriated from their substances of choice, and conscious of their belonging to a greater community of similar people consuming the same experience that they're about to indulge in.

That walk is usually really exciting because you start to get the music and you get really hyped to get in. But then, also when you see the line, it depends if it gets you really happy if it's really short and going fast or, like, have to wait, like, half an hour. Not too bad, but it's always so exciting. And a lot of people dance on that walk, too. I definitely do from time to time. (*Aaron*)



Figure 6 - Signage outside of metro Jean Drapeau

As the event grounds comes into view, participants size up the wait time in front of the entrance gates. While the wait can be especially long when famous international DJs are headlining, all informants reported that the entrance protocol is managed well compared to other music festivals.

We kind of saw that they were doing this strategy of putting us in different groups and then you would open the gate and kind of like a few people in, close that gate and separate and then four different gates, you know what I mean? So, you have people that are not all smushed together, which is like you don't move as much, but when you do move, you move a lot. *(Rob)*

Furthermore, the wait provides opportunities for social interaction and community engagement as people are all on the same emotional wave of good spirits and excitement. Greg reports that the waiting line boosts his anticipation levels, making him all that more excited to get in and start experiencing the event for himself.

The waiting line is kind of a tease for you. You're waiting, you can't go in, but you want to know what's inside, and you can see everybody just screaming and jumping and having fun and laughing, and you're just outside like, I just want to be there. So that also helps. Without a waiting line, I don't feel the start of it [Piknic experience] would be as exciting.



Figure 7 - Entrance Gates

After the ticket is scanned, the entrance bracelet is wrapped around attendees' wrists, and the bags are checked by a security volunteer, participants are waved in with a "Bon Piknic!" sentiment, ready to experience the live event.

To sum up, the phase of Atmosphere Activation follows the buildup of the social atmosphere through the service ecosystem comprising the Montreal metro system from Berri UQAM to Jean Drapeau and the path from metro Jean Drapeau to the event grounds in the woods. Here, participants recognize other community members and socially engage with each other as emotional energy culminates into heightened levels of anticipation boosted by location-specific stimuli and an unspoken sense of community among consumers. **Figure 4** aligns the Activation phase of Piknic's interaction ritual chain to Hill et al.'s model (2021). Their first step, activation of focus and entrainment, can be observed towards the end of the first phase of Piknic's interaction ritual chain as consumers indulge in substance consumption and socializing activities. This step then spills over to the Activation phase of Piknic's IRC during the commute towards the event where the awareness of other attendees' participation in the same behaviors sharpens collective consciousness and shared emotions, intensifying the atmosphere as attendees collectively move through the service ecosystem. This occurs on a more subtle note than in Hill et al.'s (2021) work because the temporal spread of the event allows attendees to consume the experience during the time of their choosing, so ritual participants spontaneously condense in various densities. Finally, prior emotional experiences were not referred to as informants described their feelings at the gates of Piknic's entrance. Hill et al. (2021) defined this step through the lens of place attachments, positing that previous experiences of collective effervescence instill settings with intense forces that drive consumers to return. At Anfield, an almost religious experience of reminiscence was observed among loyal fans. While informants

revealed that they look forward to the next season and miss this Sunday ritual, their sentiments were ultimately more casual.

	Hill et al. (2021)	Piknic Electronik
Activation	Activating focus & entrainment	Recognition of other attendees
	Intensification through collective mobility	
	Activating prior emotional experiences	Arrival to the island

Figure 8 - Activation Phase

5.3 Atmospheric Climax (Atmospherics & Climax)

My exploration of Piknic’s Atmospheric Climax is divided into the evaluation of the event’s atmospherics followed by their resulting impact on climax which does not directly overlay Hill et al.’s (2021) contextualization as it involves a step prior to the effervescence characterized by consumers settling into the space and absorbing the festival’s atmospheric cues. Hosting two stages, a variety of bar stands, food trucks, lounging spaces, and on-site games, Piknic affords attendees with multiple experiences to enjoy. Participants typically condense in front of the two DJ stages, with the larger crowd dancing in front the main Videotron stage where more renowned artists are hosted as opposed to the more niche artists at the smaller Boisé stage. Upon entry, Piknic consumers explore the space before settling into a spot with their friends and engaging in the activities that initially drove them to attend, whether the enjoyment of music, socializing with their group, lounging under the sun, or socializing with other attendees. For

example, Ralph discusses his flow through Piknic's event grounds stating that it always starts with a scan of the space.

I like to go to a high point where I can see everything, map the grounds, and then choose where I want to go. That's always the case.

A combination of community-induced and festival-specific stimuli curate the general social atmosphere that shapes individuals' enjoyment of the experience, making or breaking the potential culmination of social atmosphere into effervescence.

5.3.a Soaking Up Atmospheric Stimuli

The atmospheric cues discussed in this section are divided into festival cues comprising the elements that characterize Piknic's consumption context and community-led cues highlighting the way consumers within the space influence each other's experiences.

i. Festival Cues

Located outdoors in the woods of Parc Jean Drapeau, Piknic Electronik's atmosphere is shaped by an essential stimulus beyond the management's control, namely the weather. Montreal's weather remains sporadic well into the summer season and festival attendees have often ended up partying under the pouring rain, an experience that some attendees avoid while others enjoy.

It's sort of like, you're ruining your clothes, you're suffering to get to experience this music and you're doing so with these hundreds of other people that are also doing it with you. It's like a communal experience. And I don't know, maybe the DJ appreciates it too. Maybe he plays like a little better than he's used to. I don't know. Sometimes it just makes it feel even better. Should I bring a poncho or not? Sometimes it's going to rain and you consciously do not bring a poncho, although that's also a thing. Because that's like a next level of communal suffering of the rain-DJ connection. I'm wet, but I'm not completely wet versus I'm drenched. We're all drenched. This is fun. (*Jake*)

On other occasions, the moist summer heat makes the crowding factor at the event slightly unbearable as Matt reported the experience being “not fun times” on particularly warmer days. With the festival scheduling running until October, the weather gets significantly colder towards the end of the season and the outdoor nature of the festival becomes more uncomfortable and inconvenient for attendees, especially with regards to outfit choice.

Deeper in the crowd with a better view of the artists, Sasha and I kept getting cold then warm. I remember taking off my jacket and wrapping it around my waist, only to get chilly a few minutes later and then struggling to put it back on with the limited amount of space I had. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

The Piknic experience reportedly differs between the daytime and nighttime. Variations in the relative “lightness” or “darkness” of the skies inform individuals’ movements through a space (Edensor, 2012). Earlier in the day, the event is likened to a picnic with families lounging around the space while younger kids play at Petit Piknic, the daycare section. Crowds are more dispersed around the space, with only a few people dancing in front of the DJ booths. When comparing the nighttime vibe at Piknic to the day’s ambiance, Mary reports a substantial energy shift.

It does shift. The festival switches a bit from more of like a family-oriented festival, I find. So, then it becomes more of like a party vibe at night. You get more of like the hardcore love music, love festivals type people. You get a few more people who are either too drunk or too high or too on something, and you get less of that during the day. Which is why, like, you know, my mom could bring my cousin who's three in the daytime and then they left around four. Yeah, and they were there from like noon to four. And that's like a fine time to go with a family, which is also great that you can do that. You can go and have a picnic with your family while listening to music and there's food and all that stuff. And she loved it. She was up here, she was dancing, she was like really into it. And she's three.

As the sun goes down, the rave aspect becomes more predominant. Attendees exhibit an increased focus on the music as opposed to other activities. In terms of Piknic-specific cues, this change is attributed to the technical mastery of light and sound (Böhme, 2010) because headlining artists that typically play louder, more intense types of electronic music are scheduled

for the evenings. In comparison, opening acts taking the stage during the daytime play more mellow tunes.

One thing I've noticed in the past, like the past year of Piknic is that a lot of the earlier DJs are playing more like Afro House. And for some reason, I feel like that subgenre lends itself really well to like, an afternoon. I don't know how to explain it. It's like, okay, it feels like an introductory subgenre and then like a lead into something else, but at the same time. I don't know, when I hear those sounds and those samples and those influences, it makes me feel like this is music that's meant to be played in the afternoon because it's more light-hearted. Afro House in the afternoon is good. And obviously when the sun goes down, you have like the techno, the deep house, that stuff, you know, it's it's darker anyways, so it makes sense. *(Jake)*

The crowd tends to grow thicker later in the day as well which reduces the “picnic” aspect and amplifies the essence of Piknic Electronik as a music festival.

I really thought that the headliners play louder than some of the opening acts. Even if their music style is the same, it feels more intense when you're there at 9 than when you're there at like 7. So, I don't know if it's also the tempo. Maybe they ask the opening DJs to DJ as if they would be in their living rooms and just play what they like, try out some stuff, but not too intense because they want people to be real, kind of. It's not like a big huge party setting quite yet because of the volume, the crowd size. Obviously, you feel like you're really at a big event once people start rolling in. Whereas when you go in, like I remember seeing on Instagram, they always show like when they open the doors and there's always people but it's like you see these stages and they're empty. It's so weird to see these places designed for a large amount of people be so empty. It feels a bit strange because at 2PM, everybody's still busy. Yeah, it's nice. I think the fact that it's an event that takes place on 7 hours really, you can have this build up.

The atmosphere intensifies to culminate at sunset as pink clouds adorn the Montreal backdrop while buzzed consumers dance to the funky beats blaring from the speakers.

I love that we can do this when it's sunset. Like the amount of beautiful photos I've had of like the stage and the smoke and the music and the light and all of us and it's like the sunniest setting in the background. It's so great because we get to do daytime and nighttime, right? Like I tend to go around 4:30-5 and we leave at 10 PM, so we do really just like sunset up until the evening, which is nice because we have both the energy of the daytime and the nighttime, which is so nice. *(Mary)*

Besides the conscious scheduling of music styles and manipulation of speaker volume, firm-led stimuli such as aesthetics also influence consumers immersion in the atmosphere. Visually pleasing aesthetics create a “positive vibe” at the festival, contributing to consumers enjoyment of the space (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020; p. 2889). Larger festivals such as Tomorrowland and Burning Man take on visual themes, hosting massive structures that transform the space into a transcendent setting

of escapism. Rob refers to Piknic as a “diet, light Tomorrowland” explaining that their dream version of the Montreal festival would involve “a big ass wheel that you can ride.” They discuss the importance of such structures, expressing that Piknic is way more toned down on the aesthetic front with an underwhelming main stage design.

But again, it's like fucking Tomorrowland. It's not realistic to compare it to Piknic, but that stage... I saw that stage at Picnic and I was like, what the fuck is that? I don't want to be mean, but I saw that and I was like, is that stage? I was closing my eyes. We can't even see what's happening there in the box. And I'm like, oh my God, is it hot in there? I would want to change that stage 110%. I would change that stage. The stage was not it. We were like, oh, maybe it's not like... is this the second stage? We were unsure. So, when we found that that was the main stage, we were like, oh, wow, okay.

To sum up, festival cues whether firm-led (artist scheduling, aesthetics, volume control) or beyond management's control (weather, time of day, crowd density) inform participants' perception of the social atmosphere in varying nuances. The social atmosphere tends to intensify towards the evenings as the sun sets – the music takes on more intense techno themes, the volume is amped up, and the crowd grows thicker. As the crowd gets more condensed, the presence of other consumers within the group consumption setting proves potent, influencing individual participants' experiences of the social atmospheres.

ii. Community-Induced Cues

A key dimension to music festivals is the space for intense socializing among participants leading to the formation of *communitas* (Holt, 1995; Skandalis, Byrom, & Banister, 2018; Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020). Music festival participants' experiences are collectively influenced by crowd energy and interactions with one another (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020). When asked about the factors that hype up their mood at Piknic Electronik, Rob instantly replied that it's the people present.

Honestly, the people. 100% the people. When you're in a crowd of people that want to have fun, you're having fun. Like, either way you want it or not. We were in a big group of friends, like I mentioned, my co-worker brought us all together. And then one of her friends was like, she did not want to be there. She was not in the mood. She was not drinking. She was just not into it. And then the

more we started dancing, the more the people danced around us, the sunset started to show... She ended up having fun. She just had to push through it a bit, calm down. And then I do believe that maybe it was us, but I do believe us, the people around, we all kind of vibing or having more fun. So I would say 100% is the people. Yeah.

Consumers within such festival contexts are characterized by extraversion, displaying a willingness to strike up conversations with unknown others (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020).

This social aspect is predominant at this festival as well, with friendships forging among participants of various backgrounds and ages on Piknic's dance floor, lounging spaces, and even during the lines for the bathroom.

It's more crowded at the front, but usually people are very nice. There are so many different people as well. It's not like all the same type of people. I mean, the other time there was like an older gay couple that was next to us and we just ended up partying with them. And it's a bunch of random people from different backgrounds and just from, I don't know, they were like 45 and they were just jamming, dancing. It was nice. We ended up dancing with them and we spent like, most of our night with them. They were super nice. *(Beth)*

When I have to pee, I go to the porta potties and wait in line and that's where I also meet people. Yeah, waiting in line in the bathroom is actually one of the best ways to meet people because they would be already in the mood and it's very easy to start a conversation like, 'what's taking them so long? [ha, ha, ha]' Or something like that, and you just go on from there. There are a lot of nice people everywhere, especially when they're high, they're very talkative and it's nice. *(Greg)*

Interestingly, outfits and accessories serve as the most common icebreakers for social engagement. Jake mentions that a close friend of his deliberately wears "weird stuff" that would encourage interactions, a tactic that has allowed him to meet and befriend many people at Piknic.

I have a really close friend of mine since high school, the guy that I started the blog with who buys the season pass literally every single year ever since he was like, 20. And, you know, he's a very outgoing person. He goes by himself and just meets random people there. It was always confusing to me because how do you meet anyone when there's very loud music blaring in your ears? He wears like, weird stuff, like in that Boiler Room I was talking about, he was wearing a cap with like a little propellor on his head. Sometimes he'll wear like, pirate shirts where the arms are like really fucking

puffy. And Piknic is such a place where there's no hate there. Everyone's just there to listen to the music, chill out. And so, if they're going to say anything about anything on your person, it's going to be a compliment. So, he's wearing these ridiculous things. People are like, yo, nice hat. And he just, like, casually gives them a hug and they're just dancing together for the entire time.

These friendly encounters foster a warm emotional energy within ritual participants, resulting in feelings of “confidence, elation, strength, and enthusiasm” in addition to a sense of belonging within the community, all of which characterize the outcomes of a successful interaction ritual chain (Collins, 2004; p. 48-49).

While the social aspect of Piknic’s consumption setting is sought and cherished by most attendees, participants attending purely for the music element, those passionate about the performing artists headlining that day, tend to be off put by others’ distraction by social engagement. To rave aficionados, music is consumed as a ritual likened to a religion (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020) meanwhile less concerned participants tend to balance between music and social connections during a festival. Clemence highlights his annoyance at overhearing other attendees’ conversations while trying to dance and enjoy the DJs’ music:

It was kind of a little frustrating because as a music lover and fan, I was first and foremost there for the DJs and just seeing people just talking like they were in a park or something, I didn't really understand why they were there because they didn't seem to care that much. And then I kind of started questioning, okay, but what if I'm the one that's not there for the right reason? What if I'm just stuck up and I should just go there with more people? But I just went as thinking like, okay, this DJ I'm not going to be able to see every day, but my friends who I would go with, I could see them every day and we can hang out at their place and have these same discussions. That's what I noticed about the conversation. Okay, I don't want to seem creepy about this, but sometimes I'm a bit of an eavesdropper and when people are talking, you have nothing to do. I felt like they were, kind of, not mundane, but it was definitely a very casual conversation that could be had anywhere else. Like, ‘oh, I just started this new job’ and it's like people went there maybe to catch up and they used, like, the Piknic setting to have it be a social gathering. But this is also something that I observed recently at IglooFest. Also, I don't know if it's just Piknic, but I did go to some raves and some clubs like the SAT and Datcha and Stereo, and I felt like there people were more into the music and the music anyway there is so loud that you can't just have a conversation like that.

Clemence's last point regarding Piknic's lower volume compared to other clubs confirms that social interactions were made possible by the weak audio dispersion across the open-air space, reducing participants' ability to fully immerse themselves into the music, as observed during my participant observation sessions.

The wide arena in the middle of the forest didn't serve as an ideal location for audio control, because in the back, the volume was significantly lower and a chatter of conversations was heard at all times. It was difficult to enjoy Piknic from the back because the sound distribution was really bad [...] I moved towards the front of the crowd where the music was much louder due to the proximity to the speakers. The only source of sound was the main stage. There were no speakers around to create a better sound system effect. If you're near the front, you hear the music properly and loudly.
(*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

Aaron and Pearl share this point of view. When prompted about the reasons for ending a Piknic visit, Pearl referenced the sound system.

The sound system, sometimes I find it to be annoying. I don't know, sometimes it doesn't sound right. It's too low, or maybe it's because of the people talking around me, but at the same time, sometimes it feels like it's just noise instead of clear music. I'd say it's the people talking and the sound system, because one time the sound system was so bad, it was just like just noise, it wasn't clear at all. I don't remember what DJ, but yeah. I remember leaving earlier because the sound was annoying. It was just like static. I'm not a sound engineer but maybe like position them in different ways or make the sound clear, I don't know. (*Pearl*)

This atmospheric interruption fueled by distraction of shared focus (social interactions vs. enjoyment of music) and venue mismanagement (low audio dispersion) is a point of tension for attendees making up the music-lover demographic of Piknic's audience. These participants' "initially set goals" for attending the music festival (in this case, the consumption of music) are challenged by the atmospheric disturbances they're experiencing (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020; p. 2888) leading to lower levels of enjoyment, which, in general, would inform individuals' likelihood of entering a flow state whereby they lose sense of time and self (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020). As a result, the social atmosphere is weakened instead of being

built it up into an effervescence because attendees are incapable of being transported by emotional energy and feelings of crowd oneness.

In conclusion, while community-led cues contribute to positive feelings of *communitas* among participants, they also pose a point of tension as they emphasize the distraction of shared focus among the community, negatively influencing the culmination of the social atmosphere into collective effervescence.

5.3.b Expressions of Effervescence

Live events consumed in a group setting culminate into a ritual climax (Hill et al., 2021). This experience of collective effervescence is divided into a formal climax orchestrated by firms for the purpose of uniting the crowd and a natural climax embodying spontaneous “pleasurable outpourings” of shared emotion (Hill et al., 2021; p. 129). An example of a formal climax is the Superbowl’s iconic half-time performance headlined by widely loved international artists while an expression of natural climax is the celebration of football fans in the stadium when their team scores a goal.

In the context of Piknic, firm-led crowd-uniting efforts to generate a formal climax are not observed in a general sense. The stage is not structurally set up for pyrotechnics, though this could largely be due to the daytime scheduling of the event as only a few hours of the experience take place in the nighttime when lasers would be visible. Pyrotechnics are a pillar of electronic music festivals. Setting the mood, artificial lighting conditions environments to provoke sensory cues that inform emotional responses and bestow greater meaning to spatial and social settings (Edensor, 2012). Lighting professionals choreograph the lasers to the beat of the music creating a transcendent experience for attendees who lose their sense of space, time, and self in the

experience. The lack of pyrotechnics and reliance on natural lighting reduces the intensity of the social atmosphere created at Piknic, keeping attendees mindful of their surroundings at all times of the consumption experience. To illustrate, I compare this festival to Igloofest, the seasonal winter Montreal festival managed by the same organizers as Piknic, where large stages hosting international DJs were lit up with immersive pyrotechnics beaming lasers through the nighttime sky as attendees danced in sub-degree weather.

A lot of neon lights and pyrotechnics took over the entirety of the space. We settled into our space, swaying with the music as KAS:ST took over and kicked off their set with an amazing track. The pyrotechnics were insane. The lights matched the music to the T, and the fog machines created the perfect ambiance and reflections on the neon projectors. I closed my eyes, soaking up the energy. [...] The lights obliged to the soundwaves, creating an exquisite ambiance. For a second, I forgot the group around me and was mesmerized by the combination of lights and music. The energy immediately lifted as soon as the first beat dropped – the people in the crowd were jumping, bobbing their heads, and moving more expressively. We danced during the whole set, energy uninterrupted except as we exchanged a few words to each other. While we danced and observed the lights, my friend Maria came up to me and said, “the lights really make all the difference.” It was something that had clicked for me earlier, too. At Piknic Electronik, the daytime aspect makes it impossible to include lights or pyrotechnics. The ambiance is severely impacted as a result. Even at night events like OFF-Piknic, the event space is not set up to accommodate pyrotechnics. But Igloofest’s lights were one of the most memorable aspect of the night for me. The lasers obey every soundwave, amplifying its effect on our sensations. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

The lack of artificial lighting contributes to the perception of Piknic as a laidback outing as opposed to a liminal experience transporting consumers beyond their spatial and temporal settings. Clemence reports that this is also a result of the event’s setting at Jean Drapeau with the backdrop of Montreal visible behind the main stage. Though beautiful, it leaves attendees tethered to reality, weakening the opportunity for loss of self and total release that bubble into effervescence.

And also, what strikes me the most is also the views you get of the city behind. It's kind of like you know where you are. You know you're in Montreal because the city is right there with you. Whereas if you go to a club, you could be anywhere. You're in a dark room.

Besides the lack of pyrotechnics, Piknic's management does provide a form of spectatoral stimulus in the form of a 'hype person' who takes the stage alongside the DJ during some events to hype up the crowd by chanting ad libs into a microphone. However, this effort proves counterintuitive because when asked about the factors that disturb their enjoyment of Piknic, respondents passionate about music described how the repeated "unnecessary" screams interrupt their experience and break their flow.

The hype man, again, this is more gripe, specifically for the Inner-City Boiler Room. But the hype man was so bad, I don't know what he was doing. Like, during a very hype moment in the set, he would just grab the mic and he's like- they were playing Sugar Daddy. Okay. It's a song that they're known for. Whatever. But he's like, "Where my sugar daddies at in the crowd. Shout out to all the sugar babies. I know you got money. All the sugar babies raise their hand so all the sugar daddies could find you." And I'm just like, shut the fuck up. You're ruining it. Okay, if you would have said, that all really succinctly as the DJ was transitioning from the previous song to the song, it's fine. But, you're doing it, like, as the song is playing. It's so bad. It throws me out of it completely. Like, the immersion is gone. I need, like, another 15 minutes to get back into it. That guy was crazy annoying. *(Jake)*

Jake holds that there isn't really a need for such a person in the first place as the hype people tend to "break the contract" between the DJ and the audience. During one participant observation session, the DJ appeared annoyed by the presence of the hype person interrupting her set as well.

They're [DJs] performers, right? They understand how to rev up a crowd. They understand how to keep them at a certain level and then just take care of them throughout a two-hour period. When you have someone break that contract, it's just like, it's just annoying. *(Jake)*

At the main stage, a woman other than the DJ had taken the mic. She was hyping up the crowd, screaming – "Give it up for (indecipherable DJ name)". A member of a group of boys in front of me mocked her, repeating what she said in a funny, high-pitched voice to earn snickers from his friends. [...] The woman who had the mic kept screaming unnecessary ad libs and chants of encouragement. I directly looked at the DJ for her reaction, and she seemed really annoyed by this. *(Fieldnotes excerpt)*

To sum up, a formal climax is not observed within the context of Piknic Electronik. On one hand, the lack of pyrotechnics keeps attendees tethered to reality instead of mesmerizing the crowd to the focus on the music. On another hand, the presence of a hype person actively

interrupts individuals' immersion into the atmosphere, breaking their flow of entrancement by the music.

Piknic's environment affords the space for natural climax to proliferate at a lower scale among the crowd, namely at the main Videotron and side Boisé stages, but because of the distracted shared focus among ritual members, the effervescence observed and reported within that context occurs in smaller groups, even on individual notes, rather than collectively. As discussed earlier, the audience at Piknic is divided into participants attending for diverse purposes. Some partake in socializing activities, passionate ravers seek the enjoyment of the music, and less engaged attendees simply desire a fun summer outing. Furthermore, the setting of the event is spread across multiple zones where participants engage in different activities upon their own timelines. In other words, Piknic embodies a spatially and temporally porous context whereby attendees customize their own experiences, leading to the divide of the collective "whole" consuming the live event. Effervescence can be observed upon participants' fulfilment of their initial 'goal' (the reason behind their attendance) which drives positive feelings of excitement and elevated states of emotion leading to immersion (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2020).

For music-lovers, the experience culminates when participants are fully in-tune with the music, losing themselves to the beat of their favorite songs. Their climax is an individual experience as they get entranced by the rhythm and forget their presence within a larger crowd. This peak embodies an intensified connection between themselves and the performing artist as all other elements fade into the background of their consciousness. Jake defines it as a spiritual experience of relinquishing control:

The peak, for me, is always very music-driven. So, it has to be, typically, it's like three or four particularly good songs in a row. And then the last song is one of the songs that DJ is known for, and we've reached the pinnacle of the song. At this point, my eyes are closed, my hands are in the air. I

hesitate to use this word because I'm not a very religious sort of person, but it feels spiritual to me. Where I grew up Christian, I'm very atheist atheistic nowadays. But, like, the stuff that they told me to expect when I had, like, a talk-to-Jesus moment, that's what I feel when I'm in the crowd, like, at the peak where it's like an overwhelming feeling of... awe is the wrong word because awe can encapsulate fear as well. And I'm not fearful. It's more like wonder, I guess. Well, okay, suffice it to say, it's a feeling that's very difficult to describe. It's ineffable, it's hard to grasp, but really, it's like, at this point, I relinquish control to the base parts of myself, and my arms just move by themselves. My eyelids just move by themselves. I'm not really like, I forget that I'm in the crowd. Like, my friend is talking me like, 'oh, yeah, this song', like, I don't even know he's there anymore. And it's just I am very calm and happy and hopeful and wondrous all at the same time.

Zooming out of individual attendees' personal peaks, a form of collective effervescence permeates the crowds in front of the stages as they all dance to the DJ's music. It spreads through smaller groups within the front and middle of the crowd, as the back tends to be the least condensed section with lower audio dispersion. This natural climax is experienced to a lower intensity because it doesn't embody a total transcendence or loss of self, but it flows through participants as they all recognize their shared emotions and behavioral entrainment, honoring a sense of *communitas*.

People in the crowd were dancing with more expressive dance moves – a lot more flailing and jumping around than the typical, more refined slight bobbing that peaks into arms raised and slightly-more-defined bobbed heads in the more common techno parties. Some people had their eyes closed, dancing like no one was around. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

Crowd density and dynamics play a role here as well. Dancing towards the front or the middle of the stage allows attendees to feel more attuned to the shared focus of music than towards the back where participants are more scattered and dispersed. The back consists of less engaged attendees where social engagement is more predominant and friend groups are huddled up.

I observed as different groups seemed to be dancing in circles around each other. In the back, there was enough space to do so. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

For attendees looking to socialize, the experience “peaks” upon the fulfilment of a social goal.

When prompted about her favorite Piknic memory, Marsha discusses the formation of an

unlikely friendship, leaving out the effect of any other factor regarding music or atmospheric cues.

We met this group of girls there. They were so friendly. We're still friends up to this day. It was so much fun to meet people like that. That's like something that I really clicked in. We were having a discussion, and they just joined in, and then we just started all talking, and it was just really friendly.

For more casual attendees looking to enjoy a fun day out, the peak of their event visit is loosely defined, simply stated as the experience of “good vibes” and being in the company of friends.

There's a sense of indifference towards Piknic itself as the feelings can be recreated at any other outing with friends.

The first time after COVID, after the lockdown, after the regulations... was our first big event going in a group setting and meeting different people, meeting people outside of the people that I used to go out with. It was really nice. It was a welcome change, basically. And after it, I wouldn't say it wasn't the same, but like, that first peak was different. It's not particularly related to Piknic, I would say. The fact that we were in Piknic made it even better, in a sense where we're listening to music, we're in a venue outside, and I think that's a Piknic thing, but other than that, no, I don't think so. *(Ralph)*

Groups were engaged in conversation while other people scanned the crowds and lightly danced. [...] There was a table of around 20 people with street food containers and leftovers in the middle. They were all engaged in a group conversation, listening to a guy who was standing up and struggling to tell a story over the loud sound of music floating from the main stage. *(Fieldnotes excerpt)*

In the cases of participants driven for socializing purposes and those simply seeking a pleasant outing, intense experiences of emotion were not observed as attendees don't place enough value on the experience to desire reaching effervescence. Characterized by lower levels of passion towards the event, their emotions intensify at some points during their visit, but the threshold remains superficial as they don't seek to wholly absorb the experience.

Overall, Piknic provides a set of atmospheric cues that inform participants' experiences by curating the social atmosphere formed. Given the distracted shared focus among the audience, atmospheric cues feed into consumers' perceptions of the social atmosphere differently. While

some perceive certain stimuli as mood enhancers, others perceive the same cues with a negative nuance depending on the individual value they assign to the range of experiences afforded at Piknic. To illustrate, an attendee desiring a fun day out in the sun might be unbothered by the sound quality of the speakers, focusing on conversing with their friends and enjoying a Piknic bucket before calling it a day should the weather turn rainy. On the other hand, a music-lover would seek to position themselves closer to the speaker to drown out other participants' chatter and focus on their connection with the DJ while dancing through the rain. This diversity in experiences desired, amplified by the plethora of activities available around the event grounds, is even observed within the context of smaller friend groups which further disintegrates the intensification and immersion into the social atmosphere.

I observed the crowd from the back and noticed a group of three people hanging near the right wall – two girls were engaged in conversation while their friend was grooving to the music on the side. The friend then leaned in to join the conversation, but it seemed out of obligation rather than genuine interest. His eyes kept wandering enviously to the engaged dance floor as he slightly wiggled his body to the beat. He leaned in for a solid minute while the girls continued their animated conversation but ultimately gave up and dance-walked his way to the crowd, shaking his arms in the sky. No hard feelings from the girls' side – they continued their chat then followed him in. It felt like they killed his buzz for a few minutes there. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

As a result, the social atmosphere culminates into a variety of expressions of effervescence characterized by different degrees of intensity, as seen in **Figure 5**. **Figure 6** describes the scope of the manifestations of effervescence, indicating whether they're experienced collectively among the group of consumers within the space or individually as a personal sentiment, in addition to the level of awareness of ones' belonging to a collective. As consumers perceive an activity as a common one, becoming aware of other consumers' awareness in the space, their experience of shared emotion becomes more profound and dominates their awareness in the setting (Collins, 2004). Beyond that threshold is where transcendence takes over (Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007). Loss of Self is experienced individually with levels of

emotional energy high enough for the person to lose their perception of others as their connection with the music taking precedence over all other stimuli. Meanwhile, all other forms of effervescence observed do not intensify to the point of losing perceptions of collective consciousness.

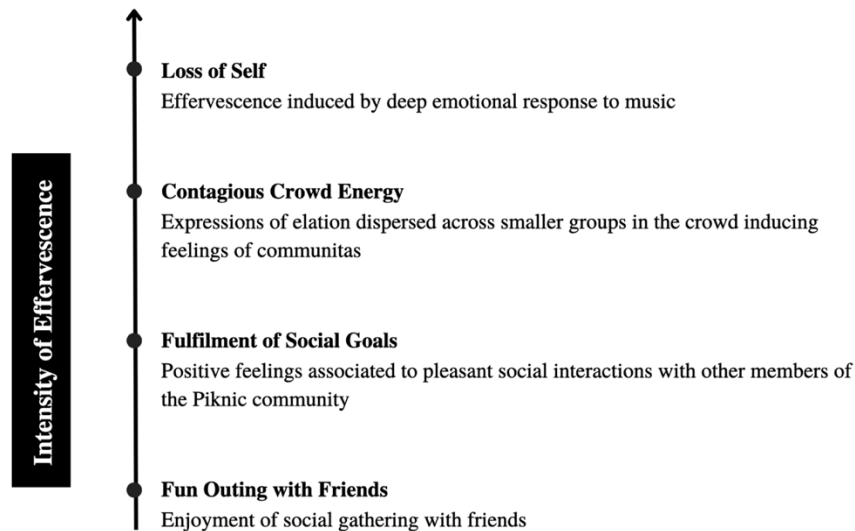


Figure 9 - Expressions of effervescence arranged by degree intensity

Hill et al.'s model (2021) highlights two forms of collective effervescence, formal and natural climax, where the experience consumed in group is unified for all attendees along a spatial and temporal timeline. On the contrary, in the context of spatially and temporally spread consumption settings such as Piknic, the shared focus is distracted resulting in a weakened entrainment of behaviors and emotions, which in turn hinders the intensification of the social atmosphere leading to the disintegration of the collective natural climax into various forms of effervescence spread along a range of intensities and experienced within different scopes, predominantly on individual notes as opposed to collectively.

Expression of Effervescence	Scope	Collective Consciousness
Loss of Self in Music	Individual	Low
Contagious Crowd Energy	Collective	High
Fulfilment of Social Goals	Individual	High
Fun Outing with Friends	Individual	High

Table 4 - Scope of Expression of Effervescence

	Hill et al. (2021)	Piknic Electronik
Climax	Formal climax	Soaking up Atmospheric cues
	Natural climax	Expressions of Effervescence

Figure 10 - Atmospheric Climax

5.4 Atmospheric Recovery

In the final phase of the interaction ritual, the social atmosphere built over the course of the experience begins its descent into dissipation. Hill et al. (2021) highlight how shared emotions and memories of atmosphere are stored in objects that serve as symbols inspiring participants' future participation in the ritual, as do digital merchandise comprising of media such as

photographs, videos, and social media posts. In the context of Piknic, atmospheric recovery begins during the commute back as consumers leave the event space.

5.4.a Commute Back

The event ends around 9PM and Piknic's attendees swarm out of the event space through the path they initially entered from, walking back to Jean Drapeau's metro station to catch a ride off the island. A few participants commute back using Bixi, Uber, or by car, but the vast majority fill up the metro station as police personnel direct traffic down the platform to avoid dangerous crowding near the metro platform. At this point, some participants are tired from the past experience while others are still revved up and wired with energy. Varying degrees of intoxication are often plastered upon everyone's face.

As you're walking back, people are spending all the rest of their remaining energy so that once you're on the metro, it's sort of like, I don't know, one dude is falling asleep on his girlfriend's lap, other people are just sort of silently hanging on to the little slings of the metro. I don't know, it's very calm. And then you have the other group of people who are like, "That was such a good show. He played magic carpets. Oh, my God, I went crazy, dude." You get a bit of both. And then there's the particularly special times where everyone is like, singing in unison and it's just one big song, like moving through the subway system. (*Jake*)

Almost everyone had red eyes, a product of either too much weed or too much alcohol. People were chatting, some were just trying to keep themselves up, and a lot were scanning the crowd - hoping to secure someone to go home with before the night ends. As the metro in the opposite direction pulled up, we realized that our metro is actually late. It had been longer than the 7 minutes indicated on the screen. People tutted and looked around, impatiently shuffling around. The energy levels seem to have dropped to an all-time low for everyone involved. (*Fieldnotes excerpt*)

Since the event ends relatively early compared to other music festivals, participants plan their next move on the journey back, deciding whether to continue the party with friends or return home to prepare for the following morning.

When you go back, everybody's fucked up. It's just a vibe. Then you start hearing questions like, "Where do we go now? What do we do now? Are we going to eat? Are we going to party more? Are

we going to go out? Are we going to sleep? Tomorrow, I have work. Yeah, but I don't want to go.”
These kind of discussions. *(Greg)*

As the metro arrives to Berri UQAM, the Piknic crowd disperses across different platforms mixing in with other passengers that are going about their Sunday evenings as the social atmosphere completes disseminates, leaving attendees with the memories, the Piknic buckets, and the digital media of their experience.

5.4.b Mementos & Digital Media

In terms of symbolic objects, most participants expressed a casual attachment to the Piknic bucket and cups purchased at the event and reused them in various ways while others were less concerned with keeping them around.

Yeah, I have kept the buckets. I accumulated a decent amount because before, I used to get the cups, those recyclable cups. The buckets are newer and so I used to also get the cups, which I had loads of, and I had to eventually get rid of some because I would always forget to bring them back. Do you know how, like, you pay for the cup and then you bring it there and then you don't pay again because you have the cup. But it's like to remember every time you bring the cup... But I do have kept the buckets. I have some buckets here somewhere that kept the buckets are fun. Sometimes I'll use them in the summer if I'm tanning up here in my building. Yeah, because it's a nice big bucket. It's got a lot of space for alcohol or water or whatever. But I usually don't bring it as much. I don't use it for as many things, like in my apartment. No, it's more of a memento. *(Mary)*

This casual attachment can be explained by consumers' laidback perception of the experience of Piknic. For most, the emotional energy built during the experience of the festival does not culminate in manifestations of catharsis or effervescence, informing why objects from the event are not charged up enough to become symbols. This is also reflected in the low levels of significance attendees afford to Piknic's social media presence, which, as described earlier, is designed to trigger memories of past experiences and induce future participation in rituals. When prompted about whether they follow Piknic's socials or watch the YouTube sets of live DJ

sessions recorded there, most responded nonchalantly replied that they don't, proving that the social atmosphere fizzles towards the end of the commute back from Jean Drapeau to Berri UQAM. Unlike Hill et al.'s model (2021), charged up symbolic objects and atmosphere recall through digital media are not observed within this context. The temporal and spatial spread of the event allows for its casual consumption, causing consumers to perceive the experience as accessible and reliable enough (seasonal scheduling) to the extent that attendance doesn't require much forethought or pre-planning let alone the need to be spurred by symbolic objects or digital media. On the other hand, in Hill et al.'s (2021) context, the atmosphere is contained within the main event grounds as consumers are all attuned to a mutual focus of attention while experiencing highs of effervescence, before the atmosphere is stored in symbolic objects in the final stage of the ritual.

	Hill et al. (2021)	Piknic Electronik
Recovery	Symbolic Objects	Commute back
	Remembering Atmosphere	Mementos & Digital Media

Figure 11 - Atmospheric Recovery

To conclude, Piknic Electronik provides a consumption setting characterized by a spatial and temporal spread, allowing participants to consume the event along their own timelines and curate their own experiences of the ritual. This results in the distraction of shared focus as the convenience of the daytime scheduling and accessibility of the event's location in addition to its recurring nature opens the festival up to more casual, laidback consumers alongside common

audiences of rave and music lovers seeking transcendent experiences. Attendees, whether driven to attend for music-related purposes, socializing motives, or to enjoy a fun day out in the sun, experience the four phases of Piknic's interaction ritual chain which inform their perception of the social atmosphere created. The interaction ritual chain begins in the Preparation phase when participants complete their Sunday errands in their own private spaces before fine-tuning the logistic details to attend the event with their friends. This phase includes a more casual choice of outfits compared to typical rave settings, characterizing the laidback perception of the experience of a Sunday afternoon at Piknic. The next step is where the social atmosphere begins to build up as attendees gather at a friends' house to indulge in necessary mood-setting activities, namely, substance consumption and socializing, before heading over to the metro to begin their commute to the event grounds. During the commute, the first step of the Activation phase, the atmosphere intensifies as Piknic participants coming from all over Montreal begin to recognize each other in the metro, condensing on the ride from Berri UQAM to Jean Drapeau which is described as a private "shuttle" to Piknic Electronik given the density of passengers heading to the same event. At this point, an unspoken sense of community looms over participants, fueling high levels of emotional energy and anticipation. Upon arrival to the island, sensory cues alluding to the Piknic experience (thumping music, signage, presence of other attendees) boost the feelings of anticipation experienced as the atmosphere further intensifies while participants walk towards the entrance gates. There, anticipation reaches an all-time high before participants finally enter the gates to begin their consumption of the experience. The Atmospheric Climax phase begins with the absorption of atmospheric cues present onsite, whether festival-specific (such as weather, aesthetics, artist scheduling) or community-led (social interactions within the space). Given the diversity of "motives" for attendance, each participant internalizes atmospheric cues

based on the experience they seek, unveiling certain points of tension in the intensification and culmination of the atmosphere. This leads to a variety of manifestations of effervescence observed onsite, varying in degrees of intensity, scope of experience, and levels of crowd consciousness. The most intense peak is described as the Loss of Self – a music-led, spiritual relinquishing of control in which the participant loses their sense of space and time, let alone presence in a greater crowd. Next on the intensity scale is Contagious Crowd Energy, defining bursts of elation experienced among smaller groups within the larger crowd of attendees, experienced collectively. For those attending for socializing purposes, the peak entails the fulfilment of a social goal, generating positive feelings of low intensity. Finally, those seeking a casual outing experience the least intense peaks, revolving around “good vibes” and good company. As the event comes to an end, attendees who had not left earlier swarm out of the event grounds towards the metro, kickstarting the Atmospheric Recovery phase whereby the social atmosphere dissipates as participants experience various levels of energy, intoxication, and positive spirits. The atmospheres fizzles to an end upon the return to Berri UQAM, where consumers mix in with regular metro passengers. Given the casual consumption of the event, mementos and digital media are not charged up enough to induce further participation in the ritual, as it tends to be a given.

Hill et al.’s (2021) model reveals a more intense experience of social atmosphere consumed wholly within the group of consumers in a space. But in spatially and temporally spread settings, the experience is not consumed by attendees along the same timeline nor is there a unified shared focus driving participation in the first place. This presents more opportunities for weaker social atmospheres, leading to the breakdown of a collective manifestation of effervescence into smaller, lower-intensity peaks experienced to different extents among attendees. **Figure 9**

summarizes the difference between the interaction ritual chains at Piknic Electronik and that conceptualized in Hill et al.'s model (2021).

IRC	Hill et al. (2021)	Piknic Electronik
Preparation	- Learning to participate - Making symbolic resources - Rehearsing entrained behaviors	- Completing Sunday errands - Fine-tuning details - Getting together for the pre-game
Activation	- Activating focus & entrainment - Intensification through collective mobility - Activating prior emotional responses	- Recognition of other attendees - Arrival to the island
Climax	- Formal climax - Natural climax	- Soaking up atmospheric cues - Expressions of effervescence
Recovery	- Symbolic objects - Remembering atmosphere	- Commute back - Mementos & digital media

Figure 12 - Summary of Piknic's IRC in comparison to Hill et al.'s model (2021)

6. DISCUSSION

The investigation of social atmosphere creation and intensification in the spatially and temporally spread group consumption context of music festivals extends literature on atmospherics and interaction ritual theory and provides practitioners with insights into alleviating points of tension that distract shared focus among attendees, guiding experience design efforts to ensure a more enjoyable live event for all participants present.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

My findings present the following main contributions to literature. First, my research extends interaction ritual theory by applying Hill et al.'s (2021) model of social atmosphere formation to live events whereby the event is consumed in a group context but along different timelines. This dimension of temporality creates the perception of a more flexible consumption experience that distracts shared focus among attendees, reducing the opportunity for behavioral and emotional entrainment. Shared focus and entrainment are core ingredients for successful ritual chains' culmination into collective effervescence (Collins, 2004). My investigation of Piknic Electronik reveals that social atmosphere can indeed culminate into effervescence despite weakened core ingredients but rather than a collective manifestation of effervescence, fragmented peaks experienced to various degrees of intensity among participants are observed. As a result, emotional energy built by elation and feelings of membership to a community, core results of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004), is experienced among individual ritual members but not to the extent of charging symbolic objects that drive further participation in the ritual. In other words, the atmosphere is not stored after the Climax, and fizzles out during the Recovery phase. Second, my research adds complexities to the literature of atmospherics,

consumer decision-making, and experience design in music festival contexts as it highlights that participants afford different nuances to the same atmospheric stimuli depending on the motives stimulating their participation in the ritual, whether social or music-related. Music festivals are known to be a site designed for the consumption of both music and community and less engaged consumers tend to balance between both during the event (Neuhofer, Celuch, & To, 2021), a fact that has been hailed as a positive aspect of such contexts. As seen through the context of Piknic Elektronik, participants' immersion into the social atmosphere is interrupted by this distraction of focus. Socializing activities were found to disrupt other attendees' consumption of music, proving that further research into this avenue should be conducted to inform the design of spaces that accommodate the consumption of both interests in a music festival without spilling over onto each other.

6.2 Practical Implications

Starting at the preparation phase of the interaction ritual chain, facilitating mood-setting activities can be a profitable avenue of investment for music festival organizers. Incorporating a space that music festival attendees can begin their experience in before beginning their consumption of the event would amplify the opportunities for community interactions and strengthen the communal bonds tying participants together, boosting feelings of enjoyment and anticipation for the event. On the same note, providing an after-party setting where consumers can use up their remaining energy before being completely pulled out of the festival context would ease this transition from liminal party setting to normal life.

On event grounds, organizers should attempt to encase the dance floor with aesthetics that make consumers forget about their current setting, allowing them to transcend into feelings of loss of

self. As the event intensifies, audio dispersion should be louder in the dancefloor but lower on the sidelines to promote socializing while allowing the immersion into the music. Designing atmospherics to support the intensification of social atmospheres would allow consumers to build up on emotional energy that is then used to drive their further participation in the rituals. An idea would be to promote fun outfits through social media competitions, as outfits proved to be conversation starters and mood-setters in the space that boost consumers' spirits. Having a theme for outfits would also allow for the detection of other community members in the service ecosystem, boosting community bonding.

7. CONCLUSION

This research is not without its limitations. The sample collected through online scouting efforts consists mainly of students or young professionals with the oldest participant being 31 years of age. Piknic targets a variety of audience members including older participants, families, and other demographics whose insights would enrich the data further. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted over the course of 6 months after the event had passed, which threatens the ability of participants to recall acute details pertaining to their experience at the event.

Piknic Electronik is a unique sub-branch of daytime music festivals similar to Spain's Brunch in the Park that doesn't include a liminal element. Attendance is convenient due to the flexible nature of scheduling and accessible setting. The exploration of the social atmosphere exclusively formed during the daytime (2PM until 4PM) at Piknic was not examined during participant observation sessions, though it was referred to during interviews. Future research could take on a comparative research study of the intensification of social atmospheres during nighttime music

festivals as compared to daytime festivals. Another research avenue could compare social atmospheres during time-bound, 3-day destination festivals (DGTL) to weekly seasonal summer festivals such as Piknic.

In terms of the commute, the social atmosphere formation was exclusively examined through the metro system. Despite it being the most common form of transportation towards the event, this focus on the metro leaves out insights into the atmospheric build up for attendees who make their way over using Bixi, cars, or even buses.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Participant Recruitment Posts

1- Reddit:

Posted by u/chrizzybearss 10 days ago

2

Call for Interviewees



Hey guys!

I'm a Masters' student researching Piknic Electronik for my thesis and looking to hear about your experience if you've attended in 2021 or 2022 :)

The interview is 100% based on your opinions, feelings, stories (basically, your experience) of the event.

The Dets

- The interview duration is 1 hour of just free flow conversation - nothing too intense
- Participation is completely anonymous and no data will be traced back to you
- There is no physical compensation offered but I'm sure the universe will reward you in good karma for helping out a stressed student

If you're interested in participating, please reach out to me and we'll schedule a video call.

Thank you!

2 CommentsShareSaveHide...

Post Insights

Only you and mods of this community can see this

3.1k 	63%	2	0
 Total Views	 Upvote Rate	 Community Karma	 Total Shares

Sort By: New ▾

2- Facebook:



Christina Zeidan
February 7 at 9:54 PM · 🌐

...

Hey guys!

I'm a Masters' student researching Piknic Electronik (the summer music festival in Montreal) for my thesis and looking to hear about your experience if you've attended it recently 😊

The interview is 100% based on your opinions, feelings, stories (basically, your experience) of the event.

The Dets

🕒 The interview duration is 1 hour of just free flow conversation - nothing too intense

👤 Participation is completely anonymous and no data will be traced back to you

✨ There is no physical compensation offered but I'm sure the universe will reward you in good karma for helping out a stressed student 😊

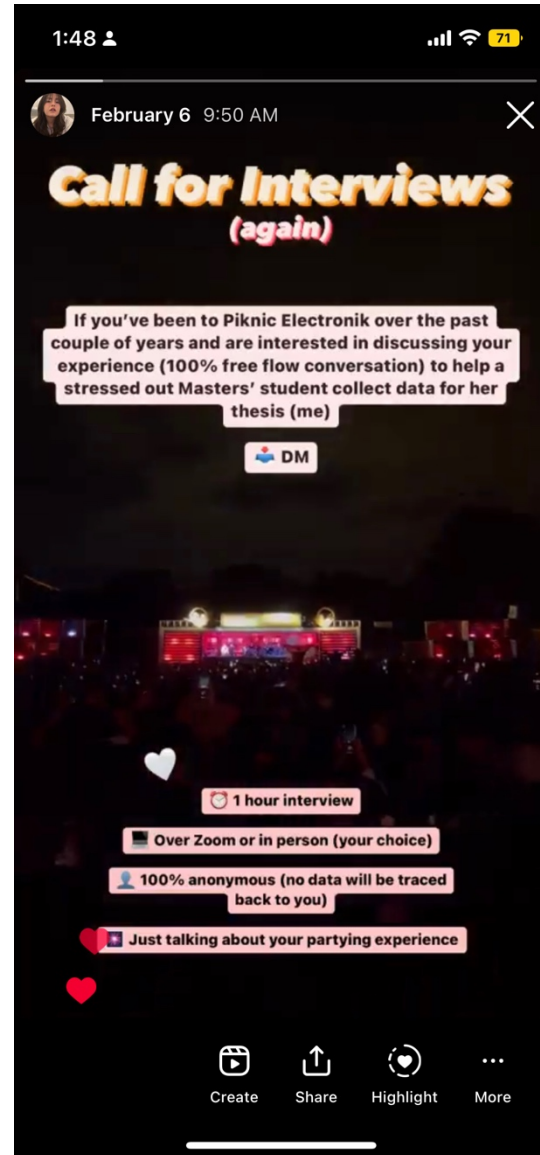
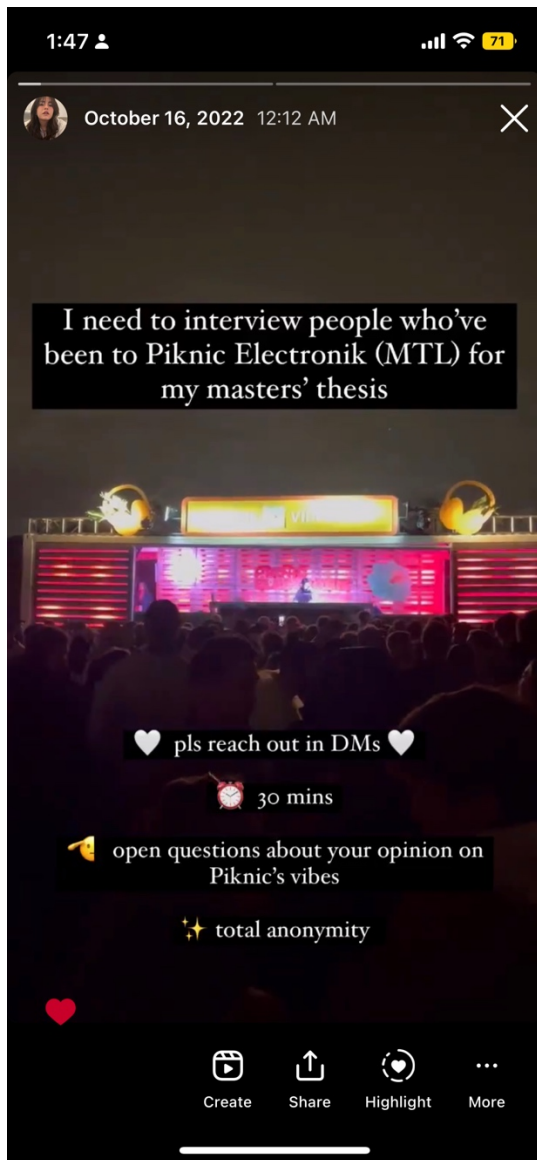
If you're interested in participating, please reach out to me via Messenger and we'll schedule a Zoom call.

Thank you so much!

  and 13 others

4 comments

3- Instagram:



Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Topic	Main Question	Follow Up Prompts
Getting to Know the Respondent	Can you tell me about yourself?	Background, education, family, lifestyle, day-in-the-life, hobbies, interests...
Piknic-Specific Questions	Tell me about your history with Piknic.	- How often did you attend Piknic Electronik? - Would you call yourself a Piknic regular? - What defines a Piknic regular in your opinion? - Are you a season pass holder? Why or why not?
	What stands out to you about Piknic as a music festival?	- How do you feel about its setting at Parc Jean Drapeau? (event grounds, stage division, commute...) - How do you think the daytime nature of the festival affects your partying experience?
Preparation Phase	Walk me through the process of attending a Piknic event.	- Why do you decide to attend that specific Piknic? - What's the process after you've decided to attend? What about the day of the event?

	What event preparation activities do you partake in? Describe them and why you do them.	- What kind of music do you have playing on in the background? Why that specific kind? - Would you say skipping these activities would influence your experience of Piknic later? Why or why not?
	How do you decide what to wear to Piknic? Are there any special considerations or is it just like any other outing clothing-wise?	- What are some of the most important considerations? - Describe a few of your favorite Piknic outfits and accessories.
Activation Phase	Describe the metro commute to Berri UQAM, then to Jean Drapeau.	- What observations stood out to you or come to mind? - Describe the other people around you on the commute.
	Describe the walk from Jean Drapeau to the event grounds.	- Highlight your five senses.
	What has been your experience with the entrance protocol of Piknic?	- What would you do differently if you were in charge of organizing it?

Climax Phase	Describe your stay at Piknic.	Where do you spend the most time? Why?
	How you feel when you're in the middle of the crowd?	- What feelings come to you? - What sensations can you recall right now?
	How aware are you of others in the crowd?	How do they affect your experience?
	What are some factors you particularly enjoy?	What are the elements related to Piknic that hype up your mood and energy (beat drops, fun people, food trucks, resting area, crossing over to another stage...)?
	Describe your peak Piknic memory – a time that you were at your happiest being there.	What are the factors that framed that experience?
	What are some aspects that you wish you could change?	What are the factors you particularly dislike?
Recovery Phase	What makes you decide to leave Piknic and end a visit?	

	Describe the commute on the way back.	
	How often do you watch Piknic's YouTube sets?	Do you keep up with them online?
	How often would you say Piknic crosses your mind during the off-season?	What triggers this recall?
	Is there anything I have not asked regarding your experience that you would like to share?	

Appendix C – Interview Length

Aa Pseudonym	:≡ Age Range	:≡ Occupation	:≡ Commitment	≡ Audio Length
Matt (M)	mid-20s	Masters' Student	Casual	21:56
Pearl (F)	mid-20s	Supply Chain Consultant	Regular	26:49
Ralph (M)	mid-20s	Tax Consultant	Casual	24:32
Greg (M)	mid-20s	Agricultural Demand Planner	Passionate Regular	50:08
Beth (F)	mid-20s	Accounting Student	Regular Passionate	46:31
Aaron (M)	early 20s	Finance Student	Regular Passionate	50:27
Jake (M)	early 30s	Finance Student	Passionate	1:30:55
Clemence (M)	early 20s	Urban Planning Student	Casual	1:09:31
Marsha (F)	mid-20s	Mechanical Engineer	Indifferent	20:26
Mary (F)	mid-20s	Actress	Regular	38:51
Rob (NB)	early 20s	Server	Casual	38:09
+ New				

Appendix D – Screenshots of Secondary Data Organization

1- Media outlets' references to Piknic

Archive ...					
Aa Article Name	Tags	Media Source	Quick Description	URL	Year
The Founders of Piknic Electronik are Ready to Take Over	Interview Background	Vice	Insights into the background of Piknic and what makes it special	https://www.vice.com/en/article/jpnwm4/the-founders-of-piknic-electronik-are-ready-to-take-over	2022
Toronto electronic music fans should put Piknic Electronik on their summer bucket list	Promo Event Details	NowToronto	CTA for Toronto people to experience Piknic in Montreal + event details	https://nowtoronto.com/music/concert-reviews/piknic-electronik-2018-review	2022
Le Piknic Électronik révèle sa programmation 2022	Lineup Reveal	Le Canal Auditif	Lineup for 2022	https://lecanalauditif.ca/actualites/piknic-electronik-revele-programmation-2022/	2022
OFF PIKNIC ELECTRONIK DE RETOUR CET ÉTÉ AVEC KAYTRANADA, FATBOY SLIM, DIPLO ET PLUS !	Event Details Lineup Reveal OFFPiknic	Sors-Tu	Lineup for OFFPiknic	https://sorstu.ca/off-piknic-electronik-de-retour-cet-ete-avec-kaytranada-fatboy-slim-diplo-et-plus/	2022
Piknic Électronik returns to Parc Jean-Drapeau as of July 3	Event Announcement	The Suburban	Details of Piknic 2021 return + COVID instructions	https://www.thesuburban.com/arts_and_entertainment/entertainment/piknic-electronik-returns-to-parc-jean-drapeau-as-of-july-3/article_178ece34-d83c-11eb-bbe9-33e2bbe55660.html	2021
Piknic Electronik returns to Montreal along with a walk-in vaccination clinic	Vaccination Clinic COVID-19	CTV News Montreal	Vaccination clinic set up on site	https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/piknic-electronik-returns-to-montreal-along-with-a-walk-in-vaccination-clinic-1.5504919	2021
Weekly music festival Piknic Électronik returning to Montreal this summer	Event Announcement	Daily Hive	Details of Piknic 2021 return + COVID instructions	https://dailyhive.com/montreal/music-festival-jean-drapeau-piknic-electronik-return	2021
Montreal festival organizers grapple with ever-changing pandemic rules	COVID-19	CBC News	Difficulties faced when planning 2021 version of Piknic due to everchanging COVID restrictions	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-festivals-grapple-ever-changing-rules-1.6089221	2021

2- Classification of Reddit comments

Key:  Quality comments  Average comments				
 Table				
Archive				
Aa Community	Title	Post Description	Link	Year
 r/osheaga	Piknic Electronik Lineup!	Image of lineup	https://www.reddit.com/r/osheaga/comments/u2oy6y/piknic_electronik_lineup/	2022
r/montreal	Piknic Electronik starts this weekend! Which are you most looking forward to?	Artists they're most looking forward to	https://www.reddit.com/r/montreal/comments/bo7l3h/piknic_electronik_starts_this_weekend_which_are/	2019
 r/EDM	Amazing lineup for Piknic Electronik @Montreal, Canada. May-September 2019	Image of lineup	https://www.reddit.com/r/EDM/comments/bkcxbb/amazing_lineup_for_piknic_electronik_montreal/	2019
 r/montreal	Devastating new alcohol policy at Piknic Electronik. No more BYOB.	Linking this article: http://patius.blogspot.com/2010/04/piknic-electronik-new-policy-for-summer.html	https://www.reddit.com/r/montreal/comments/bxw1h/devastating_new_alcohol_policy_at_piknic/	2010
r/montreal	Anyone going to Piknic Electronik on July 2nd?	User looking for someone to attend piknic with	https://www.reddit.com/r/montreal/comments/6iqnbi/anyone_going_to_piknic_electronik_on_july_2nd/	2017
r/deephouse	ID PLEASE. Hernan Cattaneo @ Piknic Electronik in Montreal 🇨🇦	Instagram story from event	https://www.reddit.com/r/deephouse/comments/btouc2/id_please_hernan_cattaneo_piknic_electronik_in/	2019
r/montreal	These promo ads for Piknic Electronik are great.	Promo ad Sponsors: - Parc Jean Drapeau - Quebec	https://www.reddit.com/r/montreal/comments/u3a8u/these_promo_ads_for_piknic_electronik_are_great/	2012

3- Piknic's blog posts

Aa Article Name	Common Message	Emergent Themes	Link	Year
PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK MONTRÉAL 2022 LINE-UP	Lineup Reveal	Come-back Ticketing Info	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/annonce-programmation-2022	2022
PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK UNVEILS THE SOUNDTRACK FOR ITS 19TH EDITION	Lineup Reveal	Come-back Lineup Sponsors Shoutout	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/cp-prog-2022	2022
PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK 2022 SEASON PASSES	Ticketing	Come-back Ticketing Info	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/mev-passes-de-saison	2022
HE GOOD TIMES WEEKEND RITUAL IS BACK THIS SUMMER AT PARC JEAN-DRAPEAU FROM MAY 22 TO OCTOBER 2, 2022	Comeback Announcement	Come-back Ticketing Info OFFPiknic Boiler Room	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/cp-passes-de-saison	2022
ANOTHER BOILER ROOM X PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK MONTRÉAL COLLABORATION	Boiler Room	Boiler Room Ticketing Info	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/boiler-room-x-piknic	2022
PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK ARRIVES IN MIAMI!!	Parent Brand News	Miami Announcement	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/piknic-electronik-arrives-in-miami	2022
LAURENCE MATTE AT PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK	Artist Live Set	Live Set YouTube Channel Promotion Content Video Planète Piknic	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/laurence-matte-at-piknic-electronik	2021
PASCALE PROJECT AT PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK	Artist Live Set	Live Set YouTube Channel Promotion Content Video Planète Piknic	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/pascale-project-at-piknic-electronik	2021
CLARIAN AT PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK	Artist Live Set	Live Set YouTube Channel Promotion Content Video Planète Piknic	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/clarian-at-piknic-electronik	2021
M.BOOTYSPoon AT PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK	Artist Live Set	Live Set YouTube Channel Promotion Content Video Planète Piknic	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/m.bootyspoon-at-piknic-electronik	2021
PIKNIC ÉLECTRONIK 2021 BEST OF	Post-Event	Promotion Content Photos	https://piknicelectronik.com/en/news/piknic-electronik-2021-best-of	2021

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