

***Is the utilisation of brand advertising in live music events “selling out” and therefore compromising customer satisfaction?***

*Name of student:* James Hook; *Programme:* BA (HONS) Marketing; *Year of Study:* 2

*Mentored by:* Dr Mazia Yassim

**Abstract**

This is a conceptual paper discussing the use of advertising communications at live music events. The paper encompasses two key viewpoints. Firstly, a number of publications have taken a negative stance towards advertising at music festivals, stating that even the notion of ‘marketing’ at this type of event hints at compromising its artistic principles, and suggests that promoters’ primary concern is profit. They feel that this is at the expense of creating a USP, which differentiates their event from others in what is becoming a saturated market. However, it is important to note that various academia suggest that consumers should be able to play a key part in the advertising and marketing communications process for these events. Key concepts alluded to in the literature include the creation of ‘positive flow’ between the consumer and the promoter/sponsor. Furthermore, the use of ‘experiential marketing’ whereby the values of the sponsored brand correlates with the experience of the attendee could provide another solution to the research problem. On the other hand, there is also evidence that special events and sponsorship campaigns (e.g. The Strongbow Cider House) are tailoring their communications towards the needs of consumers. A knowledge of the motivations behind attendees deciding to visit music festivals, enables the promoter to modify web-based communications, in order to positively enhance the overall consumer experience.

**Key Words:** Attitudes, satisfaction, decision-making, experience, artistic principles, motives.

## Introduction

The use of advertising and marketing communications at live music events to promote organisations internal/external to the event is a debate which has caused split opinions amongst academic in the events and tourism field. Prior to considering the opposing arguments, it is important to consider the notion of ‘Event Marketing’ as a concept. Vel et al. (2010) describe “event marketing’ as ‘a tool for experiential marketing that focuses on consumer experiences, and treats emotionally and rationally driven consumption as a holistic experience” (p. 371).

As the number of festivals grows exponentially on a global scale, academics have taken an interest in the way that live music organisations are able to compete in such a hostile industry. Furthermore, an interest has been taken in a shift in consumer wants/needs from material possessions to the desire to experience an event that will enhance a consumer’s social status. According to Yeoman (2013), ‘consumer spending on enrichment goods/services will increase from UK £216 billion in 2008 to UK £395 billion by 2023’(p. 255). The case studies discussed in this article will consider the degree to which related/unrelated brands have made a contribution towards fuelling consumer spending in the ‘experiencescape’.

This paper adds to the existing knowledge of ‘event marketing’ in live music events on a number of levels. Firstly, models and theories related to this topic are discussed and evaluated including ‘Event Flow’; consumer motivation; and ‘Experiential Marketing’. Furthermore, a number of case studies from various literature are used to support the points made throughout the paper. They are diverse in nature as they encompass music festivals and events taking place in different cultures, allowing for a balanced account of the research question in hand. In addition to this, the paper aims to contextualise ‘marketing’, through explaining its importance in delivering messages to target groups as well as fitting in with other key areas of a company’s operations.

This paper discovers that despite some scepticism from target markets over the use of branded marketing communications by festival organisations, they are still invaluable to festivals that wish to establish themselves within a competitive market. This is based on the premise of case studies such as the *WOMAD* Music Festival, which successfully branded an unknown festival into a successful one, despite facing numerous obstacles. Furthermore, this paper provides a general outline of the requirements of consumers when it comes to receiving

marketing communications, with examples of case studies referred to in literature indicating how strategies should not be implemented.

## **Methodology**

The sources that were identified to express the themes throughout this conceptual paper were selected for a multitude of reasons. First of all, Anderton's (2011) and Hudson et al's (2013) papers represent the most extreme views on the use of marketing in live music events. The two articles highlight the contrast of opinions between authors primarily concerned with the art of performance and those looking to highlight the logistical aspects of marketing in live music events. Furthermore, the range of quantitative/qualitative data collection methods utilised within the literature allowed for a valid assessment of the opinions expressed throughout. Popular methods adopted by studies included interviews with industry experts and consumer, as well as focus groups. The sources were also selected due to the fact that, in most cases, event marketing was put in the context of live music events. This enabled for an in-depth discussion of this issue within a specific industry rather than discussing branding and marketing communications generally, which may have led to a disorientated assessment.

## **Literature Review**

The literature that supports the use of communications in live music events covers a wide spectrum of tools/methods that enable marketers of these events the ability to engage with their end consumer. Hudson et al. (2013) studied the use of social media across three music festivals, with the objective of applying the models raised in the paper to real-life case studies. The paper builds upon the consensus in the field of events that word of mouth and viral marketing can raise awareness just as effectively as planned media. They were able to decipher from their research that festivals such as *Bonnaroo*, *Latitude* and *Lollapalooza* can achieve their marketing objectives through setting out a social media strategy which is supported by investment. This is despite the fact that "social media still accounts for <1 percent of an average marketing budget" (Hudson et al, 2013, p.207 cited Divol et al, 2012). Furthermore, the paper refers to 'the consumer decision journey' model, developed by Court et al (2009), which explains how consumers are able to consider a set of brands when making a purchase decision and narrow this set down once they make a final decision on what they wish to purchase. This can be influenced by a myriad of factors including communications

such as an e-mail from *Seetickets* offering mailing list subscribers a discount for an event to dissuade the customer from using *Ticketmaster*, for example. In the post-purchase stage of this model, consumers will then advocate their purchase through setting their expectations for their next purchase involving this brand.

The research employed in-depth interviews, content analysis on related festival websites and ethnographic research in order to collect data on the festivals. When delivering an overview of the social media activities at *Bonnaroo* music and arts festival in Tennessee, Hudson et al. deduced that the use of RFID technology was the festival's most effective use of social media. This method involved giving attendees wristbands for the weekend, which could be scanned at check-in-portals on the festival site. The impact of this was the festival-goer being checked in at the festival on their *Facebook* profile, enabling their friends to see the bands/artists that they have chosen to see over the course of the weekend, via a *Spotify* Playlist. The advantage to the festival was approximately half of the 74,000 wristbands registered online being connected to a *Facebook* account. This led to approximately 1.5 million social impressions (Sorrells, 2012). An underlying factor behind the success of this strategy was the use of words such as 'personalise' instead of 'register', when referring to the wristband in communications. The incentive to the consumer was the chance to win a *Ford Escape* through the festival's partnership with the company. This combination therefore gives the consumer the impression that the festival has been purpose-built for them, as they can 'personalise' the experience to what they want it to be using the wristband, whilst having the opportunity to win something. However, the meticulous planning of this marketing strategy through partnering with *Ford* is business orientated as the festival is looking to not only serve the needs of the 'customers' but strengthen this partnership and gain financial reward. Arguably, this is detracting from the main benefit that one may gain from purchasing a festival ticket, which is the live music. This is an argument that will be discussed in further depth in the next section of the paper.

In addition to this example, Hudson et al. (2013) also refer to the social media tactic employed at *Lollapalooza* Festival in Chicago. The organisers were able to instigate excitement surrounding the festival through the hashtag feature on Twitter, which was used to promote the festival on advertising spaces on public transport. This was achieved through displaying lyrics of the artists performing at the event, which encouraged attendees to use the *Lollapalooza* hashtag in their *Twitter* communications. Despite the fact the strategy was implemented via a modern communication method, this tactic incorporates word of mouth to a large extent. Despite the influence of the Internet and the ability to promote via other

advertising mediums, Hudson et al. (2013, p. 207) deduce that attendees at music events still very much rely on the opinions of peers and word of mouth to make an informed choice,

Marketers are therefore adapting their strategies to reach increasingly networked consumers, and are placing more emphasis on tactics such as word-of-mouth and storytelling.

This is an example of a festival being able to successfully communicate the message of a strategic marketing campaign which did not require significant investment and did not compromise the main focus of *Lollapalooza* as a music event.

In Vel et al's (2010) paper, they underline the importance of events/festivals adopting 'megamarketing', when they are competing in a saturated market. They use the example of the launch of the *WOMAD* Music Festival in Abu Dhabi using the data collection method of interviews. They outlined a number of issues faced by the organisers of the festival, which stemmed from the fact that it was going to be free for attendees and there was little public awareness surrounding the event. Furthermore, the organisers were looking to position the festival as a 'gift to the people of Abu Dhabi and the UAE' through their advertising. In order to overcome the perception of the festival quality being quite low, *TMH* (festival contract holder) set themselves the task of attracting a 'healthy cultural mix of festival-goers of all ages.' (p. 374) Pre-campaign research included focus groups and interviews in order to accumulate the needs/expectations of the demographic they were targeting. A marketing campaign started to fall in to place, when *TMH* chose to optimise their marketing budget through a multitude of different communication channels. These channels included media, PR and social networking amongst others.

As well as drip-feeding the names of artists on the festival line up to the media, *TMH* also decided to establish 'marketing partnerships with *Starbucks*, *Borders* and *Virgin Megastores* in Abu Dhabi and Dubai' (p. 377). The benefit to these globally renowned organisations was free promotional space at the event in exchange for flyers/programmes and the use of in-store TV advertising screens. In addition to these partnerships, the organisers also liaised with local newspapers where they were able to insert a copy of the festival programme, in both Arabic and English. They were also able to eradicate the notion of a low quality festival, through their PR activity which involved announcing the news that 'rock legend Robert Plant was to play at *WOMAD* Abu Dhabi' (p. 378), via Twitter. This significantly improved relations with the Media as they were able to remove the press embargo, and be notified of the line-up news prior to it being announced online.

When looking at the post-campaign results, Vel et al. (2010, p. 379) reinforce the point made earlier in the paper with regards to the effectiveness of a combination between traditional and modern communication channels. According to research, ‘two-thirds of people found out about the event through traditional media channels. However, 27 per cent of people had heard about the event through word of mouth, a very powerful medium and proof positive that the PR and social media strategies had worked.’ Furthermore, the festival achieved five times its attendance target, attracting 82,000 festival-goers.

These statistics underline the importance of unknown music festivals investing in extensive advertising and marketing communications strategies in addition to building relationships with established organisations and local media. The connections that *TMH* were able to build with local media were vital in terms of attracting Abu Dhabi attendees on a community level. Through utilising communications such as billboards and radio announcements, the festival was able to gain exposure that may not have been possible had significant resources not been inputted into *WOMAD* Festival’s brand strategy. On a global level, the invaluable promotion contributed by Starbucks and *Virgin Megastores* enabled *WOMAD* Music Festival to attract attendees from a variety of cultures. This is one instance where building relationships with external brands did not compromise the integrity of the festival content, as *WOMAD* needed to change its perception in the eyes of their target market from being a low quality event to one which could compete with other music festivals in Abu Dhabi.

Drengner et al. (2008, p. 139) look to explain the underlying reason for the rise of ‘event marketing’ as a tool for festival organisers. In their article,

Event marketing’s increasing popularity amongst marketers is caused by changes in the marketing environment as less attention is paid to conventional advertising or as moves grow toward experiential consumption” (cited Wohlfeil et al. 2005)

This observation identifies a contrast between the use of marketing by festival organisers in western cultures compared to others. For example, the *WOMAD* Music Festival required significant investment in traditional advertising, with Vel et al. (2010) not referring to the experiential marketing trend to a great degree. Drengner et al. (2008, p. 140) look to explain this contrast through integrating the ‘construct flow experience’ in to their article and identifying how event marketing has the potential to change brand image perceptions. ‘Flow’ can be defined as “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (cited Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In explaining this model in the context of

Event Marketing, Drengner et al believe that the emotions which arise as a by-product of marketing communications influence the event image, which therefore influences the perception of the event. The hypotheses developed in the article suggest that the more an attendee immerses themselves in the event experience, which could be alleviated through event marketing, the more positive their evaluation of the event and therefore the festival brand image. The only disadvantage of the flow construct is the requirement for participants to be actively involved in the experience through positively reacting to the event content. Therefore, Drengner et al seem to come to the conclusion that despite the relevance of Event Marketing to altering brand image perceptions, it is always likely to be secondary to event programming and content. However, once these conditions are facilitated by the event organisers, event marketing is still a vitally important tool to ensure information processing and the stimulation of word-of-mouth communication by attendees. Drengner et al suggest they are both of equal importance, so one aspect of the event does not compromise the other.

Rowley & Williams (2008) deduce from undertaking primary research via questionnaires that there is a positive correlation relationship between the attitude of festival attendees towards communications and purchase behaviour. However, in the literature review, the authors make the following point when referring to the use of brand sponsorship at festivals.

Some authors view brand sponsorship of arts, music and leisure events as a means of embedding brands in cultures and the processes associated with the experiential dimensions of consumption.(cited Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982)

The reference above is discussed in a positive manner, with the suggestion that festivals can have a positive impact on the brand, in the eyes of a festival attendee, as they will associate the value of the brand with an event that is of interest to them. Therefore, this can help them to formulate their own opinions of the brand. Despite this, Rowley & Williams do not view event sponsorship as a key factor in determining consumer decision-making. The issues faced in this research paper included the use of a large sample resulting in the discussion of brand recall becoming fragmented due to many individuals being unable to recall the plethora of brands in appearance at UK festivals. Therefore, little evidence was given in terms of the correlation between brand exposure via sponsorship and usage.

## Advertising & Marketing Communications at Live Music Events : The Negatives

In terms of the literature that disagrees with the notion of branding at live music events, a starting point is Duffett's (2012, p. 25) article in which he discusses the industrial reasons for sold-out shows.

It is important to understand that the live industry's aims remain primarily economic: to fill seats, to sell tickets. Promoters are more likely to court fans as a consumer group than serve them as a community. Selling tickets and presiding over the emergence and enjoyment of music fans are separate goals.

The use of newspaper and magazine publications to enhance the reputation of promoters and events, thus creating a 'bandwagon' effect in consumer decision-making is also mentioned throughout this article. This theme is also referenced to in Anderton's (2011) article on the evolving attitudes towards the capitalist nature of brand sponsorship at festivals. He describes the nature of the entertainment industry pre-1970s as 'counterculture carnivalesque', which stood for values such as anti-capitalism. In his paper, he cites Ehrenreich (2006, p. 23) whom argues that "commercialization tames the collective effects of festivals, and that festivals have now become mere spectacles and lost their utopian potential to chance society." In order to strengthen this argument, the author draws upon the example of *V Festival* 2004, which was 'lambasted' by the *Evening Standard* for the relentless adverts, plastered over every surface and played on big screens between every brand which made festival-goers feel less like music fans and more like rats in a giant marketing experiment (Smyth, 2004 cited by Anderton, 2011, p. 152).

He praises the anti-corporate ethos at *Glastonbury Festival*, which adopts a strict non-branding policy on site. Through drawing upon various academia and framework via secondary research, Anderton also discusses the utilisation of corporate sponsorship in order to finance UK festivals, and how this has become the norm since the 1990s. One of the key conclusions he makes is that event marketers and promoters alike are striving to identify a way in which they can integrate the satisfaction and the 'good times' experienced by event attendees with their chosen communications. The author's observation stems from the development of more complex promotional strategies by festival organisers, which incorporates 'experiential marketing'. Anderton points out that the aim of these strategies is to 'positively influence brand perception during and after the consumption phase', without the need to overwhelm consumers with traditional promotional methods.



Commentators on the music industry have voiced their opinions on a distinct lack of authenticity displayed in musical performance, assigning performance with a corporate undertone. For example, Taruskin (1988 cited by Anderton, 2011, p. 137),

Do we really want to talk about ‘authenticity’ any more? I had hoped a consensus was forming that to use the word in connection with the performance of music – and especially to define a particular style, manner, or philosophy of performance – is neither description nor critique, but commercial propaganda, the stock-in-trade of press agents and promoters.

Arguably, in order to gain exposure in what is a competitive market, festivals and performers require an element of ‘commercial propaganda’, in order to compete with their rivals. However, small-scale festivals and musicians that are not consistently played on radio are allowed the freedom to conduct marketing communications freely because the ‘end consumer’ does not feel ambushed by a record company or a festival organisation. In many cases, when a festival or performer does become well known within the public domain and performs well financially, music fans look for the next big thing if they deem the festival/musician to be ‘selling out’ to corporate values. For example, despite the lack of branding at *Glastonbury*, music fans may decide to attend a smaller scale festival because *Glastonbury* consistently sells their ticket allocation on an annual basis, and they would prefer to be seen attending an event which is relatively unknown.

In Rowley & Williams’ (2008) article, they use the example of the *Reading & Leeds Festival* as an example of a music festival in the UK where brands can monopolise their branding strategy, in order to gain market share over their rival competitors. Due to the fact that these festivals were sponsored by *Carling*, this was the brand with the highest brand recall amongst attendees at 92%. Despite this, there was a decrease in consumer satisfaction because *Carling* was the only available Beer brand to purchase at *Reading & Leeds*.

Despite coming to a conclusion that the types of communication methods employed by the festivals add significant value to a company’s brand activity and sales performance, Hudson et al. (2013) are also quick to point out the fact that “lack of privacy and unwanted communications are bound to become more pervasive” (p. 220). The communications posed to target markets by event marketers sometimes have the potential to be quite intrusive, which contradicts the statement, “enhancement and maintenance of visitors’ intrinsic motivations should be the primary goal of festival managers” (Crompton, 1997, p. 426 cited Iso-Ahola, 1980). In the context of a festival-goer deciding to attend a music event, they should have the ability to evaluate their options and make an informed decision on which one

to go to. This decision is likely to be informed by their underlying motivations to want to go to a festival, prior to them coming into contact with any form of marketing communication (s). If consumers feel that music festival organisations are removing their capacity to make an informed choice due to intrusive ambush marketing or narrowing product choices, then there will be no relationship between the two parties.

Hede & Kellett (2011, p. 1001) emphasise this point by concluding that “attendees require marketing communications in situ that are informative and enable them to make the most of their event experience.” In order to reach this conclusion, they conducted a study on the marketing communications of *Festival Melbourne*, which took place in 2006. Research was conducted in three different sites to ensure validity, with data collection methods taking the form of obtaining marketing communications collateral; participant observation; in-depth interviews and focus groups. As well as giving their opinions on the existing communications strategy of the festival, attendees were also involved in a role play, assuming the role of the festival organiser. This projective technique required participants to identify preferences for receiving information about the proposed festival and invited to make recommendations for its marketing communications strategy. The results of the data collection identified a centralised marketing communications strategy which was not successful in raising awareness of the events taking place in the three locations, whilst taking into account the characteristics of the target market. The strategy was also criticised by research participants for the frequency and timing of the delivery of the marketing communications, with phrases such as ‘information overload’ being used to describe the way in which information was disseminated. The authors even go on to say that the use of effective marketing communications in special events, was in this case undervalued by the festival organisers.

The literature studied in this section of the paper underlines the importance to event marketers of adopting a carefully crafted marketing communications strategy that enables significant exposure for the festival, thus providing revenue streams. Features of this strategy should include advertising methods with message (s) that are not intrusive and enable potential attendees to make an informed decision in the ‘evaluation’ stage of the consumer decision-making process. The literature discussed throughout the course of this paper does not suggest an anti-corporate movement, similar to those that existed within music festivals in the 1960 and 70s. However, many of the case studies discussed including the sponsorship of *Reading Festival* by *Carling* and *V Festival 2004* provide examples of when event marketing goes wrong in the context of music festivals.

There is evidence to suggest that festival organisers are looking for ways to improve their communications strategies, by providing a fine balance between providing exposure for the event via creative communication channels and not overloading their target market with information. This will lead to a positive reaction from the audience according to Frith (2005) (cited by Duffett 2012: p 31), using the following quote to emphasise his argument:

A live concert is not simply a transitory experience but also symbolizes what it means to be a fan.

Drenger's article on 'Experiential Marketing' illustrates a case study whereby a brand has successfully integrated their values with the festival attendee's needs/expectation. 'The *Strongbow Cider House*' is an example of this relationship and how it has become an integral part of the 'festival experience'. The use of advertising and marketing communications strategies, facilitated by branding, will always be prevalent in the operations of music festival organisations. In addition, Social Media is a channel that will continue to grow, over the next few years, with organisations adopting this approach due to the amount of information they can gather on their target market and their preferences/expectations.

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