

A critical analysis of
an event
contemporary issue



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Abstract

This paper provides an exploration of branding as interrelated to event management and experiential marketing. Different concepts and ideas are investigated in order to provide a relevant understanding of how adequate branding initiatives can impact future event management decisions. The relationship between brands and customers is emphasised throughout the paper in an attempt to focus on the importance of creating a personalised brand experience to different individuals. Therefore, the paper argues that branding is a fundamental element of ensuring proper event management activities in the contemporary business context.

Introduction

It has been indicated that brands serve different functions. At the most basic level, brands represent specific markers for the offerings provided by companies. For consumers, brands are associated with simplification of choice, reducing risk and guaranteeing a high quality level. The process of making branding decisions and undertaking particular tasks is important part of events management (Caru and Cova 2007). Brand positioning provides a relevant direction for marketing activities and establishing competitive advantage. Research shows the close relationship between brands and customers. Brand relationship quality has emerged as multidimensional because it consists of different dimensions, including self-concept, commitment, interdependence, etc. (Kotler and Keller 2006). Branding has been linked with the importance of brand experience and experiential marketing. The objective of this paper is to explore the aspects of branding

as linked to experiential marketing and how this impacts future event management decisions.

This paper will explore links between branding and experiential marketing from both academic and practical angles. It will also look at how these concepts affect future management decisions (Caru and Cova 2007). The main objective of this paper is to critically review the branding importance in event management and how it impacts event management's core decisions, how branding adds value to event management by developing a strong brand identity and new methods of linking with contemporary markets and emerging audience needs (Keller and Lehmann 2006). It is important to explore what performance signs could increase its added value for event management. Furthermore, this study focuses on the specificity of event management in terms of investigating how different trends like branding, technology, social media and events can add value to event management and improve the components of event planning. The study also investigates the contribution of branding from the perspective of brand management research (Kotler and Keller 2006). Strong branding strategy is an essential part of the overall business strategy, as currently many multi-national corporations and event organisers are facing different challenges of achieving a position to strengthen the brand.

Specificity of Branding and Its Relevance to Event Management

One of the meanings of branding is intangibility, which indicates that a brand is established on intangible relations and values, making brand performance hard to define and measure. There has not been a universal definition of

brand management in the literature (Keller and Lehmann 2006). Brand management faces many challenges in the contemporary business world, as companies and consumers are experiencing more products and services. It has been suggested that a strong brand holds various associations and has the capability to shorten the consumer decision making process, reduces the company risk, and sets different expectations (Kotler and Keller 2006). Furthermore, it has been argued that branding plays the same role in event planning. It has been recommended that the power of a brand lies in what audiences have learned, experienced, observed, and listened about the brand as a result of their experiences through an event (Caru and Cova 2007).

The strength of a brand mostly reflects in its perception by customers, and thus it is experiential in nature. Successful event management needs to understand how the brand strategy should be executed and communicated with event audiences and how audiences respond to it. Event management companies are expected to recognise the strength of branding and how it can connect with audiences. For instance, if organisations offer a valuable brand experience to customers, they will achieve a substantial competitive advantage. Businesses choose to take part to organise an event for various reasons (Crowther 2010). Small companies may want to experience what live branding can provide. Many large and multi-national corporations prefer face-to-face interaction through different events to receive a quick response. Whether small or large, event companies generally participate for many reasons, for example to strengthen branding and event awareness, generating leads, connecting with future and existing audiences and

educating event attendees etc. The main reason for companies to participate in an event is to launch or strengthen their brand (Keller and Lehmann 2006).

Event management allows the company to grow and express its particular distinctiveness directly. Through event planning, companies normally select the perfect venue to share their ideas, thoughts, and name in the most appropriate for their purposes manner they want to show to people.

Companies have been noted for their commitment to support various initiatives that popularise the brands they offer (LeSalle and Britton 2003).

Many businesses decide to arrange events based on the branding opportunity offered by the event. The use of different host events is useful to create and showcase the brand of their business, as these could be charitable events or certain volunteering activities. Hosting events also allow different companies to direct the attention of their business and to attract potential audiences, which are considered more cost efficient (Kotler and Keller 2006). Organisations constantly enhance the features of their brands through the improved process of event management. As a result, their customer base grows on a regular basis. Another significant reason companies choose to arrange and participate in an event is to show their potential through brand features and enhancing different methods to improve event management and to recognise a target audience.

The introduction of branding initiatives is important for companies to connect more personally with their customers (Crowther 2010). Branding may lead to extensive customer engagement, with a chance for positive personal interaction that establishes loyalty. Furthermore, event managers know that

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companies can understand the biggest ROI from branding and by retaining and increasing new customers. The main challenge for companies is to gain the attention of their customers accompanied by the disruption of daily work. At events, companies enjoy the chance to increase their brand awareness and revenue by introducing to their audience different types of products or services they may be interested in (Caru and Cova 2007). Branding provides organisations with an opportunity to focus on improving customers' personal experience of the brand. Accurately planned and implemented branding can generate a huge amount of revenue after the event has ended. In other words, companies increase the impact of their event by giving audience a reason to share their experience with products and services. Brand management frequently faces many challenges in a highly competitive environment (Keller and Lehmann 2006).

In the contemporary unpredictable markets it is particularly important for event managers to monitor attendees' needs and involvement. The brand is considered an intangible asset that strengthens the value by its strong connection with the associations, ethics and drivers of the audience.

Consumers attend events for different reasons, including educational, informative, entertainment, etc. These reasons are influential and have benefits in their own ways (Crowther 2010). The information provided to individuals through branding is important to understand the nature and applicability of different brands. For instance, customers may differentiate the useful characteristics of a particular electrical appliance over another one in the market. If customers attend events for educational or awareness purposes, the branding information should be presented properly and

considered the key component of an event. When a company hosts an event, it expects to gain adequate control over the event's branding information and the audience it wants to draw in (Keller and Lehmann 2006). Being in this position provides the company with the authority to define how it wants to be portrayed and what type of audience it wants to attract.

If companies are attentive about targeting their attendees, the ROI (Return on Investment) will be accomplished and the audience would show their interest in the company and their brand. However, this is not always the case because customer targeting initiatives may not be successful.

Companies have access to an audience that is exposed to their brand and message at every turn. Furthermore, attendees enthusiastically prefer to contribute their skills and expertise in the programs and activities companies tend to provide during the course of the event (Caru and Cova 2007).

Branding can be a powerful tool to generate a competitive advantage. A definition of brand culture indicates a focus on a company's culture in which employees consider the importance of specific brand values (Keller and Lehmann 2006). The brand culture concept helps companies realise why this is so important. Brand cultures are considered important for event management. Branding also refers to aspects of predictable knowledge and thus expands the dimensions of brand culture (Crowther 2010). Unless they can experience products and services or encounter exceptional brand stories through events, individuals are generally determined to support the taken-for-granted option to understand the brand.

In addition to the aspects of taken-for-granted knowledge, there are two motives for this stability. Psychological research suggests that branding

culture is strong because individuals are cognitive (Keller and Lehmann 2006). Sociological research (Keller and Lehmann 2006) also suggests that branding cultures are strong and reliable because brand cultures are collective by including many people and being expressed in a variety of contexts (talk, product experiences, advertisements, etc.). However, there are drawbacks to these studies because branding culture is multidimensional. It cannot be simply perceived as cognitive or collective in nature. Branding normally manages events, brand images, and associations through different marketing networks. Therefore, individuals need to adopt a holistic approach to understand the dimensions of brand management (Kotler and Keller 2006).

Importance of Branding and Experience Marketing

A particular definition of experience marketing is the introduction of particular marketing activities that are customer-oriented and create a strong connection with customers. Based on this perspective, customer experiences arise from various aspects to include in-store interactions, communication patterns and packaging (Kotler and Keller 2006). Such experiences also take place as a result of both online and offline marketing activities. Experience marketing is viewed as a consistent and systematic approach to measuring the way in which customers feel about the brand (LaSalle and Britton 2003). Thus, the experience concept is quite different from other customer constructs in the field of marketing.

Likewise, experience as part of experience marketing is different from motivational and affective factors, such as brand attachment and

involvement (Kotler and Keller 2006). Brand attachment usually evokes persistent customer emotions, while involvement shows the perceived significance and personal relevance of a particular brand. Experience in this sense does not emerge as an emotional relationship concept. One of the essential concepts of experience marketing is experiential value that is closely linked with the idea of strengthening consumer bonds in organisations. Undoubtedly, an experience is found to have a much more persistent impact than an exposure to certain products and services offered by companies (Forlizzi and Ford 2000). In this way, the experience marketing concept directly appeals to customers in the sense of helping them feel what it is like to be a part of a particular organisation.

Relationships between Brands and Customers

Nonetheless, the relationship between brands and customers has been revolutionised to a certain degree. The new marketing era is that of experience marketing, which focuses on providing consumers with a brand experience that adds value to their lives (Caru and Cova 2007). It has been indicated that providing a real experience to individuals is an important part of persuading them about the quality of the offered products. It could be argued that there is nothing genuine about the connections between commercial organisations and customers, rather that they are a way of extracting as much money as possible from them. Experience marketing may provide adequate evidence that marketing practices have continuously evolved in the past several decades, shifting from the focus from products to building strong customer relationships and brands. It is important that positive experiences of customers become institutionalised within the

respective marketing system in order to deliver the essence of a certain brand (Keller and Lehmann 2006). This indicates that there is no gap between the promise presented with the brand and the consequent brand delivery to customers. Personal experiences enable individuals with a relevant opportunity to make informed purchasing decisions. Therefore, an adequate customer experience is more likely to produce high satisfaction in individuals who aim to purchase certain products or services (Caru and Cova 2007).

Marketing communication has been identified as an essential aspect in contemporary business sectors. Marketing communication methods include advertising, direct and indirect mail, leaflets, altering the product packaging and sales promotion (Addis and Holbrook 2001). These activities are promoted alongside marketing sponsorship, public relations, and scientific, digital and live brand experiences. Research indicates that selected marketing channels are incorporated with other organisational tools to increase the impact of this strategy and more successfully achieve marketing communication core objectives (Kotler and Keller 2006).

The experiential marketing approach is focused on a two-way incorporation in real-time, a live brand experience and thus a considerable deeper consumer relationship process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Live brand experiences are typically apparent in the shape of live marketing events that permit the consumer to live, respire and experience or feel the brand through interactive transmitted connections and actions. The actions are typically designed to include value to target audiences in their own atmosphere, during their ordinary existence (Caru and Cova 2007). However,

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live brand experiences are basically existent in two-way branded experiences. They can be uniformly successful across many interactive scientific technologies and policies that assist marketing communication between customers and brands in real time. For example, consumers can contribute in live brand experiences on television where the TV shows substance is fluid, and they participate and add their contribution in actual time (Keller and Lehmann 2006).

Creating a Live Brand Experience

Similarly, a live brand experience can be stimulated online in a practical way in order to target more customers. Research shows that live brand experiences are seldom taken part in alone and the sophisticated marketing management tends to incorporate experiential marketing with other marketing tools and techniques to utilise a broad collection of marketing channels (Kotler and Keller 2006). Marketing departments in various multinational corporations prefer to utilise each marketing channel to accomplish different organisational goals and objectives (Maghnati et al. 2012). Advertising is frequently implemented in experiential marketing to achieve brand awareness program and to increase and sustain recognition of the brand or product within big markets.

Advertising is normally effective at raising brand awareness; however, it is expensive to implement at a proper level (Schmitt 2010). When used on a larger level in experiential marketing, advertising can have a low cost per thousand (CPT), although generally it is a costly tool and can generally only be used to affect leading brands that can manage to run large advertising

campaigns. Digital marketing or E-marketing is one of the fastest growing marketing channels in the current technological era. Consumers are linking with various brands online more than ever before, and E-marketing can also be cost-effective marketing channel for promoting brands online and generating sales and revenue via digital marketing (Maghnati et al. 2012). Viral marketing is also a rising marketing discipline, which is part of the digital range: an effective viral campaign uses a word-of-web to promote brand awareness.

However, these marketing channels usually work together; at present, they are delivering successful marketing campaigns internationally for global brands and small businesses equally. Though brands and companies gain benefit from using these marketing channels, marketing departments are searching for new ways to operate and use these channels in order to connect with their target audiences in a deeper way (Obonyo 2011). The basic idea is to build strong relationships that create brand loyalty and brand sponsorship. Additionally, experiential marketing may transform consumers from shoppers into dependable individuals who perceive the brand in certain terms, and share their personality and core marketing message or features to their families, friends, colleagues and local communities (Schmitt 2010).

Experiential marketing is method way of identifying, recognizing and satisfying customer demands or needs and ambitions, engaging them through two-way marketing communications that take brand personalities into real life and include value to the target audience (Maghnati et al. 2012). Research shows that experiential marketing is incorporated into specific methodologies, which always are connected with target audiences and add

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value through relevant and appropriate brand communication dimensions (Schmitt 2010). The methodology was sound and objective in reaching particular conclusions pertaining to experiential marketing. The experiential marketing movement was established around one concept, involving two-way marketing communication between the brand and the target audience in actual time. As a result, live brand experiences are considered to be the core feature of experiential marketing. Other marketing communications channels are also playing their role in the process (Schmitt 2010). They are being selected and integrated to increase marketing channels, which strengthen the impact of the big marketing idea known as live brand experience (customer experience).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the aspects of branding and how they are related to experiential marketing. In addition, emphasis was placed on determining the impact of branding on future event management decisions. It has been suggested that experiential creativity is at least partly concerned with offering a shopping environment that is appropriate to the customers, which can encourage them to the purchasing process (Schmitt 2010). The paper has suggested that experiential marketing provides an adequate way to achieving strong relationships with customers who may have an opportunity to experience different brands in a personal way. Furthermore, experiential marketing is also focused on getting consumer feedback, judgments, thoughts, actions and connections (Kotler and Keller 2006). All these aspects contribute to define and design a live customer experience and thinking

about marketing. Experiential marketing has modified the past marketing concept that only focused on customers and customer service.

Just as branding culture is established collectively through the participation of customers in experiencing brands, dividing branding strategies into different parts is a collective or a single branding decision for companies. It depends on the decision of branding or marketing directors to use one branding strategy over another (Caru and Cova 2007). Powerful branding provides a competitive advantage in an event not only with respect to audiences but also in relation to different brand partners (Kotler and Keller 2006). The paper concluded that a well-built brand culture also provides the firm with considerable influence in configuring event policies and negotiating with other brands.

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