BRANDED MARKETING EVENTS: THE INFLUENCE OF EVENT EXPERIENCE ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role of branded marketing events (BMEs) in facilitating customer engagement. As business environments become more dynamic and interactive, customers are seeking participation through unique experiences with brands (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012), and hence customer engagement has emerged as an important concept in academe. Previous research has demonstrated that customer engagement is highly impactful in enhancing customer-brand relationships (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić 2011a), however, there has been little research exploring the antecedents that facilitate customer engagement. This thesis proposes that BMEs can be used as strategic tools to facilitate engagement with an event, with engagement transferred to the brand and ultimately resulting in enhanced behavioural intention of loyalty.

A quantitative online survey was conducted in the South Australian wine industry to investigate how experiential components of a BME contribute to both customer event engagement and customer brand engagement. The impact of BME experiences on behavioural intention of loyalty, and the moderation effect of experiential needs are examined through structural equation modelling.

Results indicate that customer event engagement has a mediating effect on the relationship between BME experiences and customer brand engagement. Sensorial, relational and pragmatic experiences are found to only impact customer event engagement, while cognitive experience has a direct impact on customer brand engagement. This highlights that the heightened state of engagement can transfer between focal objects; from the event to the brand. This provides further insight into the BME’s impact on customer brand engagement and behavioural intention of loyalty. In addition, support is found for the inclusion of a social dimension of customer brand engagement, and partial support for a social dimension of customer event engagement. Therefore, results of this thesis suggest
that BME experiences facilitate customer engagement and subsequent behavioural intention of loyalty.

The moderating influences of the individual’s experiential needs, namely need for cognition, need for affect, and novelty-seeking needs are also examined. There is evidence that attendees with a strong need for cognition engage more strongly with relational BME experiences, while attendees with low need for cognition engage more strongly with sensorial BME experiences. However, few moderating effects are identified overall.

This research empirically demonstrates the strong and positive relationship between BMEs and customer engagement, and advocates the use of BMEs as an effective brand-building activity. This thesis contributes to the knowledge of customer engagement through identifying engagement transfer between two focal engagement objects, and provides support for the inclusion of a social engagement dimension. The findings provide support for the BME activities that managers undertake with the intention of facilitating customer engagement and providing brand-related outcomes through such endeavours.
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DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Signed: ___________________________________

Date:     November 28, 2014
PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are based upon the research presented in this thesis, and may contain results and materials presented herein.


Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Bouzdine-Chameeva, T., Goodman, S. “A comparison of Wine Event Experiences in France and Australia” (under review) *Journal of Travel Research*


* Best paper award


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For Grace
KEY TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The definitions of selected terms are listed to provide clarity and to set certain terminologies for the context in which they were utilised in this thesis;

**Associative network theory:** theory that customers retain information about events in memory; through a process of ‘spreading activation’ certain sets of event-related information can trigger thoughts about related information, in this case linked information about the host brand (Smith 2004).

**Behavioural intention of loyalty (BIL):** word-of-mouth and purchase intention (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996).

**Branded marketing events (BMEs):** a brand-initiated experience that serves as a platform for customers to interact with the brand and other actors (definition in this thesis, page 35).

**Customer engagement:** “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships” (Brodie et al. 2011a, pg 260). Focal objects investigated in this thesis are; the event (referred to as customer event engagement) and the brand (referred to as customer brand engagement).

**Customer experience:** a customer-centric concept, and encompasses all interactions and experiences between a customer and brand (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007), including those outside of regular consumption activity.

**Engagement dimensions:** This thesis follows a five-dimensional view of customer engagement; attention, enthusiasm, interaction, identification and absorption (So, King, and Sparks 2012). (Definitions of each engagement dimension are provided on pages 22 to 24).
Event experience: The broader construct of brand experience is considered to encapsulate event experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). Brand experience includes numerous brand-related stimuli, including branding, communications, as well as the environments and situations in which the brand is experienced, including events (Brakus et al. 2009). This thesis focuses on brand-related stimuli from a BME; therefore, the researcher refers to this as event experience instead of brand experience.

Experiential components of a BME: the components of a BME utilised in this thesis are cognitive, emotional, sensorial, pragmatic and relational (Gentile et al. 2007)

Experiential needs: the need that an individual seeks to fulfil through experiences

Experiential needs investigated in this thesis are need for cognition, need for affect and novelty-seeking needs (definitions of each type of experiential need are provided on pages 69 to 72).

Optimum stimulation level (OSL) theory: theory that individuals seek out stimulation from particular environments in order to achieve satisfaction (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992).

Service dominant (S-D) logic: describes the shift in marketing over the past several decades to a new marketing philosophy that considers “the exchange of intangibles, specialized skills and knowledge, and processes (doing things for and with)”, with a view to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective of marketing thought (Vargo and Lusch 2004, pg 3).

Social engagement: the customer’s heightened level of interest regarding the focus of engagement (i.e. the event or the brand) based on personal exchanges with other actors (definition in this thesis, page 46). Focal objects investigated in this thesis
are; the event (referred to as social event engagement) and the brand (referred to as social brand engagement).

Social exchange theory: argues that customers engage in activities that provide emotional rewards including social approval and human contact (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde, and Marshall 2011).

Theory of consumption values: states that various consumption values perceived by the customer are focal in explaining consumer choice with regards to purchase (or not purchase) as well as brand selection (Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991).