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**BRANDED MARKETING EVENTS:
FACILITATING CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT**

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Abstract

◦ *Purpose: Many wineries host branded marketing events to initiate memorable experiences for their consumers. This method of experiential consumption provides benefits to wineries from event revenue through to product trial, brand exposure and increased awareness; all anchored in consumer memory with the experience consumed. However, little is known about which aspects of the experience builds engagement with the event and ultimately with the brand. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of branded marketing events, this conceptual paper provides a framework that outlines how the various dimensions of an experience facilitate customer engagement.*

◦ *Design/methodology/approach: Drawing on academic literature in service dominant logic, engagement, consumer experience, and event marketing, a conceptual framework is introduced that explicates the relationship between branded marketing events and customer brand engagement through the customer engagement with the event.*

◦ *Findings: This paper outlines how the sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relational components of a branded marketing event facilitate customer engagement with the event and the brand. Customer brand engagement is both directly impacted through the experiences, but also indirectly influenced by greater event engagement and co-creation of the experience. In turn, this level of engagement fosters an increased intention to purchase the brand in the future.*

◦ *Practical implications: The wine industry commonly uses branded marketing events; with greater knowledge of the process of facilitating engagement, wineries will be able to design these events to more effectively engage their customers.*

Key words: Branded Marketing Events, Brand Engagement, Experiential Consumption

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1. INTRODUCTION

Branded Marketing Events (BMEs) are a unique form of experiential marketing because unlike the well-recognised approaches of sponsorship and product placement, both of which are often passive in their approach, this brand-facilitated experience is highly interactive and gives the consumer the ability to shape and co-create the experience. Vargo and Lusch (2004, pg 569; 2008) identify that consumers are not passive in their contact with firms, but rather co-create value through extensive interaction in order to subjectively shape their brand experiences. When BME's are considered through the theoretical lens of the Service Dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), it is evident that events are an effective platform for a company to co-create value with the consumer, and achieve consumer engagement (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić and Ilić, 2011).

The 'consumer experience' has been the subject of significant recent scholarly debate (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007), and advocates argue that experiential marketing has far greater effectiveness than traditional marketing due to the intensity and interactivity of the experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Experiential marketing events have several components, including sensorial, emotional, cognitive, lifestyle and rational aspects (Gentile et al., 2007). These components appeal to customer needs and make the BME an effective means of brand building. Creating an engaging customer experience is a well-recognised approach to brand building in the sponsorship and product placement literature (Keller, 1993; Keller and Lehmann, 2006). However, little is known about the impact of Branded Marketing Events on customers' level of engagement with the brand..

This conceptual paper will identify how BMEs facilitate consumer brand engagement through customer co-creation of the event experience. A conceptual framework is introduced that explicates this relationship between experiential marketing (the BME) and customer engagement and provides a foundation for future empirical research.

2. BRANDED MARKETING EVENTS

The notion of BMEs originates from the marketing events literature (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Drengner, Gaus and Jahn, 2008) as well as the broader literature area of consumer experience (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). Drengner et al., (2008, p138) define marketing events as "a communication tool whose purpose is to disseminate a company's marketing messages by involving the target groups in experiential activities". There is considerable debate among scholars in regards the definition of BMEs (Close, Finney, Lacey and Sneath, 2006; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Drengner et al., 2008; Wood, 2009). While some authors consider sponsorship and community events to be a type of BME (Close et al., 2006), this is disputed on the basis that these events exist for some other purpose but are used later for marketing (e.g. sponsorship events) or have some marketing application but are primarily developed for other reasons (e.g.

community festivals), and hence the events have little emphasis on communicating or ‘marketing’ the brand within the arrangement.

This paper provides a definition of BMEs that builds on the BME literature (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Drengner et al., 2008) while incorporating broader concepts found in consumer experience literature (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Brakus et al., 2009), and recognises the principles of the S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008). We define Branded Marketing Events (BMEs) as an experiential activity initiated by a brand that serves as a platform for consumers to interact with the brand and each other, with the explicit purpose of co-creating a unique brand-related experience and facilitating engagement.

2.1 Components of Experience within a BME

BMEs are further conceptualised by considering the key aspects of a consumer experience. There have been numerous studies on consumer experiences, delineating the ‘types’ of experiences that can be produced. However, these studies have either been based on the consumer’s experience with a product (Gentile et al., 2007), or with reference to experiential (product) brands (Brakus et al., 2009). It is widely recognised that an event falls within the plethora of consumer experiences (Schmitt, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007), and as such we use consumer experience measures to capture a BME experience. This paper will use the experience ‘types’ indicated by these studies to measure the types of experiences initiated during a BME. The measure developed by Gentile et al. (2007) was found to be the most robust in terms of covering social elements (Schmitt, 1999), as well as cognitive aspects (Brakus et al., 2009). The authors’ views are also consistent with the S-D logic in that consumers co-create the experience, rather than passively receive the experience from a company (Gentile et al., 2007, pg 396).

Six components of the consumer experience have been identified; sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational (Gentile et al., 2007). While Gentile et al., (2007) related to experiences with products, we find the components to be generalisable across various types of experiences, and therefore apply them within the context of BMEs. Table 1 outlines the definitions of each experiential component, and identifies examples of winery BMEs that demonstrate these components.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Sensorial component | Experiences that aim to provide positive sensory stimulation, addressing sight, hearing, touch, taste and/or smell. <i>Example: Wine and food event, music event.</i> |
| Emotional Component | Experiences that evoke an affective response or relation (with a company, brand or products), by targeting moods, feelings and/or emotions. <i>Example: Winery picnic, Coriole poetry appreciation events</i> |
| Cognitive Component | Experiences that stimulate thought or conscious mental processes. <i>Example: Wine education sessions, food/wine pairing, winery tours</i> |
| Pragmatic component | Experiences that involve physical action – “the practical act of doing something” <i>Example: ‘Make your own wine blend’ events, ‘bring your port for tasting by winemakers’ events.</i> |
| Lifestyle component | Experiences that reinforce one’s values and beliefs by adopting a particular lifestyle and behaviours. “The product itself and it’s consumption become means of adhesion to certain values the company and the brand embody and the customers share”. <i>Example: Wine lover or wine appreciation event</i> |
| Relational component | Experiences that provide social context, relationships with others, or expression of one’s ‘ideal self’. <i>(An inherent component of any winery event that caters to numerous consumers.)</i> <i>Example: Events that project a ‘wine enthusiast’ image, or means of entering an in-group of wine connoisseurs</i> |

Source: Definitions adapted from Gentile et al., (2007)

3. BRANDED MARKETING EVENTS AS A CO-CREATED EXPERIENCE

BMEs elicit active engagement between the consumer and the brand through an experiential approach, and thus have far greater effectiveness than traditional marketing (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Drengner et al. (2008) identified that previous research on BMEs overlooked the active participation of the target group in the communication of the marketing message. Service Dominant Logic emphasises the highly experiential and contextual nature of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Brodie et al., 2011). Therefore, when considered through this theoretical lens, it is evident that BMEs are an effective platform for a company to co-create value with the consumer. A BME is an effective means of co-creating value as it is completely interactive and subjective in nature, whereby the perceived value is determined by the individual. Events are an effective tool for implementing the experiential marketing perspective; but as well as this, events have the capacity to achieve engagement with the consumer, that cannot be matched by other traditional media tools (Brodie et al., 2011).

Because of these unique attributes, BMEs also reflect the key principles highlighted in the theory of Service-Dominant logic (S-D logic). Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008) identify that consumers are not passive in their contact with firms, but rather co-create value through extensive interaction in order to subjectively shape their brand experiences. The similarities between BME characteristics and key propositions of the S-D logic are summarised in Table 2. Based on these similarities, we propose that a

BME is an appropriate platform for implementing the key strategies from the S-D logic, and as a result can facilitate consumer brand engagement.

| Table 2: Similarities of S-D logic key propositions and BME characteristics | |
|--|---|
| <i>S-D logic key propositions (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, pg 7)</i> | <i>Branded Marketing Event Characteristics</i> |
| FP 6: Customers are co-creators of value – value creation is interactional | Participants interact both with other participants, as well as brand representatives (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006, pp 645-646) |
| FP 7 – companies cannot create and/or deliver value independently; they can only offer value propositions and collaboratively/ interactively create value with the consumer. | “Companies do not sell experiences, but rather they provide artifacts and contexts that are conducive of experiences and which can be properly employed by customers to co-create their own, unique, experiences” (Gentile et al., 2007, p396). |
| FP10 – “Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (value is idiosyncratic, experiential, contextual, and meaning laden) | <p>“Brand experiences are subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al., 2009, pg 53).</p> <p>Experience is strictly personal and it involves and engages a customer at different levels (Gentile et al., 2007, p397).</p> |

4. CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

The brand experience do not presume a motivational state; they can include experiences in which the consumer shows little interest or connection with the brand (Brakus et al., 2009). Therefore, wineries must not only focus on facilitating an experience, they must ensure that this experience elicits a heightened motivational state by the consumer, in order for it to be truly effective. Therefore, the key driver of success of a BME is in creating consumer engagement.

Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić and Ilić (2011, pg 260) define Engagement as “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”. Engagement is conceptualised as a state of activation, with cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements. It is a heightened state of connectedness with a brand, where consumers are motivated to interact with the brand, co-create value with the brand, and result in very strong brand connections. A consumer who attends a BME will demonstrate engagement when they interact with other attendees, experiential cues

within the BME (music, food, wine tastings) and/or communicate with winery sales staff. By interacting within the experiential event, they co-create a BME that is of most relevance to them, and therefore gain the most value from the experience. The concept of engagement is divergent in its definition, being discussed in a variety of academic conversations (Brodie et al., 2011). The primary characteristic of Engagement, distinguishing it from involvement or participation, is the emphasis on *interaction* (Brodie et al., 2011). Engagement is deeply embedded within the S-D logic – customers interact with the brand (or, ‘engagement objects’) and with other customers; they are not passive during the experience – firms merely provide a platform through which consumers create their own unique value in the experience (Brodie et al., 2011). For a BME, the event itself becomes the platform through which consumers interact with each other and the brand, and co-create their own unique experience.

A key element of engagement is that it is a ‘momentary state’ (Brodie et al., 2011, pg 255). Engagement levels at the onset of the process (or beginning of the event) typically are relatively low; however, they develop over time as the individual interacts with the event, and individuals at the event, and hence the level of engagement increases over the course of these interactions (Brodie et al., 2011). This moment of engagement is identified during BMEs as a heightened state of motivation, where event participants interact with each other and the brand, and co-create a unique, highly memorable experience. This heightened state is momentary; the BME is provided as a platform to facilitate co-creation and engagement, however this heightened state may only be sustained until the duration of the BME or shortly thereafter.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EVENT-ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND-ENGAGEMENT

The literature on customer engagement identifies that an interaction must occur between the ‘engagement subject’ (e.g. consumer/customer (Vivek, 2012)) and an ‘engagement object’ (e.g. a brand (Hollebeek, 2011) or virtual brand community (Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek, 2011)). However, these studies do not explore the relationship between multiple engagement objects. Brodie et al. (2011, pg 5) identifies that consumers can engage with numerous engagement objects, however these engagement objects were in reference to ‘themes’ of discussion with members of an online community. These multiple objects were not suggested as building on from each other, but rather as a particular ‘topics of interest’ that an online community member may engage with over others. This study also identified a possible relationship between the ‘themes’ and online community engagement objects but this was not explored empirically (Brodie et al., 2011, pg 5).

We propose that the engagement subject, the consumer/event attendee, will interact and co-create a valuable experience during an event, and therefore will first and foremost elicit engagement with the BME. However, from our understanding of consumer experience literature, we posit that engagement with the BME will contribute to the overall ‘brand experience’ (Brakus et al., 2009), and therefore event engagement will transfer/be replicated in the form of customer brand engagement. Therefore, we highlight the need to explore the relationship between event

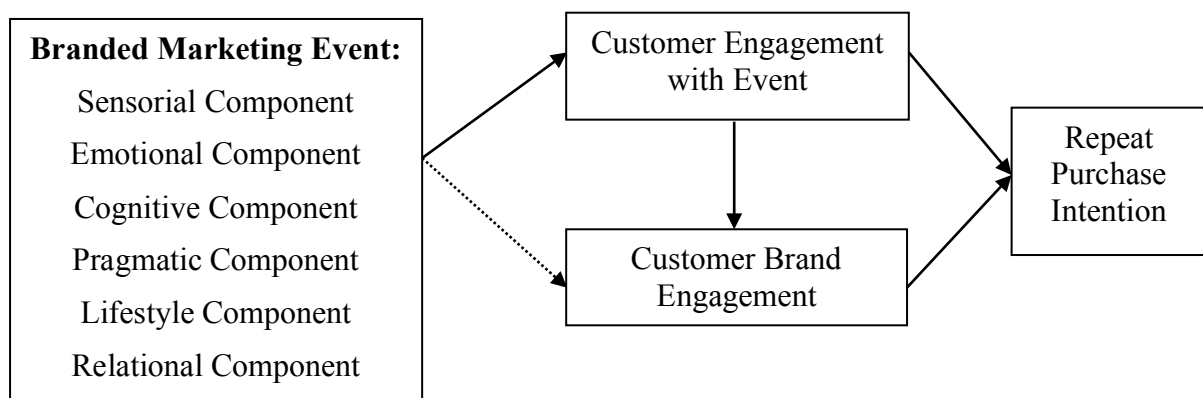
engagement and brand engagement. This important distinction between the engagement objects (event and brand) and their relationship has not been previously articulated in the current literature on customer engagement. Only through this transfer of engagement from event to brand do we then expect positive brand results to occur.

Numerous consequences of engagement have been suggested, including consumer loyalty, satisfaction, connection, commitment, and trust (Brodie et al., 2011, pg 6). Each of these consequences has been indicated to result in increased purchasing intention and/or behaviour towards brands. We posit increased repeat purchase intention as the result of achieving high levels of brand engagement, as it is a ‘tangible outcome’ of these numerous consequences.

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSION

Our conceptual framework, see Figure 1, illustrates the ability for a BME, comprised of various experiential components, to facilitate consumer engagement with the event, and then later with the brand. Successful fulfillment of brand engagement is expected to lead to enhanced repeat purchase intentions.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Customer engagement has been deemed to incorporate three dimensions; cognitive, emotional, and behavioural (Brodie et al., 2011). The interplay between these dimensions has the ability to generate various levels of engagement intensity, and single engagement dimensions may have the ability to influence the other engagement dimensions. For example, emotional engagement may facilitate enhanced levels of cognitive and/or behavioural engagement (Brodie et al., 2011, pg 5). Therefore, when exploring the ability for BMEs to elicit engagement (with the event and/or brand), they must be investigated in terms of what engagement dimension/s they may facilitate, and the overall engagement intensity that may result.

Hollebeek (2011, pg 565) argues that the three dimensions of engagement are reflected through the corresponding engagement themes of ‘immersion’ (cognitive), ‘passion’ (emotional) and ‘activation’ (behavioural). These themes represent the

cognitive (concentration), emotional (positive affection) and behavioural (time/effort) resources a customer commits in their interactions with the event or brand (Hollebeek, 2011, pg 565).

Cognitive Engagement, or immersion, reflects the extent of a consumer's "brand-related concentration in particular brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, pg 566). BMEs that are predominantly cognitive in nature (strong cognitive component) are expected to elicit cognitive engagement.

Emotional Engagement, or passion, reflects the extent of a consumer's "positive brand-related affect in particular brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, pg 567). BMEs with a predominantly emotional component are expected to elicit emotional engagement. Cognitive components may also result in emotional engagement, based on the premise that 'learning is enjoyable'.

Behavioural Engagement, or activation, reflects the extent of a consumer's "energy, effort and/or time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, pg 569). BMEs with a predominantly pragmatic component are posited to elicit behavioural engagement.

While the cognitive, emotional and pragmatic BME components (mentioned above) and their expected corresponding engagement dimension seem intuitive, what is less apparent is the outcome of the lifestyle, relational, and sensorial BME components on engagement. Also, if we consider engagement intensity as the facilitation of multiple engagement dimensions (cognitive, emotional and behavioural), it is also unclear what particular BME component will result in the highest intensity of (overall) engagement? A further idea requiring investigation is that a BME can (and often does) possess numerous experiential components (e.g. sensorial and emotional; lifestyle and relational; or emotional and cognitive, 'learning is enjoyable') (Gentile et al., 2007). Therefore, what combinations of BME components elicit the highest engagement intensity? Future empirical investigation will explore the effects of each BME component (and combinations of components), to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how BMEs facilitate engagement.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the necessity to further conceptualise Branded Marketing Events (BMEs) by considering the consumer experience and Service-Dominant logic. Events are an ideal platform for facilitating customer brand engagement, as the attendees interact with engagement objects (i.e. the event and the brand) and each other to co-create a valuable and memorable experience. The relationship between consumer engagement with the event and consumer engagement with the brand was also identified as an important area of further investigation, as this relationship has yet to be empirically tested in current engagement literature. A conceptual framework was developed to explain the process of facilitating consumer brand engagement using BMEs, with particular attention given to what BME components (sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle and relational) will facilitate specific cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement dimensions. This framework will be the foundation of future empirical enquiry.

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