



**An Exploration of Brand Experience
in the context of Event Marketing**

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Master of Science in Marketing

Submitted to National College of Ireland August 2018

Abstract

Event Marketing has recently enjoyed a rebirth as strategy of choice for brands seeking to engage consumers across all demographics and markets. However one cohort in particular are of interest to brands: the Millennial generation. Millennials are now the largest living generation globally, however they are proving difficult to engage due to their connection to digital technology, diverse media consumption habits and unique outlook on life. Therefore understanding their motivations to engage with branded events is of prime concern to marketers. The strength of Event Marketing is that it allows brands to stage immersive and authentic experiences where these consumers can actively participate and create their own experiences, to share and amplify within their own networks. More importantly, for an educated cohort that prioritises experiences over possessions, branded events can provide consumer value, in the sense they can offer authentic experiences which by being part of can set attendees apart from others, whilst still being part of a bigger cultural conversation. Therefore the inclusion of Event Marketing in Millennial consumer-brand targeting strategies is now seen as a vital tool that can capture their hearts and minds in return for their wallets.

The purpose of this study is to explore if branded experiences, delivered through Event Marketing, can create emotional bonds between Millennials and brands. It seeks to understand how emotive drivers triggered through different dimensions of experience can influence consumer-brand relationships. Factors that contribute to experiential outcomes such as participant co-creation and value creation are explored. The research investigates event staging to evaluate most effective brand experience design, whilst also identifying current challenges and future opportunities.

Qualitative research was undertaken through in-depth interviews amongst a sample of Millennials, to gain rich insights into their subjective opinions and insights. Research analysis indicated that brand experiences delivered through Event Marketing connect strongly with this cohort across all brand dimensions measured, with both brand loyalty and event loyalty key themes arising out of the findings. Other results suggested co-creation is an essential engagement factor, influenced by all participants including event staff, while value can be gained through participation alone. Event design is a critical consideration, with thoughtful executions that match expectations providing memories that live well beyond the actual event itself. Finally, results were discussed with regard to previous findings and recommendations were considered for future research and industry practice.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my employer Exterior Media for sending me on this journey, and in particular Colin Leahy for his ongoing support over the years. Also, thanks to my colleagues Orla O'Neill and Demi Reynolds for all the academic advice over the past few months, it is much appreciated.

A huge debt of gratitude goes to my supervisor Dave Hurley, for his guidance and support throughout this research period. Thanks also to the staff at the NCI, but in particular to Dr. Colette Darcy for the inspiring words at the start of the course, and to Keith Brittle for being so patient and available with research advice and tips throughout my studies. I would also like to acknowledge my enthusiastic research interviewees for sharing their time and insights.

Finally, thanks to my family for their understanding throughout the course and research period.

In memory of my father, Ned Carroll, who always enjoyed a good read.

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Chapter 1: Overview

1.0 Introduction

Event Marketing is a very topical subject in the business world today, with marketers increasingly employing it as a consumer-brand experience tool that delivers imaginative and eye catching brand executions that cut through in targeted environments (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). The strength of Event Marketing lies in the premise that events deliver experiences that disseminate a brand message by involving target audiences in experiential activities where participants can actively opt in and co-create experiences, not just by interacting with the brand but with other consumers too (McCole, 2004; Drenger et al., 2008). In addition, technological advances and ease of accessibility means brand experiences can take on new and powerful dimensions where consumer created digital content can amplify reach and impact (Pesci et al., 2016). This has resulted in major strategy changes as brands and marketers scale back traditional marketing budget allocation, whilst dialling up investment in experiential activations (Arrigo, 2017).

However for marketers who must justify these increased investments, an ongoing issue is evaluating return on investment, not just in terms of financial metrics but in respect of assessing impact on consumer-brand attitudes and behaviours as a result of engagement (Wood, 2009). In addition, as an established targeting technique it is starting to show signs of overuse in the market place, therefore brands need to conceive ever more imaginative events to keep executions fresh and consumers engaged (Solaris, 2017). Understanding target market expectations, not just in terms of value delivery, but what it is in an event that creates an emotional connection is valuable market intelligence, especially in a cultural era where the connected consumer means that poorly executed events have the power to immediately make or break a brand (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013).

For the purposes of this research, Millennials are being investigated as they are the first generation who, having grown up with the internet ever present in their lives, exhibit online and offline attitudes and behaviours that differ to those of previous generations (Hershtatter and Epstein, 2010). Brands are keenly interested in this sizeable cohort not least due to their spending power and yet to be formed brand loyalties (Lazarevic, 2012). However they are becoming harder to reach through traditional marketing channels, as they continue to develop new media consumption habits and block irrelevant targeted messaging (Ha & McCann, 2008).

More importantly, as they are influenced by what others think, recounting experiences presents a method of self-expression that is of value to them (Belk, 2013; Clef et al., 2014; Usborne, 2017). Therefore a study that seeks to understand how Event Marketing can deliver memorable brand experiences to this cohort is of interest to practitioners and academics alike.

1.1 Research Justification

Secondary research sources suggest that Event Marketing continues to soar as the experiential methodology of choice for a broad range of consumer brands (Solaris, 2017; Arrigo, 2017). The review indicated that industry practitioners no longer use traditional Share of Voice metrics to drill into market share and consumer engagement outcomes, instead Share of Experience (SOE) metrics are employed to determine performance outcomes in relation to consumer-brand experiences (Blades and McDevitt, 2016). That the industry has developed specific metrics to evaluate investment and effectiveness of brand experiences, is indicative of the growing need for more sophisticated research, underlining the need for this present research.

The literature review uncovered several calls for further research into some aspects of Event Marketing and Brand Experience, which will be addressed in this study. Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013), academic leaders in Event Marketing and Brand Experience research, called for research to identify optimum event design that would stimulate memorable brand experiences and convey emotion. Altschwager et al. (2013) recommended investigations into the various components of branded events to ascertain if multi-dimensional brand experiences elicited higher engagement intensity amongst consumers. They suggested that research that examined experiences which specifically stimulated both relational and sensorial engagements as a worthy contribution to the understanding of how combinations of experiences enhanced engagement. According to Khan and Rahman (2015) there is an excess of Brand Experience research, many of which have taken logical positivist approaches, therefore they recommended research that adopted an interpretivist perspective to uncover what are fundamentally subjective consumer-brand insights.

Furthermore while the literature review found many studies examining Brand Experience in relation to consumer-brand relational concepts, and to a lesser extent studies that measured various Brand Experiences outcomes at Event Marketing, a clear gap was identified for research that explored Event Marketing and Brand Experiences relative to Millennials. A Millennial investigation is now relevant as this is a steadily aging cohort, collectively moving into new life stages, who are presenting marketers with new targeting opportunities to influence their changing purchasing habits and brand loyalty (Mintel, 2018). Finally, as the review found no evidence of Millennial research in the broader field of Experiential Marketing, neither in an Irish or UK context, it suggests that this research will be beneficial as it seeks to uncover new consumer insights that may enhance brand strategies.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

1.2.1 Research Aims

The main purpose of this study is to explore the current role of Event Marketing, exploring its effectiveness as a marketing tool that delivers emotional brand experiences amongst one particular generational demographic, Millennials. This cohort are significant to understand due to issues raised concerning traditional media penetration, combined with their voracious appetite for experiences and affinity with social media suggesting that Event Marketing is the ideal methodology to reach this cohort (McCann and Ha, 2008; Presci et al., 2016). The research will use an in-depth questioning approach, and will consider many viewpoints, to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations of Millennials to engage with a range of experiential dimensions encountered at branded events. The second research aim has an eye to the future, as it seeks to investigate the continued efficacy of Event Marketing as a Millennial targeting tool that delivers emotional experiences. It seeks to explore the significance of variables such as event design and co-creation, in order to identify trends, challenges and opportunities that will be of interest to marketers and academics alike.

1.2.2 Research Objectives

Research objectives are clear, specific statements that identify what the research wishes to accomplish as a result of completing the study (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore in line with the research aims, this dissertation has four specific objectives to meet through the process:

- 1 Are Millennials engaged by brand experiences delivered at branded events?
- 2 Are emotional connections formed through Event Marketing?
- 3 Does co-creation at branded events influence brand experience outcomes?
- 4 Does event design influence brand experience outcomes?

1.3 Research Question

Cooper and Schindler (2014) described the Research Question as a hypothesis that states the main objective of this research. For this study, the research question is:

“Does Event Marketing continue to deliver relevant brand experiences that connect on an emotional level with Millennials, and if so, what are the outcomes?”

1.4 Scope and Limitations

This study seeks to add to the current body of literature on Event Marketing and Brand Experience by examining the effectiveness of Event Marketing in establishing emotional brand connections with Millennials, exploring social psychology and consumer behaviour responses to a variety of brand experiences. This study does not extend insights into other cohorts or examine other forms of Experiential Marketing apart from aforementioned Event Marketing. The research findings may be narrow, as it seeks to measure five dimensions of brand experience only, when there may be more of relevance. Additionally, the research is based on frameworks conceived in 1999, 2009 and 2013, therefore changes in technologies, brand marketing and consumer behaviour in the intervening years may skew results.

1.5 Dissertation Structure

In order to provide a logical progression through the research process, this dissertation will be structured as follows: Chapter Two presents the academic literature review, along with relevant background secondary data, to contextualise the research questions and support research findings. It will present academic literature on the topics of Event Marketing, Brand Experience and Millennials in that order, detailing studies that are relevant to this study. The theoretical framework underpinning the research is also addressed. Chapter Three presents the research methodologies, outlining research philosophy, approach, strategy and method of research. Sample and method of data analysis are discussed. Chapter Four presents the findings of the research while Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings in the context of the four research objectives. Finally, Chapter 6 establishes conclusions generated from the findings, and presents recommendations for both further academic research and for practitioners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

A critical review is a detailed and justified analysis of the merits and faults of literature within a chosen area, to demonstrate familiarity with existing knowledge about the research topic (Saunders et al., 2016). This review presents a comprehensive and critical analysis of historical and more recent empirical studies which are of relevance to the research objectives, and will act as a foundation for the research to be undertaken (Cooper et al., 2014).

2.1 Content of Literature Review

The literature review is separated into three sections. Event Marketing is defined and contextualized in the body of consumer-brand marketing. The various Event Marketing activities and outcomes are explored, along with a review of studies that interrogate the significance of co-creation, followed by an analysis of event staging. The second section examines Brand Experience, reviewing definitions and then contextualized within the body of marketing literature by tracing its evolution from traditional marketing, examining conceptual foundations and theoretical frameworks. The review then links Brand Experience with Event Marketing, considering elements of event staging, and explores both offline and online brand experience outcomes. The final section reviews most recent studies into the chosen demographic, Millennials, examining behaviour both online and offline.

2.2 Event Marketing

2.2.1 Event Marketing Definitions

Event Marketing has become a common inclusion in consumer-brand marketing strategies, increasingly employed by marketers as it provides a low cost, mass audience targeting tool, by which to create memorable, live brand experiences that engage consumers for longer, both directly and indirectly (Wohlfeil and Whelan; 2006; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013; Presci et al., 2016).

It is not a new methodology, with one of the earliest definitions describing it as ‘a set of actions that promote the interests of an organisation and its brand by associating it with a specific activity’ (Shrimp, 1993). A later definition defined it as:

“an interactive communication of brand values by staging marketing events as 3-dimensional brand-related hyper-realities in which consumers are actively involved on a behavioural level and which would result in their emotional attachment to the brand” (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006)

Event Marketing or ‘branded marketing events’ are considered an experiential form of marketing (Altschwager et al., 2013). They communicate a brand’s message by involving target markets in real-lived, multi-sensory experiential activities that are usually undertaken by brand owners who want to engage customers with the brand, to co-create long lasting brand experiences (McCole, 2004; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Altschwager et al., 2013; Fransen et al. 2013). Event Marketing is a highly interactive activity that provides the consumer with the ability to shape the experience around a brand and has been found to positively impact customer engagement and brand experience (Khan and Rahman, 2015; Altschwager et al., 2013; Addis et al., 2018).

As Event Marketing can sometimes be used to describe many marketing practices around events, it must be distinguished from Sponsorship Marketing, as both strategies use events to communicate brand messages. However while Event Marketing is self-initiated by brands, when brands sponsor an event that is staged by a 3rd party organiser the focus is on the event not the brand, therefore it presents limited opportunities to create the required dramaturgy around the event that enables an emotional experience (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Drenger et al., 2008).

In a broader context, Event Marketing as a strategy developed in tandem with market changes such as the explosion in communication channels that brought about the connected consumers, which combined with consumer market fragmentation (Eisend, 2015), made brand stand out increasingly hard to achieve (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Ha and McCann, 2008; Drenger et al., 2008). As a result, Event Marketing became an impactful promotional tool in marketing strategies.

2.2.2 Event Marketing Frameworks

Event Marketing is part of the traditional Marketing Mix, included within the Promotional element of the mix. The Marketing Mix has been described as a set of controllable tactical tools that are blended to produce the desired response from a target market (Kotler, 2010), the other elements being product, price and place (distribution).

The objective of the Promotional mix is to communicate the merits of the product or service, and persuade consumers to purchase (Kotler, 2010). Event Marketing is one of the tactical tools marketers can use to establish positioning and influence consumers.

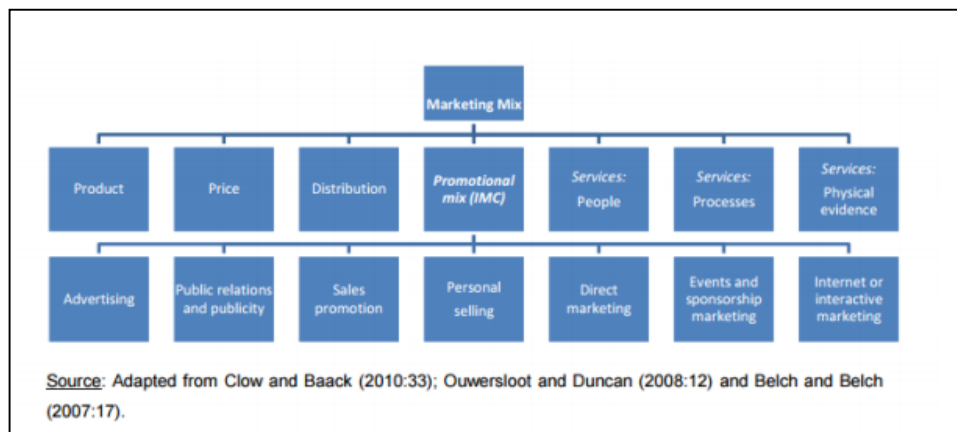


Figure 1: The Marketing Mix, Clow and Baack (2010)

Illustrating where Event Marketing sits within the more recent body of the brand consumer marketing literature, Khan and Rahman (2015) conceptualized Event Marketing as an antecedent to Brand Experience, proposing it was one of several tools which marketers could deploy to deliver a long lasting brand experience, that can motivate customer engagement, influence brand equity, and increase sales:

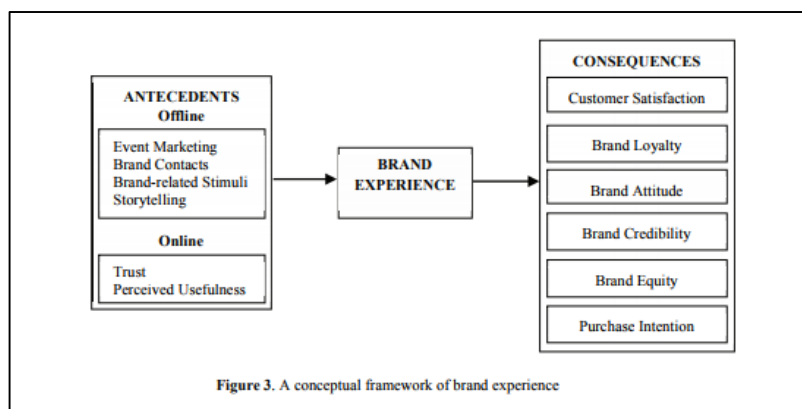


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Brand Experience, Khan and Rahman (2015)

2.2.3 Event Marketing Activities & Staging

Event Marketing is a broad term for a wide range of “real life experiencing” activities ranging from brand to hand product sampling exercises, to more exciting publicity generating stunts, and fully immersive experiences that incorporate Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technologies (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). Other activities include pop-up shops, street events, charity fundraisers, trade shows and other ‘created events’ (Wood, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). The common denominator amongst all initiatives is that they require lower financial investment than traditional advertising, but aim to reach higher audiences through personal and digital Word of Mouth and other earned media coverage (ibid). For that reason it has led brands to reduce investment in traditional media targeting, becoming more focused on creating experiences that connect emotionally with consumers (Whelan 2006; Drenger et al., 2008; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014).

Experiential events are live and interactive, taking place in a range of different settings, each of which can be tailored to deliver different experiences for the different consumer audiences they reach i.e. on street, transit environments, retail environments, sporting or other entertainment events (Whelan and Wohlfeil, 2006; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). The common factor with all environments is that they place the brand amongst high volume audiences where consumers have high dwell time, and therefore can spend time interacting and engaging with the brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt 2013).

In terms of event staging, Pine and Gilmore (1999) posited that experiences occur “when a company intentionally uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage consumers in memorable ways”, recommending cognizance of staging design as consumer experience is highly subjective, with no two consumers having the same experience. Later studies advised brand owners to develop coherent themes when staging experiences as the setting contributes to the value creation aspect for consumers (Poulsson and Kale, 2004; Gentile et al., 2007). With the age of digital consumers, staging is more pertinent than ever, as cleverly staged executed experiences can generate rich content opportunities that live online for longer, well beyond the immediate event activation time frame (Presci et al., 2016).

Events are intentionally staged to create feelings of immersion and participation through both direct and indirect brand encounters (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). They can generate multi-sensory responses in consumers by successfully establishing emotional connections and through the provision of stimulations create experiential value which can influence the perceived value of the brand (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias, 2011; Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) added to the literature on event design by who devised a typology of consumers in order to predict consumer behaviour, defining five types of experiential consumer: five: hedonistic, action-oriented, holistic, inner-directed, and utilitarian consumers. Their findings highlighted groups of consumers that prefer different experiential appeals and recommended marketers devise experiential marketing strategies and tactics that would match specific psychological expectations and profile of target consumers. These theoretical studies were influential in providing practical guidelines in staging events, however considering the wide range of event types and the lack of empirical evidence underpinning the effectiveness of any method in particular, selecting the most appropriate event execution which will best match strategy objectives remains challenging (Crowther and Donlan, 2011; Khan and Rahman, 2015). Therefore research that explores different experience outcomes will contribute to the understanding and provide more confidence when setting out to create events.

2.2.4 Event Marketing Co Creation

Co-creation is a critical consideration for studies into Event Marketing, as experiences can only be implemented through an event when consumers actively or passively participate in it, co-creating their own and others' experiences of the brand, and developing brand attachments while they become part of the experience themselves (Cole, 2004, Tynan and McKechnie, 2009; Crowther and Donlan, 2011; Altschwager et al., 2013; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). Co-creation as a concept is much discussed in the literature, with earliest definitions describing it as the 'process where value is created when two or more parties come together' (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Many studies recommend companies adopt a service-dominant logic approach to creating experiences, as engaged consumers become part of the experience and co-create experiences around it, therefore the value is created through active participation (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 2009, Iglesias, 2011; Crowther and Donlan, 2011; Altschwager et al., 2013; Tynan and McKechnie, 2009; Ding and Tseng, 2015). There are multiple definitions of value in the literature which differ in delivery context however for the purpose of this study value

is defined as 'an outcome of an evaluation judgement' (Varsheyra et al., 2016). Value is embedded in the actual personalised experience created through active participation and has been found to be the ultimate reward for marketers, as it can affect customer memories, satisfaction with the brand and future behavioural intentions (Lacher and Mizerski, 1994; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Mascarenhas et al., 2006; Tynan and McKechnie, 2009). In addition, value can be achieved through provision of sensorial, affective, relational, behaviour and cognitive aspects of an experience (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009).

In the current market, with the advent of Web 2.0, co-creation takes on a new dimension, as today's consumers do not have to directly experience a brand or event to have an experience, but can create value through formation, in the second hand accounts from others who have had the direct experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Heinonen et al., 2013; Kennedy 2017). For that reason, co creation is a powerful determinant of event success. A central objective in any event strategy is to create an environment where consumers can emotionally connect and actively interact with a brand and each other, thereby co-collaborating in the creation of a uniquely emotional brand-related experience (Presci et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it has been cautioned that co-creation can be a risky strategy, with consideration needed to be given to issues around how much co-creation should be embedded in an event and implications of co-destruction should an event execution fail to meet expectations of the participants (Crowther and Donlan, 2011, Addis et al., 2018).

2.2.5 Event Marketing Experience Outcomes

The fact that event marketing can influence consumer brand relationships has been well established in the literature. Previous studies have theorized that event marketing positively influences brand equity, brand attitude and brand satisfaction (Keller 1998; Brakus et al., 2009; Hollebeek, 2011; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). Other studies hypothesised that brands that deliver superior brand experiences can gain brand preference and brand differentiation, in addition to increased brand loyalty and brand evangelism (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al 2013). Significantly in the age of the connected consumer, events have great impact in creating customer engagement and online / offline brand experiences (Fransen et al., 2013; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013; Khan and Rahman, 2015; Presci et al., 2016; Clef et al., 2018). Prior studies recommended that events be personally relevant, and attempt to evoke positive feelings of hedonism to accompany consumption experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014; Tseng and Ding,

2016). However as events rely on evoking subjective experiences, negative experiences can also be accidentally evoked, which can impact brand relationships (Addis et al, 2018).

Given that Event Marketing continues to increase its share of media budgets but is wholly dependent on consumer interaction, executing relevant brand experiences can be challenging, with little conceptual and empirical consumer research available to underpin marketing strategies or measure the true return on investment (Wolfheil and Whelan, 2006; Martensen et al., 2007; Wood 2009; Iglesias, 2011; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). As a result, while brand marketers can connect with consumers by staging holistic branding experiences, and consumers continue to engage with unique and memorable experiences, both academics and practitioners acknowledge the need to gain better understandings to enable the marketing of goods and services (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2013).

2.3 Brand Experience Marketing

2.3.1 Brand Experience Definitions

Brand Experience is a relatively new theoretical framework which describes how consumers relate to brands in a more comprehensive way than previously thought (Gentile et al., 2007; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). It is difficult to define Brand Experience due to the broad range of experience areas associated with it (Poulsen and Karle, 2004; Tynan et al., 2014) however for this study, the most cited definition by Brakus et al., (2009) describes brand experience as:

“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”.

The Brakus et al. (2009) study was significant, as it was the first to propose that a brand was not just an identifier, but had become a provider of experiences, which had implications for brand managers in terms of strategy planning. This seminal study is further addressed in Section 2.3.5.

Brand experiences can be strong and memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), and ordinary and commonplace (Carù and Cova, 2003). They can be provoked as a result of direct, live, physical brand interaction, while other experiences can come about from indirect brand interactions that can take place through traditional or digital advertising channels (Brakus et al., 2009; Pesci et al., 2016). They can be positive or negative, short-lived or long-lasting and stored in memory for later recall. They can also affect influence outcomes such as brand

equity brand image, brand satisfaction, brand personality, and brand loyalty (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al.; 2009; Nysveen & Pedersen, 2014; Basoc, 2015; Khan and Rahman, 2015; Clef et al., 2018; Mathew and Thomas, 2018). The review points to the range of consumer brand outcomes possible through experience marketing, however a further examination of its provenance is required to broaden the knowledge of its true potential.

2.3.2 Experiential Marketing Definitions

To better understand how Event Marketing complements Brand Experience, it is important to first clarify the differences between Experiential Marketing and Experience Marketing. The review has shown they are separate methodologies, employed for different outcomes. Experiential Marketing has most recently been defined as:

“the process of identifying and satisfying customers’ needs profitably, engaging them through authentic two way communications that bring the brand personalities to life and add value to the target audience” (Smilansky, 2018).

Event Marketing is therefore classified as an Experiential Marketing tool (Brakus et al., 2009), which is included in an Experience Marketing strategy. Other differences between both concepts are:

- Brand Experience is defined from the point of view of consumers; whereas Experiential Marketing is from the point of view of marketers (Tseng and Ding, 2016).
- Experiential Marketing is a tactical tool, whereas Brand Experience Marketing is a strategy (Basoc, 2015).
- Experiential Marketing operates at emotional level, to instigate an emotional response, whereas Experience Marketing is tapping into emotional-cognitive level, using experiential as a tool to achieve objectives (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013).

2.3.3 Experiential Evolution

When considering the place Experiential Marketing has in today’s marketing strategies, it is important to frame its differentiation from Traditional Marketing approaches. Several major changes in the market instigated its evolution, factors such as the omnipresence of the internet and new technologies, the ubiquity of new media channels and platforms enabling brands to reach the connected consumer in a more targeted fashion, and the resultant rise of “supreme” consumer brands and associated brand experiences which combined

necessitated a change in marketing approaches in order to create brand differentiation in crowded marketplaces (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999; Schmitt 2003; Schmitt et al., 2014; Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Gentile et al., 2007; Clef et al., 2014). According to Schmitt (1999, 2014), the main differences between the two approaches are:

| TRADITIONAL MARKETING | EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING |
|--|---|
| Brand is identifier | Brand is the experience provider |
| Focused on communication of functional features and benefits | Focused on generating customer experiences that engage the senses |
| Narrow definitions of product categories and rivals | Consumption is a holistic experience |
| Customers viewed as rational and logical decision makers | Customers are viewed as both logical and emotional |
| Methodologies are analytical, quantitative and verbal | Diverse and eclectic methodologies used |

Figure 3: Traditional Vs Experiential Marketing, Schmitt (1999)

These market changes meant products could no longer be distinguished purely on functional features and benefits, so to create competitive advantage marketers started to create holistic experiences around consumption, thereby converting brands into signifiers of experiences (Schmitt, 1999; McCole, 2004; Gentile et al., 2007). Experiential marketing started to become even more relevant in consumer marketing strategies due to globalization, mass consumerism, and consumer expectations demanding brand experiences that satisfied beyond utilitarian needs (Mortimer, 2009; Fransen and Lodder, 2010; Clef et al., 2018). Moreover, consumers were simply becoming overwhelmed when attempting to differentiate between various products (Gentile, 2007). As a result marketers began to reconsider traditional mass media, finding it less effective but more costly in reaching audiences which led to strategies including more targeted engagement platforms to better influence consumers and build brands (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2014). As experiential marketing could deliver stronger brand experiences than traditional media due to the active consumer participation element, it led to more refined experiential techniques developing, methods such as event marketing which were found to be very effective at anchoring multi-sensual brand experiences amongst consumers (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013).

2.3.4 Brand Experience Conceptual Foundations

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) first addressed Brand Experience, theorizing that experiential marketing was more effective than traditional marketing due to the intensity and interactivity of the experiences it created. Their much cited ground breaking conceptualization of Brand Experience described it a primary need a consumer has for feeling, fun, fantasy, stimulation and enjoyment around consumption, stating that the need for gratification was a hedonic response to the inherent pleasure principle.

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) seminal study in which they coined the phrase "Experience Economy", first placed the concept of economical experiences in the literature, when they described how changes in economic values and the business environment had affected how brands marketed themselves. As markets developed so too did economies, evolving from Agrarian, to Industrial, to Services, to the present market that demands "Experiences". This shift in the business environment prompted business strategies to provide memorable staged experiences 'entertaining and educational in nature' in order to connect with consumers and differentiate from competitors to gain competitive advantage.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) advanced the concept proposing the "The 4 Realms of Experience" model which categorized experience into 4 separate categories: entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapist. It provided a background for experience consumption and benchmarked depths of experience, demonstrating how important it was to understand customer needs when seeking to create an experience that matched expectations.

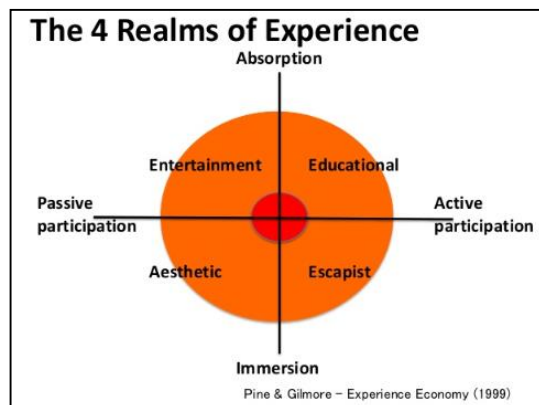


Figure 4: The 4 Realms of Experience, Pine and Gilmore (1999)

Pine & Gilmore’s conceptualization paved the way for further academic research, of which three studies will form the basis of the theoretical framework for this present study.

2.3.5 Brand Experience Conceptual Frameworks

Schmitt (1999) was seminal in providing a new conceptual framework that provided an operational typology for experiences, one which continues to be recognised within the consumer brand marketing literature as a reliable measure of brand experiences (Gentile, 2007; Altschwager et al., 2013). The Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM) framework proposed a typology of consumer experiences as a guideline for marketers to understand experience outcomes:

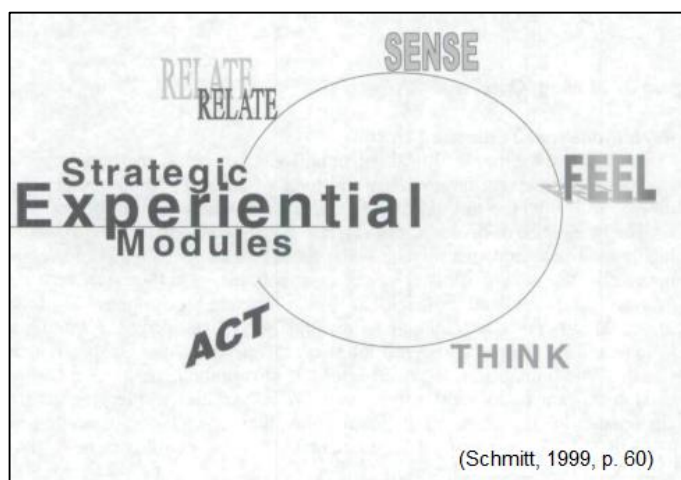


Figure 5: Strategic Experiential Modules (Schmitt, 1999)

The SEM model proposed a typology of five brand experiences that provided sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational values:

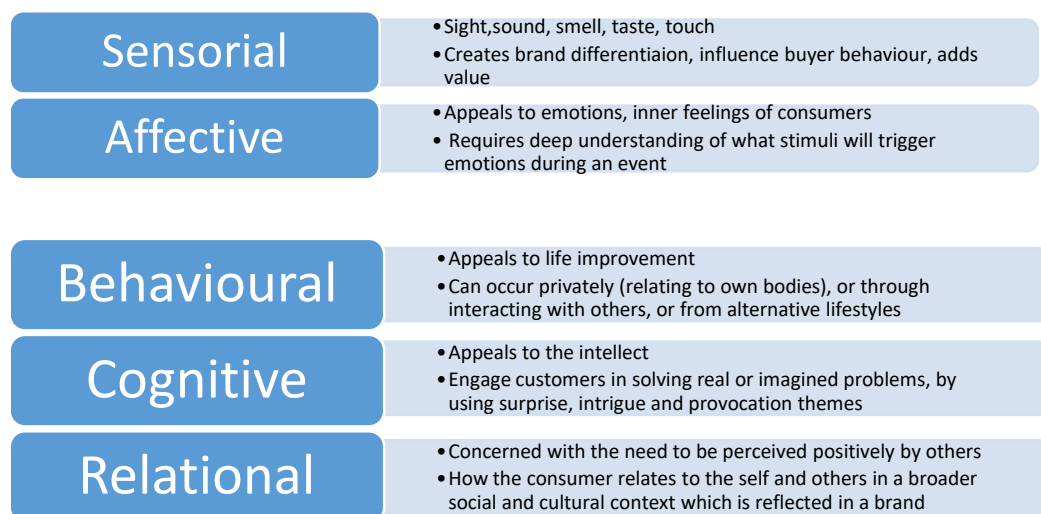


Figure 6: Brand Experience Typology (Schmitt, 1999)

Brakus et al. (2009) developed a Brand Experience Measurement Scale that was modelled on and extended the theory of Schmitt (1999) by conceptualizing that brand experience included specific sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses triggered by specific **brand-related stimuli**. The findings suggested that brand experience was a strong predictor of consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty, both directly and indirectly (through brand personality associations). In addition, depending on how many dimensions were evoked, the resulting brand experience can be more or less intense.

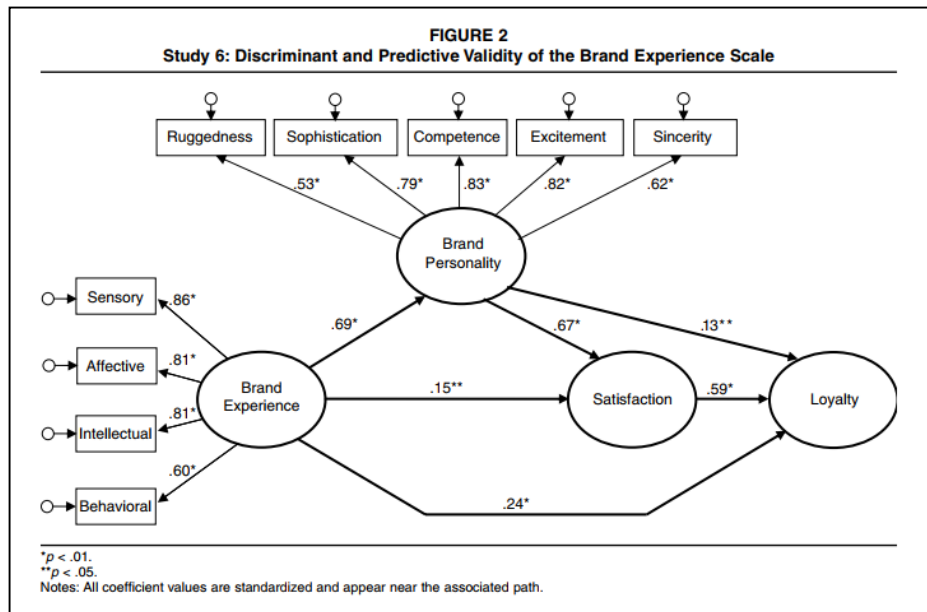


Figure 7: Discriminant and Predictive Validity of the Brand Experience Scale (Brakus et al. 2009)

The Brakus et al. (2009) construct provided a valid and reliable framework for further research, with Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) and Iglesias et al. (2011) extending the theory by examining outcomes of brand experiences. Nysveen and Pedersen (2014) validated the scale in their study that examined co-creation influences in brand experiences. While the relational dimension was not included in the Brakus et al. (2009) model due to lack of empirical support, Nysveen included it as they were examining the relational construct. Consequently, they found that co-creation strengthens brand experience and that the relational dimension in isolation strongly mediates brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. However the scale is not without its limitations, as was pointed out by Nysveen and Pedersen (2014), who argued that the scale only measured five dimensions, when potentially there may be other dimensions relevant to the experience construct. In addition, the framework was created to measure offline brand experiences only, therefore does not extend insights in a digital context (Cleff et al., 2018).

A third study by Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) investigated the impact of Event Marketing on brand equity, by adapting the Brakus et al., (2009) framework. Employing a 12 item brand experience scale to measure degrees of stimulation each experience dimension encountered at an event, the Brakus et al., (2009) framework was validated, with findings suggesting that events mediate brand equity through brand experience.

When addressing the theoretical framework for this present research, these conceptual frameworks will be referred to again in Section 2.5.

2.3.6 Emotional Drivers

Emotion is defined as “a state of mental readiness”, triggered by cognitive appraisals of events, agents or objects, occurring at time of brand consumption (Hung and Mukhopadhyay, 2012; Tseng and Ding, 2015). Emotions are the most intense point in the consumer-brand relationship, with earliest studies into brand experience recommending that brands create experiences that appeal to emotions, as consumers essentially are emotionally motivated, hedonistic by nature, seeking fun or fantasy themed consumption experiences (Hirshman and Holbrook, 1982; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 2003; Basoc, 2015; Cleff et al., 2018). Hedonic values are emotive motivators for co-creation (Nysveen and Pedersen, 2014). Furthermore, consumers seek emotional experiences simply so that they can relate them back to others in their network (Triantafillidou and Siomkos; 2014). As a result, positive brand experiences are highly influential outcomes to elicit, as consumers tend to remember the ones that help them escape from reality, with consumers who have had intense experiences often becoming brand evangelists, who actively spread the word about the brand (Hirshman and Holbrook, 1982; Triantafillidou and Siomkos; 2014; Presci et al., 2016).

Hung and Mukhopadhyay (2012) theorized that emotions can be either spontaneous, natural, hedonic responses, or alternatively, self-conscious emotional responses which arise out of how consumers evaluate the event or assume how they might be evaluated by others. Emotions are differentiated from the concept of brand attitude, which is ‘a learned disposition that makes consumers respond consistently towards a brand’, but significantly in the context of events, can be based on automatic affective reactions (Lutz, 1991; Tseng and Ding, 2014). As positive emotional experiences at event marketing can affect brand attitudes, emotion is therefore an antecedent to brand experience and should be considered an instrumental concept to evoke in event design (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013).

Marketers should be mindful that generating emotions at events can be a risky strategy, as brand owners cannot always control consumers subjective emotive responses, even when they provide all the social cues to create a positive experience, as cognitive appraisals, real or not, can affect outcomes (Ding and Tseng, 2015; Addis et al., 2018). Therefore if experiential marketing aims to identify and satisfy emotive drivers to generate more meaningful responses, understanding what those drivers are and how to stimulate the right emotions is critical.

2.3.8 Brand Engagement

Brand Engagement refers to the level of motivation a consumer has to interact with a brand, and is characterised by specific cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to direct brand engagements (Hollebeek, 2011). When conceptualising brand experiences at events, creating engagement is a key catalyst for success, since motivating consumers to engage with brands is getting increasingly harder, due to the proliferation of platforms vying for attention (Ha and McCann, 2008; Altschwager et al., 2013). As consumers now conceive brands not for utilitarian value, but for the perceived experience around the brand or product (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Aaker et al., 2014) and experiences relate to the emotional responses a brand evokes in the consumer, engagement is considered a driver of experience success and can affect brand loyalty, satisfaction and trust (Brodie et al., 2011, Altschwager et al., 2013). Studies suggest that brand immersion, where a consumer becomes physically or virtually part of the experience itself, is crucial in terms of capturing consumer engagement with a brand, as it strongly connects the brand experience to consumer sensations, emotions and thoughts (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009; Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek 2011). Furthermore Brodie et al. (2011) argued that consumer engagement has three dimensions, cognitive, emotional and behavioural, and that by facilitating them in isolation or combined affect the intensity of engagement.

2.3.9 Brand Experience Online

A review of the literature found few empirical studies for digital brand experiences; neither is there a conceptualization of online brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014; Cleff et al., 2018). However according to Schmitt et al. (2014) in light of businesses becoming digitized, and growth in digital media channels, relational experiences are becoming more important due to the growth of what they called the 'sharing economy', with consumer-consumer and consumer-brand experiences taking on new meanings. In fact, through digital technologies, consumers can have virtual brand experiences which can lead

to stronger connections and improved levels of brand attitude and increased brand loyalty (Clef et al., 2018). Nevertheless due to the lack of physical presence, online brand experiences must work harder to arouse emotional responses, despite experiences that appealed sensorially (through sight and sound) and cognitively being more effective in a digital context (Luo et al., 2011).

While Event Marketing immediately engages those in direct proximity to the event, it is the potential to leverage wider attendee network through indirect reach that makes it so valuable to the marketer (Belk, 2013; Riivits-Arkonsuo and Leppiman, 2014; Cleff et al., 2018). Cleverly staged branded events can create experiences that connect with the target audience who amplify it digitally, extending reach and brand message, at lower costs than traditional media, thereby converting attendees into brand advocates who actively share content online (Ha and McCann, 2008; Belk, 2013; Pesci et al. 2016; Cleff et al, 2018). However while digital media allows for two way communication and co-creation between consumers and brands to co-create digital brand experiences, ultimately it is the consumers who hold the power as they dictate how the brand is experienced by others in this context (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Belk, 2013).

2.4 Millennials

2.4.1 Generational Stratification

Generations have been described as groups of individuals who shared the same birth years, age locations and significant life events at critical developmental stages (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Generational boundaries are significant because life events experienced during specific time scales have been found to have the same effect on group attitudes and behaviours of generations born during that same period, resulting in a different outlook to those born in time periods either before or after (Mannheim, 1959). Generations or 'generational cohorts' are relevant as it implies that those born within the same time frame will have shared opinions, values, traits and frames of references that binds them together (Lazarevic, 2012).

2.4.2 Millennials

Studies differ across the literature when classifying the Millennial age range, however for this research they are defined as individuals born between 1977 and 1994, who are aged between 24 – 41 years in 2018 (Noble et al, 2009; Mintel, 2018). Millennials, previously known as Generation Y, alternatively referred to as ‘Generation Whine’ and other times the ‘Greatest Generation’, are a most valuable target market for brands and marketers to engage, not least due to being the largest generational segment globally, with over 500,000 living in Ireland, but also because of their current and future spending power (Noble, et al 2009; Hershatter and Epstein, 2010; Lazarevic, 2012; Bord Bia, 2014). Due to the aforementioned development of technologies, and proliferation of brands in today's crowded marketplace these consumers are being targeted at every opportunity, at thousands of touch points along their daily consumer journey (Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2014). However secondary research and empirical studies suggest they do not respond well to this targeting, increasingly employing a range of ad avoidance techniques to block out irrelevant advertising (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Mortimer, 2009; Kim and Hahn, 2012; Lazarevic, 2012).

Studies on Millennials have been ambiguous as they have been described as both brand loyal and brand disloyal (Wood, 2004; Nobel et al. 2009, Lazarevic, 2012). In addition, they exhibit loyalty to certain product categories such as high value technology items like mobile phones or lap tops, which this connected cohort view as essential accessories in their everyday lives (Lodes and Buff, 2009; Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). Either way they remain challenging, being an educated cohort, who are knowledgeable about brands, who choose brands that are congruent with their self-image (Belk, 1988; Noble et al. 2009). Even more so, they are aware that brands they consume will provide social cues to those in their network about how they view themselves (Belk, 1988; Lazarevic, 2012).

2.4.3 Millennials and brand experiences

While Millennials are especially keen for discerning experiences, they are more difficult to reach through traditional media formats than previous cohorts, due to their unique perspective on the world which has conditioned them to block out unwanted marketing messages (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010; Bord Bia, 2014)). However, living in the Experience Economy, they are leading the charge in relation to how experiences are shared, as this cohort find it less important to share information about what they own; instead they prefer to share about what they have experienced. This increase in sharing ‘experience’ related information can be important for cash poor Millennials, as experience led posts can be seen

as 'status boosters' (Usborne, 2017). In fact, event marketing has had a renaissance amongst this cohort, as it enables marketers to provide authentic, immersive experiences that they actively engage with, in exchange for hedonic or relational rewards (Cummings, 2016).

2.4.4 Millennials and digital experiences

The greatest difference between Millennials and previous generational cohorts is their relationship with technology. Having grown up entirely in a connected world, their lives are viewed through a sea of glass, with Wi-Fi connectivity as essential a life force as the oxygen in their blood; as a result they are more comfortable sharing information online than in person (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). For that reason, they are considered 'digital natives' whose digital immersion has been so intense that studies have found they are actually wired differently to previous generations. Being neurologically and developmentally unique, they have learned to adapt and respond to digital communications in a way that is fundamental to their social and personal lives. (Tapscott, 2009, Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). Digitally, they like to publicly express their opinions, and tend to share experiences, whilst regularly watching or listening to other user generated content (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010; Usborne, 2017). They are heavy users of social media and more than likely will buy goods or services online, tending to research online before they make purchases. Significantly, they tend to make purchasing decisions based on the influence and opinions of others but are innovative and willing to buy the latest popular brands introduced into the market which means they are open to persuasion when it comes to switching brands (Morton, 2002; Belk, 2013; Lazarevic, 2012). However while Web 2.0 offers vast branding opportunities, a major challenge for brands is that they aren't always welcome on social media with their presence on social platforms often perceived as an uninvited intrusion that renders the brand inauthentic (Fournier and Avery, 2011). The same authors suggest that the web is ideal for 'open source branding' whereby consumers are the creators and disseminators of branded content. Therefore creating events that generate rich user generated content is a key objective of Event Marketing (Solaris, 2018).

2.5 Theoretical Framework Summarised

Two seminal brand experience conceptualizations reviewed in this study will support the theoretical framework. Schmitt (1999) will provide the thematic framework for the research

instrument. The instrument used by Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) which validated the Brakus et al. (2009) framework, will be used in the present hypothesis, however it cannot be replicated exactly as it was originally created for a quantitative approach, for use in surveys with close ended questions. Therefore for this study, the items will be adapted to explore the objectives of the research through a qualitative questioning approach. The relational dimension will also be included as it is relevant to the objectives of this research.

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| Brand experience (Brakus et al. 2009) | <i>Sensory experience</i> | |
| | 1. I find this brand interesting in a sensory way | BE1 |
| | 2. This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses | BE2 |
| | 3. This brand does not appeal to my senses* | BE3 |
| | <i>Affective experience</i> | |
| | 4. This brand induces feelings and sentiments | BE4 |
| | 5. I do not have strong emotions for this brand* | BE5 |
| | 6. This brand is an emotional brand | BE6 |
| | <i>Intellectual experience</i> | |
| | 7. This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving | BE7 |
| | 8. I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand | BE8 |
| | 9. This brand does not make me think* | BE9 |
| <i>Behavioural experience</i> | | |
| 10. I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use this brand | BE10 | |
| 11. This brand results in bodily experiences | BE11 | |
| 12. This brand is not action oriented* | BE12 | |

Figure 8: The Four Factor Model (Brakus et al. 2009, Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013)

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods

3.0 Introduction

Saunders et al (2015, p726) define the word ‘research’ as the “systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose, to find things out”. It is a process, a set of activities that unfold over time in order to discover new insights or verify and expand existing market knowledge (Ghuari and Gronhaug, 2010). Indeed, the purpose of much research tries to find a causal relationship between occurrences and is very much a conscious activity aimed at demonstrating the link between variables (Matthews and Ross, 2010, cited by Johnson, 2014). Bearing those principles in mind, it is crucial that the correct research design is devised, as it is that overarching strategy that underpins the collection and analysis of data. It incorporates all decisions made regarding all aspects of the project, including methodology, to ensure it is tailored to effectively deliver the stated research objectives. (Cooper and Schindler, 2014; Bryman and Bell 2015).

This aim of this study is to explore Brand Experience in the context of Event Marketing, investigating the opinions, attitudes and behaviours of a specific cohort, within a validated framework that seeks to answer the research questions and objectives. This chapter therefore intends to explain the methods used to underpin the study, discussing the approach taken to answer the research objectives. It starts with an overview of the theoretical philosophies, discussing how the chosen philosophy and approach are suitable for this dissertation. It also discusses the research strategy, research choice, and the reasoning behind the methods employed. Data collection, data analysis and population are also discussed. Finally ethical considerations and research limitations framing the research are also discussed.

3.1 Proposed Research Methodology

A Research Methodology is the theory of how research is undertaken, and includes both theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which the research is based (Saunders et al, 2015). It involves an explanation of the scientific methods used to collect data, and will argue why results obtained are meaningful, while also seeking to explain any associated limitations (Saunders et al, 2012).

The guiding framework employed to provide a structured approach to this study is 'The Research Onion' (Saunders et al, 2009). It uses an analogy of an onion to determine an appropriate research philosophy suitable to the research question, by working from the outer layers in to the centre of the Onion Model. The outer layers refer to the philosophical stances and approaches, while the inner layers are concerned with research strategies, choices and time horizons. The very centre involves the data collection and analysis techniques. The Research Onion provides the roadmap that aids decision making around designing an effective research methodology. Progressing through the layers of the onion the researcher better understands the context for selecting the correct data collection and analysis techniques that will be coherent with the research objectives.

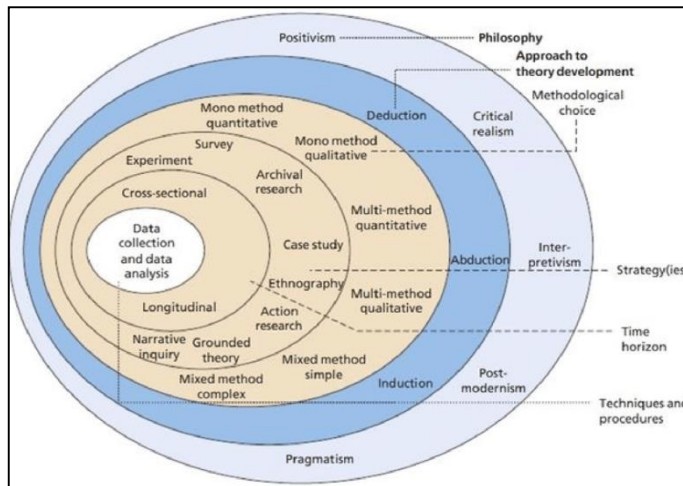


Figure 9: The Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015, p124)

It must be noted that the framework excludes three key philosophies of Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology, however it is still a very valid model to employ when seeking to establish the most appropriate research strategy, design and methodology.

3.2 Research Philosophy

A philosophical framework has been described as the ‘worldview within which the research is situated’, with worldview defined as a set of beliefs that guide action (Cresswell, 2009, Quinlan, 2011). Therefore the framework is an essential component of the project, as it supports the research, providing a structure in order to deliver the objectives required (Quinlan, 2011).

The outer layer of The Research Onion refers to Philosophy, with the term ‘research philosophy’ referring to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge in a particular field (Saunders et al, 2015, p. 124). Many authors have argued that the research method can only be chosen once the research paradigm is established, a ‘research paradigm’ being defined as “a set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn, 1962). However the research method can only be determined once the beliefs or philosophical stance taken by the researcher is known, in order to understand their rationale for the research (Bryman and Bell, 2012, cited by Johnson, 2014). Therefore, there are three separate key thinking paradigms that can influence the research process are (Saunders, et al., 2015; Johnson, 2014):

- **Ontology** – the researchers view of reality, which shapes how research objects are viewed
- **Epistemology** – the researchers view of what they consider acceptable and valid knowledge
- **Axiology** – the researchers view of the role of values and ethics within the research process

It is important to appreciate a person's view of reality, and what is considered acceptable knowledge and why the research is being undertaken, with Easterby-Smith, et al. (2012) suggesting that understanding Ontology and Epistemology is at the very core of all research.

The construct of Theory must also be considered. Defined as “observed realities, or what we see and accept around us, be it practical or abstract” theory can be considered an additional instrument to interpret data beyond the level of description (Walshaw, 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2012). Theory therefore is connected to research, as it is driven by Ontological and Epistemological assumptions, which combined influence the chosen philosophy and methods (Johnson, 2014).

There are 5 major philosophies referred to within the Research Onion, with those most frequently referred to being Positivism and Interpretivism (Saunders, et al. 2015):

- **Positivism (also called Constructionism):** a single ordered reality, with real, observable and measurable facts, that assumes a scientific approach, most suited to quantitative studies.
- **Interpretivism:** reality is rich and complex, with many aspects constructed through multiple meanings that are open to interpretation. More often used in qualitative research.

Positivism and Interpretivism are two philosophical positions, both representing distinct ontological and epistemological viewpoints. The positivist approach finds an external world, one that should be measured by objective methods, while the Interpretivism view is that the world is open to interpretation, it being socially constructed by people (or social actors) (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2012, cited by Johnson, 2014). These contrasting views dictate how research is undertaken and how the theory is related to the research (Johnson, 2014).

Research that adopts a positivist approach usually employs existing theory to develop a hypotheses and typically take a quantitative approach to test hypotheses against large scale samples, collecting data that is specific and precise, and the research can be generalized from sample to population (Collins and Hussey, 2009; cited by Johnson, 2014). In contrast, the Interpretivism philosophy, which is derived from the natural sciences, respects differences between people, and requires the researcher to interpret the subjective meaning of social actions by taking a more naturalistic approach to data collection, through

qualitative methods, notably interviews and observations (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Collins, 2010). It tends to measure small samples, but generate rich subjective data in order to formulate theories that are generalized against that setting only. However, as different as the two philosophies are, it has been argued that natural sciences have developed from engaging with the world, as the data would have been originally been collected and observations made before a hypotheses was formed (Saunders, 2009).

The philosophical stance a researcher takes will influence the overall research design and the research design determines the choice of research method to match against the specific research objectives (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders et al. 2009). Therefore it is important to distinguish the approach from the outset. Therefore the philosophies selected to underpin this dissertation research strategy are:

- An **Ontological** perspective will be adopted, as the investigation seeks to understand participant subjectivism. It has been described by Quinlan (2011) as “social phenomena developed in social contexts in which individuals and groups create, in part, their own reality”.
- An **Epistemological** paradigm is required, especially as epistemological research is concerned with thoughts, intellect, information, awareness, imagination, perceptions, and sensations (Browaeyns and Fisser 2012). Participant’s views and opinions will be considered acceptable knowledge, and deemed theoretical findings. The nature of this dissertation is to understand subjective view of a specific cohort, exploring their opinions against a variety of theoretical constructs, therefore the freedom to fully and freely express those opinions and beliefs in relation to the topic is integral to the research objectives being met.
- An **Interpretivism** philosophical approach will be adopted as it considered the most appropriate to its subjective standpoint, which is characterised as seeking to understand human actions (Bryman, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015). It concentrates on the detail of a situation, and gain deeper understandings of subjective meanings and motivating actions (Saunders, et al, 2009). In addition, the Interpretivism paradigm is more suited to qualitative methods of analysis, as it requires the researcher to take an empathic stance, and to seek the complex differences and unique experiences of humans. It is especially suitable for in depth interviews, as it avoids rigid frameworks.
- A **Positivist** approach would not be suitable for this study as that relies entirely on having an initial theory to test as a starting point, whereas this study aims to develop theory as a result of the research.

3.3 Research Approach

The second outermost layer of the research onion refers to two distinct research approaches employed to draw conclusions on various phenomenon; deductive and inductive approaches (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al, 2009). Both are logical but alternative approaches, as deduction is grounded in the epistemology of the natural sciences, while induction is embedded in the social scientific approach. Each is an opposing approach to the relationship between theory and research, with a deductive approach starting with a theory to research, as opposed to an inductive approach, where theory is the outcome of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Therefore, the decision on which research approach to take depends on whether the research project is to test a theory, or develop a theory:

- **Deduction** - based on logic, it involves the development of a theory, or hypothesis that is subjected to rigorous testing through a research strategy designed to test it, and where the premise and conclusions are inferred to be either true *or* false only (Saunders, et al, 2016).
- **Induction** - based on empirical evidence, research starts by collecting data to explore, themes and patterns are identified, from which the theories are formulated, sometimes expressed as a conceptual framework devised (Saunders, et al, 2016).

As the dissertation is an exploration of Brand Experience in a specific context, the most appropriate approach of the two will be inductive as this will allow the development of conclusions from assumptions, based on empirical observations and findings gathered through a qualitative research design. However, caution has been advised over validity of inductive conclusions, as due to the fact that they are based on empirical evidence only, there is a strong possibility that the findings may be inaccurate (Ghuari and Gronhaug, 2007).

3.4 Research Choice

The next layer in the Research Onion refers to the methodological choice used. There are two overarching choices, Mono Method or Multiple Methods:

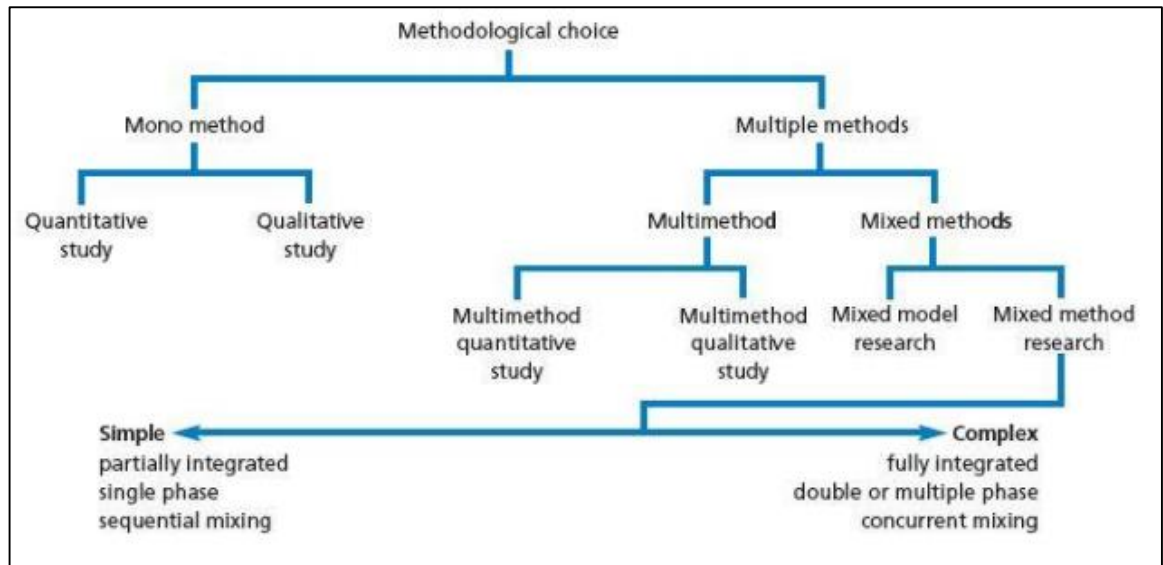


Figure 10: Methodological choice (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p167)

Mono methods are single data collection methods, either quantitative or qualitative design only, whereas Multiple Methods can be a combination of multi data collections within each design, or a mix of both designs, to run either at the same time or sequentially (Saunders, et al, 2015).

- **Quantitative research** is a structured and precise approach concerned with numerical values. It is usually associated with a deductive, positivism approach, however it doesn't always subscribe to those features (Brymore and Bell, 2007).
- **Qualitative research** seeks to describe, decode and interpret words or non-numerical data, to give meaning to phenomena (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Usually associated with inductive and interpretivist approaches, it doesn't always subscribe to those features (Brymore and Bell, 2007).

Bryman and Bell (2007) argued that while Mixed Methods have become an increasingly accepted approach to business research, that in essence they are grounded in incompatible epistemological and ontological assumptions. However they state that the methods can be complimentary, with the numerical data from quantitative supporting the qualitative words to deliver more strength in data findings. In addition the multiple methods research may overcome weaknesses inherent in mono methods (Saunders, et al, 20156).

Following a review of Brand Experience literature, it was recommended that more qualitative studies be conducted into the consumer experiences constructs (Khan and Rhaman, 2015). Their meta-review revealed that most studies conducted into Brand Experience predominantly employed quantitative methods, using survey design and

quantitative data analysis techniques, despite the fact that most studies had perceived Experience as being an inherently subjective perception. They therefore called for deeper, more insightful analysis on Brand Experience constructs, specifically recommending in-depth interviews as a suitable research method.

As this proposal is for exploratory study into consumer experience and opinions into Brand Experience, information which is highly personal and extremely subjective, a qualitative mono method will be adopted. Qualitative Research is appropriate as it uses an inductive approach, as it is searching for new information, as opposed to a deductive approach which is more concerned with testing an existing theory.

3.5 Research Strategy

The fourth layer of the Research Onion introduces the research strategy into the methodology. A research strategy is defined as a plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research question (Saunders, et al, 2016). There are many factors to be considered when deciding strategy: research question and objectives, time horizon, access to sample participants and financial parameters. However most critical is that the strategy chosen provides a coherence throughout the research design that will deliver the research objectives (Saunders, et al 2016).

A critical consideration when deciding strategy is the objective of the study. Three different types of research objectives are referred to in the literature:

- **Exploratory Studies:** aims to investigate and seek new insights into phenomena, by asking questions, to assess phenomena in a new light (Saunders, et al. 2016). Relies heavily on qualitative techniques (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).
- **Descriptive Studies:** aims to produce an accurate representation of persons, events or situations (Saunders, et al, 2016).
- **Causal Studies:** aims to identify a causal relationship between variables where a change in one variable is caused by the other variable (Cooper and Schinder, 2014; Saunders, et al. 2016).

There are many strategies to choose and each will contain key assumptions about how the data is interpreted. Techniques include surveys and experiments for quantitative studies, or for qualitative, it includes interviews, observations, ethnography and grounded theory (Saunders, 2016). Research projects are not limited to a single strategy, but depending on the objectives, several strategies can be adopted.

This dissertation is an exploratory study, as it seeks to understand consumer experiences in the context of branded events. It will adopt a single qualitative strategy, Semi Structured Interviews as these are most often used in exploratory studies, as this method enables the interviewer to probe certain responses more deeply (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

3.6 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data collection refers to studies originally made by others, for their own purposes which can be further analysed to provide additional or different knowledge (Saunders, et al. 2016; Cooper and Schindler, 2014). The advantages of using secondary data is that it saves research time and money as the data has already been collected and analysed, and is readily available. It also provides a comparison instrument with which primary data can be interpreted and understood (Ghuari and Gronhaug, 2010). However it has its drawbacks, as the data will have been collected for another study with different objectives that may not match the needs of the research at hand, therefore the data may be inappropriate to the research question (Saunders, et al. 2016).

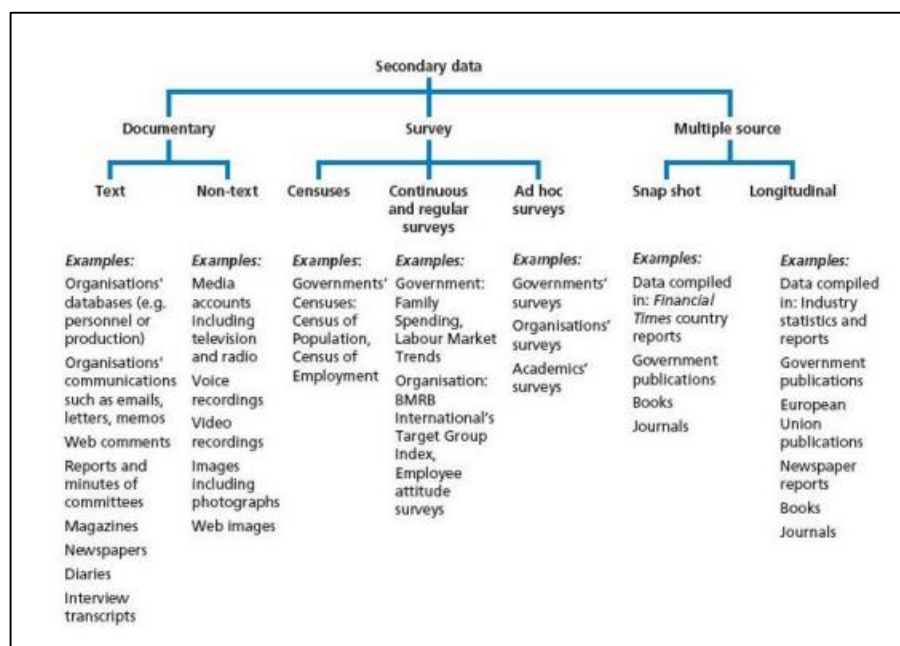


Figure 11: Types of secondary data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p319)

For this research, the secondary data sources used were primarily 'snap shots' taken from data compiled in books, journals, industry reports and some government publications. The electronic database from the National College of Ireland library provided access to journals, while hard copy academic texts were accessed from the National College of Ireland library.

3.7 Qualitative Data Primary Collection

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a mono method to explore the dissertation questions, as it is a flexible method of data collection that focuses on the interviewee point of view. Facilitating a probing style of questioning, it aligns with the interpretivist philosophical approach, applying meanings to insights given into the rationale behind decisions, attitudes and opinions (Saunders, et al. 2016). While other interview techniques were considered 'semi-structured' was selected as it follows a less rigid script than a structured interview would, but unlike unstructured interviews, it has fixed themes and questions to discuss. However, semi-structured allows both the interviewer and participant the freedom to move from the question guide, in order to explore emergent themes and beliefs, or elicit rich insights which may previously have been unconsidered but that may add to the research (Easterby-Smith, et al. 2012; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders, et al, 2016). Therefore as specific information was being sought through the asking of predetermined questions, with the use of additional probing by the researcher, semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate method.

3.7.1 Data Collection Instrument

For this dissertation, a research instrument was devised, adapted from a validated instrument used to measure event marketing in a different context (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). The items in earlier instrument were adopted from seminal brand experience frameworks both developed to conceptualize and measure brand experience (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus, et al, 2009). However, the items for this dissertation were adapted to measure brand experience through a qualitative approach.

To ensure interview objectives were met, a Pilot Test was conducted on the research instrument, amongst a sample representative of the target population to evaluate proxy data gathered for relevance to the research objectives (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). It also served to detect and adjust weaknesses in instrument design, by ensuring questions were relevant to the study, and clarifying any ambivalence in the language used.

3.7.2 Data Collection Procedure

The research consisted of seven face to face, in depth interviews, using a question guide with sixteen items. All questions were open-ended to encourage detailed responses. An aide memoire was also used in each interview, as this provided a set of prompts to serve as a visual interpretation of the experiential context being examined (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

All sample participants were interviewed individually in a quiet setting, using an audio recording device to record interview findings, with additional hand written notes taken by researcher. Audio recordings were each saved and backed up, on a hard drive in a password protected file. Each interview took approximately thirty minutes and took place over a period of two weeks. Each interview was transcribed separately, as a reproduced verbatim as a word processed document producing cleaned up data, to facilitate accurate coding and analysis (Saunders, et al. 2016). The seven interviews were transcribed over a one week period, and generated approximately 50 x A4 pages of raw data for analysis.

3.8 Population

A Population is the total collection of elements, be that people, event, or records, about which inferences will be made for a research project, who are selected on the basis that they share characteristics and can answer relevant measurement questions in a meaningful way (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). However as an entire population may be difficult to examine, due to unknown or inaccessible elements, the population may be refined to a population subset, called the Target Population. This reduces the focus of the research in a more manageable and effective way (Saunders et al, 2016, p. 275).

Sampling selects a subgroup from the Target Population, in order to allow conclusions to be drawn about all elements of target population as a whole (Saunders et al, 2016, p. 275). It is therefore critical that the sample selected is representative of the target population being examined.

Saunders, et al, (2016) provided an overview of sampling techniques, the choice of which is determined by research question to be answered, access to individual sample elements, in addition to issues around resources such as time and money:

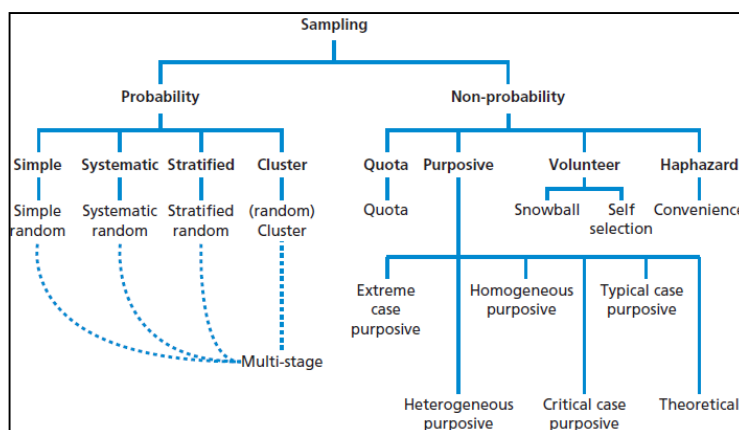


Figure 12: Sampling Techniques (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p276)

There are two types of sampling, probability and non-probability. Probability sampling, also called representative sampling, means that there is an equal the probability of a case being selected from a given target population, whereas with non-probability, the probability of selection is unknown (Saunders, et al, 2016).

3.8.1 Study Sample

For the dissertation, the sample technique employed is Non Probability, with a Convenience sample being selected. Non probability has been defined as 'haphazard', as the sample cases are identified not through any obvious principles of organisation, but because of their immediate availability to be examined. (Saunders, et al, 2016). Therefore while the sample may be quick, inexpensive and easy to action the sample may be interpreted as arbitrary and subjective, containing bias or influences that do not provide estimates of precision therefore may not be representative of the target population (Denscombe, 2017; Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Nevertheless, it can be the case that samples chosen for convenience often do meet purposive selection criteria that are relevant to the research aim (Saunders et al. 2016).The target population for this study were Millennials living in Ireland, adults of both genders with an age range between 22 and 37 years old in 2018. While the sample cases chosen were part of a convenience sample, they did meet the strict age requirements for inclusion, and all were living in Ireland at the time of research. In addition, sample participants were chosen from across the generational age spectrum in order to better represent the target population. Due to the fact that the sample has not been selected scientifically, it will be assumed that the findings cannot be generalized across the target population as a whole.

| PARTICIPANT | GENDER | AGE | MARITAL STATUS, OCCUPATION, EDUCATION | INTERVIEW LOCATION |
|-------------|--------|-----|--|--------------------|
| P 1 | Female | 33 | Married Mother Professional | Dublin |
| P 2 | Female | 36 | Single Professional Graduate | Dublin |
| P 3 | Male | 34 | Single Professional Non graduate | Dublin |
| P 4 | Male | 37 | Single Unemployed Graduate | Dublin |
| P 5 | Male | 24 | Single Graduate | Dublin |
| P 6 | Female | 25 | Single Graduate | Dublin |
| P 7 | Female | 28 | Single Employed | Dublin |

Figure 13: Study Sample (Carroll, 2018)

3.9 Analysing Qualitative Data

A Thematic Analysis approach will be taken as it is one of the most common methods to analyse qualitative data (Byman and Bell, 2007). Braun and Clarke (2012), authors seminal in developing the technique of Thematic Analysis in relation to psychology, state that it is a flexible analytical tool that can be used to systematically identify, analyse and offer collective insights into a range of patterns or themes across total data sets. This begins with coding, which means searching for and identifying themes and patterns that occur across the data set, that are potentially relevant to the research question (Saunders, et al, 2016). The strength of Thematic Analysis is that it is not tied to any one philosophical position, or

theoretical research approach, it stands alone as an interpretative tool to cluster key themes and patterns, generate rich thematic descriptions, and draw and verify conclusions. (Saunders, et al, 2016). However Bryman and Bell (2007) raised a concern over the technique, as their research found ambiguity existed in what constituted a code: for some a theme was the same as a code, whereas for others a theme transcended codes, or was created from many codes combined. Therefore for this dissertation, as the data will take both an inductive and deductive interpretive approach to generating theory, the coding will apply not just to what is in the data itself, but what concepts and themes that the researcher interprets as emerging from the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

3.10 Ethical Issues

Ethics are the norms or standards of behaviour that guide the moral choices made about research behaviour (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). They refer specifically to how the rights of those who are either the subject of, or are affected by a research project, must be treated by the researcher (Saunders, et al, 2016). As with all research strategies, potential ethical concerns must be raised in advance in order to minimise or overcome potential issues (ibid). For this study the following ethical issues were addressed:

All participants in the research were made understand why they were chosen and what their views will contribute to the project. Consent forms were provided prior to start of each interview. Participants were informed that the all research will pertain to a specific academic exploration and will not be used in any other reports apart from the dissertation. They were advised that they are not legally bound to remain in the study but have the right to remove themselves at any time. Participants were made aware of interviews being recorded, and are afforded access to their data at any time throughout the study. Participant anonymity will be guaranteed throughout the process; they will not be referred to by name in any of the data capture recordings or data reports, therefore they will not be personally identifiable, with all data stored digitally, and all files to be secured by password and code named to maintain confidentiality.

3.11 Research Limitations

Due to time and budget limitations in carrying out this research, the sample size is small, and participants will be from the Leinster region only, therefore findings will be limited to that setting only. In addition, the sample to be tested is a convenience sample, and not random therefore findings are not representative of the total population, so will not be generalized or applied to population as a whole. Finally, the use of semi-structured interviews will limit

the quality of data collected in terms of respondents giving true reports of own views or behaviours. Interviewer bias is also a consideration in terms of the interpretative subjective analytics used in thematic scoring method applied to the findings.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

The objective in conducting seven face to face interviews was to explore how the Millennial sample interpreted and responded to different brand experiences, examining their opinions, attitudes, feelings and behaviour in the context of the five distinct brand experience types. By questioning and probing their responses, the researcher can interpret and evaluate the findings against each experience type, in order to get a holistic understanding of the construct and answer the broader research objectives as laid out in Chapter 1.

The research questionnaire was based on a thematic framework which was previously established in the literature as being a reliable and valid brand experience measurement tool (Brakus et al, 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2009; Iglesias, 2011). The five brand experiences dimension investigated were:

- 1) Sensorial Experiences
- 2) Affective Experiences
- 3) Cognitive Experiences
- 4) Behavioural Experiences
- 5) Relational Experiences

4.1 Qualitative Research Findings

Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology, the researcher followed the prescribed framework which, in a consistent and systematic manner, interpreted and evaluated the findings generated from each of five experiences investigated. Findings that provided relevant insights in answering the objectives will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.1.1 Investigating Sensorial Experiences

4.1.1.1 Have any of your 5 senses ever been stimulated by a branded event you encountered?

The first question sought to understand sensorial experiences, to understand how participants responded to branded events that appealed to their senses. This study consistently revealed that the senses were stimulated at many events, ranking the most common sensual stimulations that interviewees encountered as visual, sound, taste and smell.

Of the four senses, visual imagery was repeatedly referenced throughout the study. Firstly the staging of an event alone was found to positively influence perception of the brand, with scale of build a sufficient catalyst to create interest or change consumer perception about a brand. Others found that seeing a familiar brand and other brand related stimuli in a novel setting was an effective mechanic to convey brand personality on a deeper level:

“Everyone was dressed up, it was done very well, there was music, there was taste, there was sight. They had mixologists doing all these taste tests for different flavours of Schweppes, it was all very cool.” P.F

Brands that incorporated entertainment, be it comedy or music were also referenced, with events that strongly incorporated music especially being referenced as important cultural reference points for this cohort, therefore experiences that stimulated this sense were found to make impact, generating positive recall and feedback throughout the research.

4.1.1.2 Have sensually appealing events made the brand experience differ to previous encounters with the same brand?

The question sought to explore if Event Marketing changed the perception of brand experienced, and if so, in what ways. The study found that evoking sensory imagery influenced brand attitude and created brand differentiation. Participants agreed they would gain a better perception of a brand, as the event would enable them to physically interpret and connect with the brand in ways not possible through other methods of targeting. Branded events were deemed particularly suitable for communicating information about certain products, or reinforcing aspects of brand identity and brand personality which they may not have been aware of previously. For instance, when recounting an encounter with a “Peroni Lounge” pop-up event, one that which employed a distinct modern design theme:

“The look of the event wasn’t what I would have connected with Peroni. It was all white, and very sharp and space age, so that really caught my eye and made me think about the brand.”

P.C

Research found that as a result of sensorial experiences, participants behaved more favourably towards a brand which previously they would not have considered, or even been aware of:

“I would’ve seen that product advertised on TV before, but I wouldn’t have been influenced by that. But when I sampled it, it definitely influenced me a lot more by tasting it. I would pick it again.” P.G

4.1.1.3 Are sensorial experiences influenced by other actors?

The research found that other actors’ reactions within an experience can determine outcomes. Hearing people laugh, or seeing them enjoy themselves as they engage with the experience are strong sensorial cues that inform attitude towards the brand or event. Conversely, if actors are observed having a negative experience, by being upset or not enjoying themselves, that too will impact upon experiences.

Participants often discussed the significance of other actors at events, specifically referring to event staff and brand ambassadors, underlining how important their involvement was with the event. It repeated arose as a factor that these actors must play their part in motivating consumers to engage:

“I guess it is down to the personality of the person handing out the product, they might be really fun, or have a bubbly personality to draw you in. If they’re not like that, I say no thanks and just walk by.” P.A

A second observation amongst this sample was an expressed need “to fit in” at events. It was observed that a tactic often employed by participants was to gauge other actors’ actions and responses, in order to mirror what they observed or heard. P.F described it as “*the human nature of conformity*”, stating that what is observed can create a desire to enjoy or avoid the same experience in the same way as everyone else.

4.1.2 Investigating Affective Experiences

4.1.2.1 How do participants feel about of being part of a branded event?

This question sought to understand participant opinions about Event Marketing as a concept. It found that large scale brand experiences evoked both simple and complex emotions towards the brand. Significantly, several respondents strongly stated if events focussed on sales as opposed to delivering experiences that they may not engage positively.

Participants stated they would actively engage to gain something of value, as receiving free samples or other rewards makes them feel happy and or positive towards a brand:

"I would be curious if I saw people handing out things, and everyone happy getting a free bottle of Lucozade." P.G

4.1.2.2 Are emotions or feelings triggered towards the brand at an event?

The hedonic factor was detected as a critical factor for success at events. Event settings that provided entertainment, especially those that incorporated music and dancing, were successful at triggering positive feelings, with adjectives used to describe emotions including "fun", "excitement", "enjoyment" and "happiness".

Interestingly, strong emotional experiences led to positive post consumption event memories, with unprompted brand recall for the same event recorded in four out of seven interviews, each unrelated participants, who each had experienced similar hedonic feelings within their own social groups therefore revealing a consistency in affective bonding with the brand across the study.

In addition, P.B stated that as a result of the experience, whenever now exposed to the brand, it makes her feel nostalgic, reviving happy memories of the event:

"Whenever I see that brand now, I always think back to that time and remember good feelings of happiness and having fun with my friends." P.B

This last finding demonstrated that brands are no longer identifiers, but signifiers of experiences.

4.1.2.3 Do feelings change towards the brand post event?

Positive brand outcomes were observed as an outcome of intense positive brand experiences. Several participants commented that they were very impressed when a brand

showed consideration for their needs by providing an event or branded props which enhanced their overall experience or added value. One participant who had been given a branded prop that protected his mobile phone at an event stated:

“One hundred percent it came across that they cared about you... so in return you build a positive connection with the brand because of what they have done for you.” P.E

Conversely, some participants stated that events can have negative outcomes, especially if the execution is not cognisant of their needs at time of interaction. The research indicated that if the event design does not consider their needs, consumers may not interact with the brand or event. In fact, poorly executed events were at risk of inducing negative emotions such as frustration, anger, indifference or guilt.

4.1.3 Investigating Cognitive Experiences

4.1.3.1 Are events perceived as effective marketing tools?

The research indicated that events were perceived by participants to be effective targeting tools:

“There’s no getting away from the brand when you’re there, you have to engage.” P.G

If an event design is eye catching and relevant, it can interrupt and encourage brand consideration:

“It’s convenient as the event comes to you, as opposed to you having to make the search. It makes you think “what’s going on over there.”” P.F

Events were found to be effective at introducing new brands, as they created curiosity and allowed participants to trial samples without incurring any financial investment, which for many in this cohort is an influencing factor.

“I know there’s a reason behind the event, but if it’s fun or you get free stuff, if it’s relevant to me, I don’t mind as long as it’s a good experience and you get something out of it.” P.A

4.1.3.2 Do events make people curious about the brand?

This question elicited mixed responses. Some responses were overwhelmingly positive about the outcomes of cognitive experiences, finding that engagement depended on event design and how relevant the brand was to the consumer:

“Before, Guinness would never have interested me... whereas, Arthur’s Day had this sense of community, it was like a cultural thing, that said “Ireland is great” so it totally changed my perception of Guinness after that.” P.B

A recurring theme of event resistance was observed. In essence the view was that branded events were more suitable for new or niche brands, and less so more established brands, emphasising that due to the ubiquity of mainstream brands, participants were not as curious and switched off:

“For established brands, you see them everywhere, so events don’t change my opinion very much.” P.A

4.1.3.3 Do participants recall brand experiences post event engagement?

Brand recall was consistently high across the research especially where the brand was connected to entertainment events which participants enjoyed with others. For those events the brand name alone would be referenced to trigger vivid memories of the experience. Interviewees referred to branded objects and merchandise distributed at events as valued items, providing reference points for sharing, reliving and extending positive experiences.

Where attendance at an event was perceived to be exclusive, participants were more likely to recall it personally or want to recall it within their network:

“If the brand was new or unique then you would definitely talk about it because others might not know about it. The fact it’s new or novel would make it stick out in your head.” P.G

4.1.4 Investigating Behavioural Experiences

4.1.4.1 Is there evidence of changes in behaviour towards branded events?

The objective of this question was to understand how consumers react to events, to establish if there were consistent patterns in relation to engagement. Research findings suggested that consumers were interested in attending events, with several participants stating that they actively researched events that were promoted in advance, or that they had enjoyed at prior attendance.

“After being at a Red Bull event, I would go home and straight away be on the internet, thinking “when’s this on again” so that I could go... as it really was enjoyable.” P.E

Behavioural resistance was detected with interviewees stating they wanted greater relevance in event execution and value exchange in order to attend events. That value can be presented in many forms, whether it is free products, entertainment or educational experiences, however what is notable is that the more unusual the exchange, the more it can be accepted amongst this cohort:

“The Red Bull soap box racing in Cork is brilliant, it bodes well with the brand the whole hair raising thing.” P.C

4.1.4.2 Do consumers behave differently towards brands encountered at events?

The study found that event attendance has an impact on brand experience, which, in turn influences the brand relationship. Many participants alluded to behavioural changes as result of engaging with a brand, stating that because they enjoyed an event, it often resulted in increased brand attitude and brand equity:

“At the end of the event, we’d make sure to get selfies in front of the Bacardi logo, so that when we shared photo’s we would be associated with the brand, as we had such a good time there”. P.B

Most participants stated that following a strong positive engagement with a brand it could lead to repeat consumption, or at least a stated intention of future purchase, therefore it has been found to increase brand loyalty.

4.1.4.3 How do participants behave after a branded event engagement?

Participants felt that post event that heightened brand awareness would led them to research or even or purchase the brand post event:

“Yes I would keep an eye out now for Quakers Oats in the supermarket.” P.A

Where events were positive, the research found that consumers would want to share or compare their experience within their network through Word of Mouth (WOM) communications, which was the most trusted method of referral amongst this cohort. The study revealed that some people enthusiastically became brand advocates, actively recommending or persuading their friends to buy the product after a brand experience:

“I would always choose Schweppes over Fever Tree now, and would be more likely to promote it if out with friends... saying “I’ve tried this really nice tonic water...” P.F

However, where a negative experience occurs, participants felt they would immediately relay this within their network in order to prevent others having the same experience. When probed about brands that had produced negative experiences, actual brand name recall was zero.

4.1.5 Investigating Relational Experiences

4.1.5.1 Do branded events change how participants relate to the brand?

The aim of this question is to understand the meaning that consumers attach to brands after an experience. The study found that whether participants were aware of it or not, their relationships with some brands did change post events. Throughout the research, when probed, all participants could identify brands which they now consume, which prior to an event they would not have considered:

“ I wouldn’t have had any relationship with Heineken at all prior to attending one of their events, but by attending, your building the relationship, and each time you drink it, you’re building it even more.” P.E

Conversely, if engaging with a rival brand to one that the consumer had already established brand loyalty with, the research findings were mixed. Some said that the event outcome would make them question brand loyalty values, while others stated it resolutely reinforce the original relationship.

4.1.5.2 How do participants relate to other peoples’ experiences?

The question revealed that interviewees emphatically agreed that they will relate to either positive or negative brand experiences which they have not directly experienced, on the proviso that they are relayed within their own trusted network. Unknown social media agents would not be as trusted, only known and respected individuals within personal networks would be considered influencers:

“Because you can relate to their feelings and reflect them, you trust their judgements; they’re your friends for that reason.” P.C

It was also underlined that whether those experiences were related in person or online, while strength of experience can vary, the endorsement would be the same:

“With the power of social media and word of mouth, you’re obviously going to take on board information that people give you based on an event they’ve been at.” P.E

Notably, it was observed that if a brand is not relevant to the receiver within the network, while observing positive experiences from trusted sources may enhance the brand awareness, it will not create brand loyalty.

4.1.5.3 Do participants share their brand experiences with others?

This question was important as it seeks to understand motivations for sharing experiences, which is the singular objective of most events, to create experiences that people want to talk about, personally within their own network, or in a wider digital context. The research indicated that sharing experiences was found to provide a narrative on peoples’ lives, reinforcing their own values whilst promoting social cohesion within their network. However sharing experiences was a subjective choice that depends on the event encountered, but equally on the ego too:

“Yes, you’re going to post it online, as you want it to come across to people you know that you were there too, having a good time” P.E.

Some events made consumers feel good about themselves especially if they thought it made them stand out as an early adopter, someone who was first to experience a good brand. Experiencing an event that was unique or has an exclusivity badge was found to earn “bragging rights” that can be a social booster:

“Wow, look how many people are here, having a good time as well. I must be doing something right.” P.F

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to interpret the findings yielded to address the research objectives as set out in Chapter 1.

5.1 Are Millennials engaged by brand experiences delivered at branded events?

The main aim of the research was to explore the role of Event Marketing in today's market place, by examining it the context of the five brand experience dimensions, to assess which, if any, resonated most with Millennials. The findings were persuasive, and suggest that Event Marketing is still an effective methodology for staging brand experiences that are sensually, emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally and relationally appealing, which is in line with studies by Tynan & McKechnie (2009) and Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013).

Answering the call from Zarantonello & Schmitt (2013) and Altschwager et al. (2013) for an investigation into combinations of experiences to gauge which elicited the highest intensity of engagement, this study found that sensorial, affective and relational experiences combined were the most recalled amongst the sample, which is line with research from Schmitt (2011) Where intense sensorial and affective experiences were created, strong relational experiences were the outcomes, as attendees tended to become brand evangelists, endorsing the brand and actively encouraging those within their network to consume the product as a direct result of their experiences, extending findings by Pesci et al, (2016).

With regard to sensorial experiences, visual imagery was often referenced as a means to efficiently build or alter brand perceptions with several interviewees stating that event executions can instantly convey a new narrative on a brand which is instantly interpretable. Some events were found to change brand perceptions with interviewees stating that large scale executions revealed more of the brand personality than would have been inferred through prior brand touch points, a finding that paralleled a previous study by Riivits-Arkonsuo, et al. (2014), who argued that brand experiences altered brand perceptions.

Triantafillidou and Siomkos (2014) suggested that not all experience dimensions affected consumers equally in post consumption stages, that brands create hedonistic experiences in order to boost post event outcomes such as WOM or behavioural intentions. This study found the reality of experience consumption is that every consumers brand experience is

different, interpreted and benchmarked against their own set of learned values, so creating a mono outcome that is relevant and meaningful across the cohort can be difficult to achieve. That said this research observed that Millennials are very reliant on peer to peer validation therefore the very act of sharing their experiences can create mono outcomes, as it was indicated that once the source is trusted, the experiential outcomes are accepted at face value, whatever the outcome. Therefore in contrast to the Triantafillidou and Siomkos findings (2014), but in answer to Altschwager et al. (2013) and Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) and echoing Nysveen & Pedersen (2014) this research finds that while each experience has a relevance in an event strategy, events that stimulate relational experiences, experiences which Belk (2013) asserted allowed participants to relate their subjective experiences to others, were found to engage this cohort and create the most memorable and effective at stimulating reach and WOM advocacy, and had the strongest positive influence on brand loyalty. These findings should not be underestimated in the context of Millennials, a cohort with undetermined brand loyalty, as it shows they can be influenced in the context of branded events.

Another interesting observation, relevant to marketers, suggested that while cognitive experiences are important and have a role, that overall, the preference is for event experiences with sensual, emotional, behavioural or relational dimensions, more so than cognitive, as this cohort expressed a resistance to overt branding at events, being hard wired to actually avoid traditional brand advertising (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006; Mortimer, 2009; Lazarevic, 2012). The overriding preference was for experiences that were entertaining in nature, which echoed Pine & Gilmore's (1999) prognosis, finding that events that did not engage in monetization or a "hard sell" branding approach were more actively engaged with. The research found that when events concentrated on providing affective, sensorial or relational experiences, they had higher engagement and recall rates, as participants found through the act of engagement they subconsciously absorbed the brand, and therefore had more powerful brand experiences.

These results are significant when considered in the context of the cohort being a hard to reach group who deliberately avoid traditional media platforms therefore they require more sophisticated targeting strategies (Lazarevic, 2012). By considering the correct experiences staged events that provided more relevant, original and rewarding experiences were found to be more accepted by the cohort.

5.2 Are emotional connections formed through Event Marketing?

This question seeks to understand how effective Event Marketing is as a tool in connecting with consumers, as Schmitt (2011) stated that experience does not presume a motivational state, but can occur when consumers have no interest or personal connection with a brand, while conversely brands which have established relationships don't always evoke the strongest experience with their target market. This theory was upheld as the research revealed that interviewees would attend events even if the brands are not relevant to them, as they can be more interested in the lure of event value, whatever form that took, reflecting studies by Brakus et al. (2014); Schmitt et al. (2015). Furthermore interviewees stated that if they enjoyed an event, they would actively plan to repeat the visit in order to repeat the experience. Therefore this study reveals evidence of event loyalty as a significant emergent theme amongst the cohort. It extends research conducted by Iglesias, et al. (2011) stating the higher the brand experience a consumer has, the deeper the affective commitment they have to the brand, with this study now suggesting that it can be the event that is rewarded with the affective commitment more so than the brand. This finding also correlates with theory that brands became signifiers of experiences as it suggests that the experience can become the signifier of the brand (Schmitt 1999). And this is important, as it implies that if marketers can conceive interesting event propositions that connect emotionally, that consumers will repeatedly opt in and have a strong brand experience.

In line with findings from Brakus et al. (2009) that stated brand experience mediates brand personality, this study found elements of brand personality were evoked through brand experiences, enhancing the brand relationship, leading to increased affective commitment, purchase intention and brand advocacy. In addition the research concurred with existing theory stating positive emotional brand experiences are stored in consumer memory, and affect consumer behaviour and brand equity over time with the study finding that positive experiences were easily recalled and influenced purchase intention and brand loyalty (Schmitt 1999; Brakus et al. 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2013). Interestingly, where interviewees stated they had poor experiences, there was no evidence of brand recall at all, however this could be accredited to the fact that either consumers chose to forget bad experiences, ergo the brand name was forgotten, or that they simply hadn't encountered many negative branded events. Additionally, while this study found that loyalties can be challenged through events, the outcome is dependent on valence of existing brand loyalty, and like Lodes and Buff (2009) argued, the product category affects valence, however the

findings do suggest that event marketing presents opportunities to persuade consumers to switch brand loyalties.

It was noted that interviewees expressed disinterest in events promoting established brands due to an over exposure or aversion to branding on traditional channels suggesting they had very little impact. This research indicated this cohort have a lethargy towards traditional media, with some interviewees implying that previous brand targeting was not as impactful due to the medium employed or the timing of the broadcast (Ha and McCann,2008; Schmitt, 2011).

Significantly, attitudinal and behavioural resistance was noted even if to a lesser degree in this study, with the findings showing early evidence of Event Fatigue as the cohort becomes over exposed to Event Marketing executions. This finding develops the theory (Schmitt, 1999, Schmitt et al, 2014) that stated experiential emerged as a result of the proliferation of traditional marketing channels, by positing that contagion may now be extending into experiential marketing due to over use in the market. This finding poses questions for marketers about developing more effective ways to execute events that cut through and engage consumers.

5.3 Does co-creation at branded events influence brand experience outcomes?

This research found event co-creation is one of the most important variables to be present for creating an emotional brand experience, reflecting prior studies (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Brodie et al, 2011; Altschwager et al, 2013) as findings suggested co-creation raised engagement levels by getting participants involved on a deeper level and motivated them to share experiences, whether in an online or offline context. Whether participants engaged in simple branding events or more complex executions, once the event provided value in some form the participants had a higher affective commitment to the brand, echoing studies by Gentile et al. (2007). Co-creation was found in each of the five brand experiences explored which demonstrated that co-creation is not a by-product of event design but arises from the active participation in the event and agrees with findings by Schmitt (2003a) and Iglesias (2011) that suggested experience marketing delivers sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural and relation value to customers. Furthermore, elements of co-destruction were observed, to a lesser degree, with findings suggesting that consumers can be influenced by negative experiences, whether that experiences be encountered directly or indirectly. (Crowther and Donlan, 2011).

Wolfheil and Whelan (2006) stated event-marketing is a pull strategy highly dependent on consumers' voluntary participation, however while the theory held, the study revealed events were dependent on the participation of *all* actors involved in the branded event i.e. the event staff and brand ambassadors. This study found that observing their enthusiasm was integral to the experience outcome, therefore the active participation of all actors, not just other participants, is vital in the co-creation of brand experience. This finding reinforces studies by Wood (2009) and Hung and Mukhopadhyay (2012) who posited that subjective experiences are often influenced by how a participant evaluates an event, and that emotions observed may be imitated by other participants.

According to Vargo & Lusch, (2004) one of the outcomes of co-creation is value and this research found that participants were very motivated to engage in events where they perceived a reward or value in exchange for their time. That the value could take many forms, not always physical, was in line with theory from Triantafillidou and Siomkos (2014) who stated that pleasurable experiences can create "reward memories" for consumers. Reinforcing Tynan & McKechnie (2009) participants described engaging in certain group events where memories shared within their network was clearly an outcome which they still enjoyed and valued, long past the event consumption. This also reinforced Nysveen & Pedersen (2014) who posited that stimulating relational experiences in co-creation resulted in competitive advantage, as participants indicated strong affective long term commitment to associated brands that provided such rewards. Overall this study was in line with Crowther and Donlan (2011) who stated that events represent valuable brand-consumer experiences, which are central to facilitating value co-creation by allowing consumers to infer relevant meanings around a brand.

5.4. Does event design influence brand experience outcomes?

Secondary research pointed to changes into how marketers planned media strategies, with campaigns no longer seeking to simply disrupt consumers, that being an over exercised strategy which media savvy consumers have learned to resist (Knittel, 2016; Solaris, 2018). Event strategies are now more interested in getting consumers to actively opt in, as active engagement tends to equate with enjoyment, implying attendees are more likely to share and amplify digitally (McGee, 2018). Reflecting industry opinions, one of the overarching insights that came out of this research was the necessity for marketers to stage thoughtful events that understood the needs of the target audiences at the exact point of event engagement.

Schmitt (1999) theorized that events that incorporated sensory experiences provided strong mental anchors that creating deeper experiences. That theory was strongly validated in this research, as it found that events with music or entertainment were most often referenced in positive terms. This indicates that for brands who want to target Millennials, creating experiences around music is powerful mechanic that creates positive brand associations and agrees with Tseng and Ding (2015) who suggested some product groups were better suited to directly appeal to hedonic emotions without the need for associated branding to raise awareness. This research indicated certain product groups targeting Millennials appeared to be more successful with sensorial events. Alcohol brands especially set a standard in excellence in event design, with large scale executions incorporating music the most recalled brands and events for this research, which matches where this cohort are in their life stages (Lazarevic, 2012). It is a significant takeaway for alcohol brand marketers as it reinforces their strategies to date, especially in light of the soon to be introduced Public Health Alcohol Bill (2015) which will severely curtail access alcohol brands have to traditional media branding opportunities (Hancock, 2017). Therefore this research underpins their rationale of continued investment in event marketing in order to build loyalties amongst this aging and fickle cohort (Knittel, 2016).

The literature reviewed found that branded events provide rich online content opportunities especially when consumers take 'branded-selfies' as a way to digitally preserve and extend their own experience (Belk, 2013;Presci et al., 2016). During this study the branded selfie phenomenon was observed with interviewees implying they engaged in them as they were social signifiers of the experience, therefore this finding contributes to the Presci (2013) theory on brand selfie contexts, finding that branded events are suitable environments to facilitate the brand selfie phenomenon and further influence the brand-consumer relationship.

Furthermore, Zarantonello & Schmitt (2013) theorised that events should be designed to recreate brand experiences rather than stimulate brand attitude. While this was observed in this present study interviewees did display a degree of attitudinal and behavioural resistance to events that blatantly used events as an attempt to reinforce prior branding exercises, as opposed to designing them to provide an experience that was relevant and rewarding, as the latter is what consumers have now come to expect. Ethical resistance to events was also observed, which is of consequence for certain product groups. It specifically alluded to that fact that participants felt certain product groups were not suited to this

methodology, therefore regardless of design or investment in execution or value exchange, consumers would not engage if it meant their personal values were compromised.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of the literature by exploring if Event Marketing delivered brand experiences that connected emotionally with Millennials, and if so what were the outcomes. This was a qualitative process, which employed a theoretical framework that structured the examination of the five brand experience dimensions and allowed for robust in-depth discussions with each interviewee, examining their preferences, attitudes and behaviours towards the concept. It prompted participants to give a thorough but realistic representation of their subjective experiences, and generated significant findings that contributed to the investigation of the aims and objectives of the study.

To address the primary aim and objective of this study, it is the opinion of this researcher that this study conclusively demonstrated that branded events are still a powerful experiential consumer-branding tool which Millennials have an appetite to engage with. Much evidence within the research found that the most impactful dimensions that connected with this cohort were sensorial, affective and relational, and where affective and sensorial were executed together they tended to change brand perception and stimulate strong relational outcomes. Positive relational experiences tended to result in stronger brand attitude and brand advocacy, with the research suggesting that this cohort tended to share positive experiences within their network, as it reinforced self-identity and provided social cues within the network. Equally, brand experiences encountered directly or indirectly were found to be influential, on the proviso that the source was trusted.

Behavioural outcomes were observed as interviewees discussed behavioural changes as a result of event encounters, however interestingly, while cognitive outcomes were observed by the researcher, the interviewees were not as cognisant of those, which reiterated the literature findings that this cohort do not welcome direct advertising or promotions, but will absorb brand experiences on a subconscious level. That finding implies that experiential is an effective marketing strategy.

The second objective which investigated emotional connections found that event marketing can be a powerful motivator to entice consumers to engage with brands. For some

consumers, brand loyalty is not a factor in attendance, in fact the higher the brand awareness the less the interest in attending. Nevertheless, what is interesting for marketers looking for cost effective methods to launch brands, is that while research suggested that event marketing does not suit all products it was deemed a suitable method for niche brands to engage consumers, especially as this group are not heavy consumers of traditional media channels.

It was observed that if attendees have strong affective experiences they were interested in repeat attendances at events which suggests that some events can create brand loyalty around the event, more so than the brand being promoted. Positive experiences were stored in memory and brands were favourably recalled post event, while events that triggered hedonic emotions can influence purchase intention and brand loyalty..

Co-creation was found to be the critical element in all brand experience dimensions, as co-creation raised engagement level particularly if it provided value to the attendee. While the brand and attendees are instrumental in the co-creation process brand ambassadors and event staff can also influence consumer outcomes. For event organisers, this is a critical insight, illustrating the importance of hiring and training the right staff as they will have a bearing on experience outcomes. Value was a strong motivator to engage consumers, and this value can take many forms, not least the very experience of being present at the event itself. Value can create competitive advantage for brands and long term affective commitment from consumers, therefore careful consideration must be given to value form.

The final objective considered event design, and found that events must be designed with consumer needs in mind to encourage opt in. Sensorial events were very effective at engaging this cohort, with certain product groups more successful than others in harnessing sensorial dimension to create large scale hedonic experiences that created brand differentiation and brand loyalty. Cleverly choreographed events create opportunities for attendees to take brand selfies, and create content which can be shared online, extending the brand experience reach.

However Event Fatigue and other attitudinal and behavioural resistance traits observed in the study raises issues about both event execution in its current iteration.

While this study observed that event marketing still has a role in consumer-brand marketing, the second aim of the study which looked to opportunities, challenges and trends generated some interesting results. Findings suggest that regardless of the brand experience

dimensions evoked, scepticism is emerging amongst this cohort, which may be in part due to marketers becoming over reliant on event marketing as an experiential tool to target Millennials. Lethargy towards events in its current inception is probably not to be unexpected amongst this cohort, considering they adopt or discard new digital trends incredibly quickly. Therefore, in order to remain relevant marketers and brand owners must reconsider how events and brand experiences are delivered and reshape strategies according to changing trends. If brands can do that, they will leverage attendee networks and stimulate greater reach, by converting consumers into content creators who will continue to amplify the experience throughout their network. This will allow brands to engage with much larger audiences but in a different context, that will better suit the changing life stages and diverging media consumption habits of this cohort.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Academic Research

Recommendations for future empirical research arising out of this study echo Zarantonello & Schmitt (2013) by suggesting studies adopt a narrower perspective and focus on where events are staged, to understand if event staging context has an impact on consumers or outcome. Events can occur in a myriad of situational contexts, however as the research revealed, consumers can encounter them at an inopportune times or place, resulting in a poor brand experience, therefore research that examined the influence of setting would be valuable. This study revealed that event staff and brand ambassadors have a key role in motivating attendees or influencing the outcome of event engagements, therefore an investigation into their role may yield rich data that will enhance the co-creation literature. Equally, to better conceptualize value and deliver more effective experiential outcomes, a study exploring event fatigue, or factors that create behavioural or attitudinal resistance to events would enhance the understanding and delivery of brand experience. In terms of methodologies, an investigation of Millennial engagement in the broader context of Experiential Marketing through Focus Groups would be insightful, especially as Hollebeek (2011) chose this method for his research into Brand Engagement as it enabled in-depth discussions of topics. This qualitative method in particular will stimulate open interaction and sharing of knowledge amongst this sociable target group who have been shown to enjoy sharing experiences.

6.3 Recommendations for Practitioners

From the results of this study practitioners should take confidence in the knowledge that delivering brand experiences through Event Marketing remains a valid inclusion in today's

Promotional and Experiential strategies. Themes that emerge relate to event design, recommending that practitioners consider how various combinations of sensorial, affective, cognitive, behavioural and relational brand experience generate different responses in consumers. Context of consumer engagement is critical, as is consideration of event value, as outcomes can have lasting effects. In addition, the study found that event staff can influence outcomes, so staff training is crucial.

In order to avoid event resistance, create events that deliver valuable experiences without seeking any commitment apart from participation. This research has shown that the most successful events are those where consumers immerse themselves in an experience that doesn't push, but naturally pulls; those events are more effective at connecting with this cohort and end up with higher brand recall and sharing of experiences. Finally, most events tend to be executed offline and reliant on digital amplification for reach, however with high adaption rates in new digital platforms and app technologies, this author suggests that for the Experience Economy 2.0 to advance, where live events and virtual brand experiences can be equally impactful, that some events be streamed digitally, extending reach levels exponentially, without being reliant on time poor attendees to be physically present to co create the experience.

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Appendices

Research Instrument - Brand Experience at Event Marketing

Objective 1 – To investigate Sensorial Brand Experiences

1.1 Can you describe if any of your 5 senses were stimulated by a branded event you encountered?

1.3 Did an event that appealed to your senses make the brand experience differ to previous encounters with the same brand?

1.3 Have other participants at a branded event ever make an impression on your sensations?

Objective 2 – To investigate Affective Brand Experiences

2.1 How did you feel about the whole experience of being part of a branded event?

2.2 Were any emotions or feelings triggered towards the brand during the brand event?

2.3 Did your feelings towards the brand change significantly after the event?

Objective 3 – To investigate Cognitive Brand Experiences

3.1 What do you think about branded events in terms of placing the brand in front of you?

3.2 Would you be curious or think about the brand being promoted at an event?

3.3 After an event would ever think or talk about the brand or the event itself again?

Objective 4 – To investigate Behavioural Brand Experiences

4.1 Have you ever changed your behaviour after being part of a branded event?

4.2 Would you act differently towards the brand after experiencing it at an event?

4.3 What would do after you had an enjoyable experience at a branded event?

Objective 5 – To investigate Relational Brand Experiences

5.1 Do staged brand events make you think about your relationship with a brand?

5.2 Can you relate to other peoples' experiences of a branded event?

5.3 Have you ever shared your brand event experiences with other people?

6.1 Is there anything else you would like to add about Event Marketing & Brand Experiences?

Aide Memoire - Branded Events

