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An exploratory study looking at the relationship marketing techniques used in the music festival industry

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Abstract

There are current issues and trends in the music festival market which may affect the success of an event, market saturation is at the forefront of these issues. Previous literature maintaining the need for a marketing approach for festivals identifies the necessity of maintaining strong stakeholder relationships in order to succeed in a business environment; attention has been focused to the theory of relationship marketing due to the recognition that this practice is complementary to the marketing of festivals. The very nature of the music festival as an annual, usually 4-day event, means that effective marketing is needed to keep connections with the consumer throughout the year. This article focuses upon the relationship marketing techniques utilised within the music festival industry from the viewpoint of the festival organiser in an attempt to establish how festival organisations value and monitor organisational relationships.

This article explores the extent of how these relationships are valued and managed and furthermore the variations between these intricate relationships are considered by focusing upon those held with the organisation's consumers and sponsors; the results of which have provided the ability to establish the importance & relevance of relationship marketing to the industry and furthermore identify the marketing communication methods employed to establish and maintain such relationships. In-depth, convergent interviews have been undertaken with a segment of music festival organisers from a range of events. The results have been integrated with the study of current literature to best exemplify these issues. It has been established that relationship marketing has a strong role in today's commercial and independent music festival industry; technological advances are enabling the organiser to support online relationships further and

increase consumer loyalty. There is a need to expand the research further due to the complexity of organisational relationships and the varying categories of festivals.

Keywords: music festivals; relationship marketing; technological advances

Introduction

There are current issues and trends in the music festival market which may affect the success of an event and market saturation is at the forefront of these issues (Anderton, 2008; Mintel, 2008); therefore it has been established that there is a need for the festival organiser to focus on competitive advantage and generate consumer loyalty in order to flourish in what may be seen as a volatile industry and maintain a strong positioning. Previous literature maintaining the need for a marketing approach for festivals identifies the necessity of maintaining strong stakeholder relationships in order to succeed in a business environment; attention has been focused to the theory of relationship marketing due to the recognition that this practice is complementary to the marketing of festivals (Benito, 1997; Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002).

There are many ways in which to maintain consumer relationships, particularly due to technological advances enabling online marketing communications throughout the year. Alternatively festival organisers need to find creative ways of engaging with the postmodern consumer to meet growing needs; this particularly due to the festivals experiential qualities (Masterman & Wood, 2006; Webb, 2007). This study intends to identify the importance of relationship marketing to the organisation and the techniques that are considered to be valuable in achieving stakeholder relations; it is intended to identify areas of innovation and relationship-building trends within the music festival industry in order to achieve the research objectives.

A study by Collin-Lachaud & Duyck (2002) will act as a basis for further research; although the article evaluates the role of relationship marketing as a paradigm for festivals, it leaves much room for exploration in the music festival industry. As purely a case study of a cultural festival the findings may not be generalised to a variety of festival genres such as music festivals; however a range of the findings are highly relevant due to the structure and network of relationships found commonly within festival organisations. There is little research to be found in the field of relationship marketing for the UK music festival industry, neither is its importance highlighted in events literature. This surrounding information will act as a basis for research into the UK music festival industry. In order to focus the research topic particular attention has been made to the consumer & sponsor relationships and how retention may be maintained to achieve the festival organisation's ambitions.

Literature Review

The music festival industry has seen a huge expansion over recent years, with numbers growing from 240 festivals in 2006 to 530 events in 2008 (Mintel, 2006; Mintel, 2008). Although there is evidence to suggest that the music festival arena is flourishing, it is emerging that the issue of market saturation is of concern to festival organisers as the industry reaches its peak in terms of growth. During the 71% growth in new music festivals between 2003-2007, nearly one quarter failed to achieve success and ceased to exist during this period; this illustrating the difficulties in

long-term prosperity (Anderton, 2008). The negative effect of this intensified marketplace is becoming evident, perhaps more so in light of the current economic climate and increasing artist fees instigated by today's downloadable music trends (Atkinson, 2008a; BBC, 2008; Mintel, 2008; Mintel, 2008a; Quainton, 2008).

There is an increasing uncertainty for the future of some music festivals in what may be seen as a highly volatile industry. Rising costs in commodities such as fuel, artist fees, logistical expenses and power alongside such escalating competition and the economic downturn are all contributing to the cancellations of festivals. The lack of additional sponsorship income in the current economy may only exacerbate financial difficulties further as many sponsors attempt to reduce business expenditure (Atkinson, 2008a; Atkinson, 2008b; Mintel, 2008).

The trend of festival failure as a result of market saturation is apparent within the festival industry, as illustrated by Benito (1997) in his study of the French festival industry; Collin-Lachaud & Duyck (2002, p.56) add that festival market saturation has, "resulted in financial difficulties and an identity crisis." Festival organisers increasingly have to set themselves apart from the competition; it is imperative to find new ways to create consumer loyalty by integrating the festival brand with its offerings and furthermore to find innovative ways to market and build long lasting relationships. The very nature of the music festival as an annual, usually 4-day event, means that effective marketing is needed to keep connections with the consumer throughout the year (Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002; Leenders et al, 2005; Mehmetoglu & Ellingsen, 2005; Unwin et al, 2007). Geoff Elliott of DF Concerts supports that, "Music fans have more choice than ever before so it is important to ensure that your event has a point of difference and that it builds a relationship with its fans by responding to them and growing with them every year" (in Atkinson, 2008b).

To gain this competitive advantage strong ties with all stakeholders within the network of internal & external relationships are essential for overall success; this is not only applicable to the consumer, for example, suppliers, the media and sponsors should engage with the festival organisation. Ultimately this will result in the development of commitment, empowerment and mutually-beneficial relationships - marketing based on this network of relationships is referred to as relationship marketing, or RM. This theme of stakeholder 'cooperation and collaboration' is understood to gain serious competitive advantage, hence the relationship marketing thesis of 'cooperate-to-compete' (Agrusa, 2008; Christopher et al, 2002; Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002; Fuan & Nicholls, 2000; Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2008, Masterman & Wood, 2006; Möller & Halinen, 2000).

The direction of marketing as merely a means to generate one-off transactions is rapidly shifting to one of long term relationships, stakeholder involvement and loyalty (Bowden, 2009; Fuan & Nicholls, 2000; Möller & Halinen, 2000). The popularity of the relationship marketing concept grew during the 1990's and was made possible by way of social and technological trends such as database and communications developments. The focus of transactional marketing (or one-off transactions) is moving towards one of personalised communications, the benefits of which are perceived as competitive advantage through stakeholder loyalty (Christopher et al, 2002; Gummesson, 2008). However this notion fails to explore the consequences of maintaining a core group of consumers; can festival organisers afford to let audience groups grow stagnant?

Attracting new consumers must also be important to the festival organisation in terms of growth and development.

This notion of RM as a paradigm, or a total shift in thought has been criticised in various studies as it is claimed that its ideas and origins are not wholly new. There is also an inability to universally apply the theory to the business environment as not all organisations value relationships at all times; it is also suggested that the value of transactional marketing should not be underestimated or totally removed from marketing strategies (Gummesson, 2008; Hui, 2006; Möller & Halinen, 2000; Fernandes & Proença, 2008). Despite the criticisms of relationship marketing, it is highly evident that stakeholder relationships are the basis of the successful event and that RM is valuable in relation to the festival industry (Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002; Fuan & Nicholls, 2000).

A study by Collin-Lachaud & Duyck (2002) investigates the relevance of relationship marketing and finds that it is better conformed to the nature of festivals due to the interdependency of the stakeholder relationships; additionally a conclusion is drawn that, "The relationship marketing approach would allow for the development and long-term survival of festivals without perverting their artistic mission" (p.69). It is outlined in the study by Collin-Lachaud & Duyck (2002, p. 59-60) that there are three key characteristics of festivals that are directly related to relationship marketing, these are the "multiplicity of parties," for example the financing of festivals being reliant on a number of stakeholders: sponsors (lateral), consumers (standard) and suppliers (downstream); the "interdependence of partners" which is particularly applicable to private-sector festivals due to the collaboration needed in relationships with sponsors and stakeholders alike (Daellenbach, 2006). Finally, the "essential role of communication" was highlighted in gaining and retaining consumers and in relation to liaising with media partners; of particular interest will be how the internet is playing a part in strengthening these relationships. These key areas will be considered and integrated into the research study and questioning (Christopher et al, 2002).

The dynamics of music festivals vary throughout the industry, but are generally categorised in terms of capacity, for example the 'boutique' (ten-thousand or less capacity), 'mid-scale' (ten-fifty thousand attendees) and 'large-scale' (over fifty-thousand) may be likely to have differing consumer & sponsor relationships, particularly as larger audiences meet more challenges in maintaining strong ties with the consumer (Anderton, 2008). There is indication that the smaller and less established festivals may be the first to suffer and will need to maintain a strong identity and maintain consumer relationships in order to survive the current marketplace. Evidence suggests that issues such as the lack of corporate finance, market saturation and music agent's reluctance to select smaller, less-distinguished festivals for their bands, are contributing to these festivals realising success (Atkinson, 2008a).

Regardless of size or ethos, the organisations' relationship with the customer is vital in any modern marketing strategy, particularly when considering that the festival has such a short-term consumption period; a 'customer-centred' focus is essential to be successful, particularly in meeting the needs of the consumer (Kotler et al, 2008; Yeoman et al, 2004). A diverse range of philosophies interrelate into relationship marketing theory; for example Godson (2009 p.4) suggests that areas such as 'customer relationships, supply chain relationships, customer value

management, retention and loyalty' are all associated with relationship marketing. These philosophies have a huge part to play in creating benefits beyond the singular transaction in organisational relationships; retention is gained through satisfied customers and those existing consumers are less sensitive to price increases and in turn assist company development by giving referrals (Bowden, 2009; Harwood et al, 2008). This word-of-mouth promotion may be viewed as highly significant when exploring marketing communications for music festivals due to the experiential and social characteristics of the product, particularly due to the materialisation of social networking and online forums; this trend will be examined further in terms of relationship marketing and researched within the study topic.

When looking specifically at the consumer to organisation relationship, businesses have more recently adapted CRM, or 'customer relationship management' due to technological developments over the past decade (Payne, 2006). This strategic approach is based upon the theory of relationship marketing as it involves particular focus on the long-term retention of consumers; the intention is to generate a shared affiliation reliant on trust and commitment with the organisation (Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002; Peelen, 2005). For the festival organisation to establish such a strong foundation in the relationship, it is necessary to adopt qualities such as "honesty, fairness, responsibility, helpfulness and involvement" within its ethos; these virtues must therefore be conveyed to the stakeholders and the consumer within marketing communications (Peelen, 2005 p.34; Unwin et al, 2007); such qualities will be investigated further within the research.

The main methods of marketing communications for events may vary between festival organisations, however Masterman & Wood (2006p. 75) suggest that, "methods include any one or combination of the traditional promotional mix of personal selling, advertising, sales promotion and public relations but also extend beyond this into word-of-mouth, corporate identity sponsorship... e-marketing and merchandise." When looking at festival communications and considering the short-term consumption period, it is vital to instil post-purchase communications to encourage a transition from 'one-off' to repeat. The festival organisation may also wish to seek the assistance of other stakeholders within the relationship, for example the media may become a desirable communication method to promote the success of an event by way of interviews and reviews (Stavros, 2005); this illustrates how the network of relationships coincide and how such communication will also contribute to establishing future consumer relationships. The research fails to exemplify the negative effects that the media can generate to a festival; for example bad reviews or favourability of larger, well-established festivals.

A focus on customer & stakeholder care and the additional services surrounding the festival is vital for a music festival to ensure the trust and commitment required to maintain relationships is nurtured. Providing benefits such as newsletters, email updates and competitions to consumers and maintaining websites and advice will cultivate the relationship, add value and attract new participants (Masterman & Wood, 2006; Sterne, 2000); however organisers must ensure that consumers are not inundated with marketing communications as this may have an adverse reaction and may be regarded as a one-way relationship (Godson, 2009; Masterman & Wood, 2006). Loyalty schemes are also seen as a significant method to cultivate long-term relationships, however such methods may not be suited to all events in the music festival industry due to the popularity and desire for tickets once on sale; this will be researched further within the study.

The popularity of online communities is increasing rapidly and it is vital for festival organisers to realise the benefits of engaging with such participants. The formation of such communities is enabling what may be expressed as ‘virtual relationship marketing’; this allows multidimensional relationships not only between organisation and consumer, but between online participants (Kozinets, 1999 p. 254). These communities, whether in the form of a festival’s online forum or through groups formed by consumers on social networking sites such as Facebook, give festival organisers a greater opportunity to observe and collect more meaningful and qualitative information about their consumers’ needs than other database marketing techniques. Through these communities, organisers are able to understand audience opinions rather than through typical data capture techniques which may focus on statistical information; quantitative may therefore be seen to overlook an abundance of significant social data which can be considered to be an integral part of the festival product (Kozinets, 1999; Yeoman et al, 2004). However an online focus of relationship building may denote that the organisation will fail to meet the needs of other consumer groups that do not engage in such techniques, it is therefore important to employ a variety of marketing communications.

This escalating growth of internet usage suggests that festival marketers have an increased need to revise online marketing communication strategies to include such methods of maintaining relationships (Kozinets, 1999; Webb, 2007). Kozinets (1999, p.261) supports that, “marketing in the internet age will learn how to form alliances with the powerful communities that are brewing online”; learning from these communities through observation of their societal interaction has given emergence to virtual communities marketing, (VCM) which can benefit an organisation through understanding of how participants perceive the festival and its offerings (Kozinets, 1999). The ultimate goal of managing online communities is not to control, but to construct the long-term cohesive connection that relationship marketing is founded upon; this may be difficult to monitor due to the extensive levels of participation found in online communities, but methods such as ‘loyalty-based segmentation’ could be adapted by festival marketers to engage in more targeted interaction with the communities, for further reading see Kozinets (1999). Such modern communications are vital in the modern music festival industry, Jim Campling of Live Nation maintains, “we can now establish communities online and that gives us a quick, customer-focused way of giving festival-goers what they need and what they require when they want it” (in Webb 2007, p. 22). It is apparent that festival audiences are highly reactive in responding to online communications and forums and are able to gain empowerment and in turn organisers are valuing their opinions (Webb, 2007).

Many festival organisers have reported huge potential in building relationships with online forums by providing online opinion polls to identify popular artists or new facility requirements; recently Download Festival organisers went further and sourced active online members to aid in designing the festival site, this was following the online forum’s assistance in saving the festival from relocation, this is a clear example of community empowerment (Masson, 2009; Webb, 2007). Rui Teimao, the web editor for The Big Chill festival demonstrates the importance of online relations and consumer input in stating, “It’s a completely two-way process... We get loads of suggestions about who people want to play the festival and that feeds through the programming” (in Webb, 2007, p.25). Strong mutually-beneficial relationships can be

maintained with the festival organisation, not only are the audience gaining empowerment, but participants are able to become actively and physically involved within the festival and its offerings; this epitomises the notion of relationship marketing in the festival industry. New technological advances can only aid in strengthening these relations, already mobile ticketing and on-site festival updates are providing loyalty incentives and giving the consumer empowerment (Kozinets, 1999; Webb, 2007).

Considering the explored literature within this review, the research aims to take a further examination into these trends taken from the perspective of the festival organiser; the findings aim to highlight the perceived importance of these relationships and furthermore explore the field of innovation in relationship marketing.

Methodology

The focus for the study was to provide "an investigation into the relationship marketing *techniques used in the music festival industry*"; the desired outcome of this study is to establish the importance of relationship marketing in the UK festival industry and identify the prominent techniques used. Particular interest has been made to the consumer and sponsor relationships and the use of marketing communications by festival organisers. The current literature has provided a framework for the questions.

In-depth face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals from varying sizes of music festivals in the UK, this interviewing has engaged in open-ended questioning rather than more formalised methods enabling in-depth research; Marshall & Rossman (1999, p.108) describe this qualitative research form as, "a conversation with a purpose". Interviewees included marketing & sponsorship managers and festival organisers. This approach of "elite" interviewing has been selected so that these individuals can offer expertise in the appropriate study areas (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). Convenience sampling methods were utilised as the interviewees were in some cases difficult to access; therefore interviews were retained due to the opportunities that emerged during the study. This method is noted for its inability to apply rigorously to the population; however this negative effect may be reduced as the cross-section of interviews has allowed the research to take a viewpoint from a various categories of festivals for comparison (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

As the study investigates relationships, factors such as organisational functioning, interactions and experiences have been examined; this correlates with justifications outlined by Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.11). Interviewees were informed that the festival names would be removed during transcription, however gave permission for the festival organisation to be accredited within acknowledgements; by doing this it was hoped that interviewees would provide more information on commercially sensitive factual matters (such as relationship-building techniques) that may have otherwise been withheld (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Five interviews were held in total, this number not only allowed a cross-section of opinions from the festivals of differing ethos and sizes, but also considered appropriate as the wealth of information after five interviews allowed 'theoretical saturation' for the intensions of the research (Seale, 2004).

The interview was divided into three sections. Section one consisted of an introduction to relationship marketing and issues in the festival market; section two explored the consumer relationship with the organisation. Finally, section three examined the sponsorship relationship and its value, including the growing emergence of experiential marketing or live advertising. The interview results were convergent, meaning that findings were collaborated and compared in order to generate similarities and trends. Finally, interviews were compared against the secondary data gathered enabling the researcher to triangulate the findings, hence strengthening the discussion of findings (Gummesson, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Gill & Johnson, 1997).

A ‘template analysis strategy’ was adapted where the large quantities of text from the interviews were sub-divided under relative headings in order to gather information into categories relevant to the intensions of the study. Additionally this allowed irrelevant points of the research conversations to be ‘filtered’ and ‘revised’ during the coding process.

Findings and discussion.

The overall awareness of relationship marketing theory varied between festival organisers as not all participants were necessarily aware of the terminology or theory. However despite this it was apparent that organisers consider stakeholder relations to be an integral part of organisational strategies. The importance of building such relationships within marketing and communications was evident from the interviewee’s responses, with some participants relating such techniques to that of CRM and good customer service, or even stating its practices are down to “*common sense*”. RM is evident within the industry and immediately two respondents acknowledged that the very notion of relationship marketing was vital to build the festival and is essential to understand the audience and gain competitive advantage. This correlates with the general concept and desired outcomes that relationship marketing can generate (Christopher et al, 2002; Gummesson, 2008). Furthermore respondents acknowledged that retention of their consumers was established through satisfaction; again complementing the principles of RM and CRM (Godson, 2009; Payne, 2006).

On a strategic level, the consumer relationships are of the highest priority, yet it was found that the boutique festivals engaged in what would appear to be more ‘organic’ relationships, as will be exemplified later in the discussion; these smaller festivals claim to employ relationships that are more amiable and have strong desires to meet and exceed the expectations of the consumer. With boutique festivals it is clear that the two-way relationship is more robust and the organisers intend to have consumer involvement in many of the festival offerings, pre, during and post-event. This is not detrimental to the mid or large-scale events; these festivals are by no means neglecting consumer relationships and their importance is clear, however managing relationships for such high levels of attendees may signify that a sense of intimacy is lost between consumer and organiser.

The “*personal approach*” is therefore more attainable with smaller festivals, respondents from the boutique festivals reported experiences of hugely loyal followers dedicated to the festival product and offerings; this is a result of finding a ‘niche’ within the festival market and having ‘family-friendly’ attributes, as supported in Atkinson (2008b). One festival in particular is

managing two-way relationships particularly well, the festival adopted relationship building techniques from an early stage and is actively encouraging its audience to participate in on-site art instalments and performances, even to an extent of providing funding for individuals wishing to become involved; the organisers adopt a principle of “made for you and by you” which demonstrates the high level of audience empowerment. These factors can contribute significantly to the success of a boutique festival, particularly when considering the lack of sponsorship finance and the current economic situation (Atkinson, 2008a). However, one issue that does emerge with such smaller festivals is that the management of online communications such as forums is more difficult due to staffing or time constraints.

When looking at the customer relationships at larger festival organisations, the interviewees stressed the importance of “*understanding the audience*” to gain loyalty from them, thus illustrating the importance of meeting consumer needs (Long & Robinson, 2004). It would appear that the difference lies within the ‘message’ of the product through its communications and target audiences; for example the marketing message is primarily geared towards big acts headlining at the festivals and towards a young audience of “*passionate music lovers*”. Secondary literature supports that it is necessary for festivals to promote the marketing message in such a way to encourage ticket sales and communicate the festival identity; ultimately generating competitive advantage and attracting the target audience (Collin-Lachaud & Duyck, 2002; Masterman & Wood, 2006). The level of corporate involvement also assists in promoting this message to a mass market and participants felt that the recognition of brand involvement “*adds value*” in the minds of the consumer, further aiding the marketing message; sponsorship will be discussed further.

Respondents from all categories of festivals acknowledged the necessity to meet the needs and respect the opinions of the customer and actively engage in monitoring information, this was apparent throughout online communication methods. In addition one participant representing various sizes of festivals reported the use of annual, post-event focus groups which assist in regulating the festivals. The focus group is described as a “*dedicated core group*” and the individuals assist the organisation further in providing recommendations for product development (i.e. facilities & acts) and also in generating positive word-of-mouth for the festival. All respondents expressed the need to actively engage with the consumer online, for example by responding to emails, sending newsletters, online polls, monitoring online forums and utilising online/on-site questionnaires; participants were in agreement that caution is needed not to inundate the consumer with information when making contact online, this relates to the techniques and recommendations outlined in Masterman & Wood (2006). Word-of-mouth was considered particularly important by the respondents and effective in creating and maintaining relationships.

The internet has created great opportunities for managing and building consumer relationships, however one boutique festival felt it was not necessary to manage official online forums at all and responded only to emails and the use of social networking groups on sites such as Facebook; yet another felt it was essential to monitor an official festival forum and the consumer’s online dialogue. A respondent from one of the UK’s leading festival promoters reported utilising “*in-house administrators*” and “*official fan administrators*” to oversee and “*self-regulate*” forum activity. This may signify that organisations of higher prominence in the industry and those with

sponsorship financing have an advantage in online communications and will in the future be the leaders of innovative techniques in building consumer relationships. Although not recognised as such, respondents appear to be engaging in ‘virtual communities marketing’; this technique will no doubt become more accepted as online trends develop (Kozinets, 1999).

Whilst the need to manage online forums or social networking spaces is undoubtedly represented in the interviews, the importance varies between organisations due to the time and staffing constraints; a respondent suggested that, “the amount of investment required to effectively *manage a forum is far too great for us to be able to do it at present... E-Festivals have a forum for [festival name] which is considered to be our official forum*”. Conversely, most participants had noted that forums were advantageous in terms of cost-effectiveness, for consumer observation and to keep open communications with the audience. Whilst there are no signs of innovation in managing consumers online, one participant responsible for the marketing of multiple festivals identified that online communications could be managed more effectively by introducing segmentation; this correlates with Kozinets (1999) study which maintains that loyalty-based segmentation will aid in making targeted communications with the consumer and strengthen relationships. This is a huge task, yet in the future segmentation in marketing communications may be made easier through technological developments.

In terms of loyalty incentives the interviewees on a whole did not offer tangible incentives for loyal consumers such as reduced ticket prices (Godson, 2009); however there is a small amount of such activity in the industry. Respondents expressed that this is something that may be considered in the future. One participant reported that in the past there had been collaboration with the sponsor to provide free drinks on the basis that the consumer retained wrist bands from previous years. Loyalty generally is maintained through the use of marketing communications, for example by subscribing to the festival mailing list or social networking site consumers are able to receive first-hand information on ticket and headline notifications, this also assisted in opening communications channels. Again, it has been found that participants were not in disagreement with such techniques however did not feel that such incentives are necessary; it has been noted within the literature review that there are alternative festivals that actively engage in such activities in collaboration with sponsors (Webb, 2007). Another activity that respondents agreed with was that of personalised communications, all participants felt that this form of contact was not suitable due to its similarity to that of junk mail, or additionally its transparency in trying to generate what may be perceived as a “forced relationship” with the consumer.

The interviewees reported their own festivals to have varying levels of sponsorship; this has enabled a cross-section of opinions to be generated on corporate attachment and its benefits. As envisaged, all festival organisers believe it is fundamental when entering sponsorship negotiations to ensure that the brand involved is in keeping with the festival ethos and that collaboration is needed to maintain mutually-beneficial relationships (Bowdin et al, 2006; Rowley & Williams, 2008). While some sponsors are short-term, the importance of long-term relationships is highlighted; a sponsorship manager for a large festival organisation illustrated the benefits of establishing long-term deals in stating, “*Where possible I try to do long-term deals... if you are in a three year relationship there is more opportunity for them to grow and improve. Also, for them it gives financial stability and they know where they are going for the next three years*”; this statement exemplifies the mutually-beneficial relationships outlined in relationship

marketing theory (Gummesson, 2008; Rowley & Williams, 2008). The desired outcome of forming sponsorship alliances is clear from the respondents dialogue, the festival and sponsor aim to work collaboratively to add value to the festival for the benefit of the consumer; this demonstrates how the network of relationships interrelate to reach the desired outcomes of the festival.

Alternatively when examining the responses from participants who do not have sponsorship involvement there are mixed reactions, many of which relate to Anderton's (2008) study on the commercialisation of music festivals. The boutique festivals had somewhat negative views on the use of sponsorship; although respondents reported that sponsorship is present on some levels (in-kind or on a small, non-intrusive scale), generally the notion of having large corporate involvement would somewhat depreciate the experience of the festival as a setting for "*escapism*". This can be exemplified as one interviewee reported corporate branding would "compromise [their] position", while another reported, "*if you want to go somewhere and escape and be in an environment where you are potentially giving yourself that freedom, it kind of just ruins it if that's just seen as an opportunity to advertise.*"

The value of consumer relationships was seen as highly important in generating competitive advantage to succeed in market saturation, yet the larger festivals seemed confident of ticket sales regardless of the situation and considered smaller festivals to be in a time of uncertainty, this supporting the findings of the secondary research (Atkinson, 2008a; BBC, 2009); yet for the boutique festivals involved in this research there appears to be a positive outlook for the future. In order to generate a better picture of the industry, a larger segmentation of festivals would be necessary to establish how such issues are affecting smaller organisations and contrasted against the consumer loyalty at these events; this would be adapted into new research if the study was to be repeated.

Conclusions

After triangulating the results and findings of research, it can be concluded that festival organisations are actively engaging in relationship building techniques within the organisational network of stakeholders; the importance of which has been highlighted in the findings. The interviewees expressed that relationship marketing is fundamental to organisational strategies and the desire was expressed to continue developing such strategies. It has been found that these relationships are important on various levels and furthermore that each has a different value; the consumer and sponsorship relationships are undoubtedly very significant and require two-way communications to achieve a successful festival.

Technology plays an extremely important part in building relationships throughout the year and at present the industry is engaging in many forms of online communications such as forums, social networking spaces and subscriptions to newsletters; this however varies between the alternative categories of festivals where different techniques are deemed more effective than others. Additionally, festival organisers are working collaboratively with the consumer to gain feedback by undertaking post-event research, both online and face-to-face; this assists in enhancing the festival product and alternatively is giving the consumer empowerment and establishing long-term relationships.

In terms of innovation, it has been found that there is little evidence of new relationship-building techniques in communications. Communications can be seen to move from online to face-to-face relationships as consumers are given the ability to become actively involved in the product. It can be deduced that festival organisers will be constantly trying to develop online communications and may in the future employ segmentation strategies to build consumer relationships.

All festivals are different in terms of culture, size and target audience; therefore the relationships and techniques that create them are valued on a multitude of levels. Although the research cannot be generalised to the entire music festival industry, it is apparent that the segment of participating festivals feel that upholding a relationship marketing approach is generating competitive advantage and will aid these organisations in overcoming current issues in the market.

Overall the study coincides with Collin-Lachaud & Duyck's (2002) findings, in that the relationship marketing approach was found to be suited to the festival industry and organisers should give priority to the formation of relationships and to understanding the consumer. From the organisers perspective the music festival industry has the ability to create a loyal following of consumers; emotional attachment to the music festival experience is a strong indication that organisers are working creatively and effectively with the consumer to meet their needs and create exceptional festival experiences.

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