Original Article

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, and market saturation is at the forefront of these issues. Previous literature, maintaining the need for a marketing approach to festivals, identifies the need for maintaining strong stakeholder relationships in order to succeed in a business environment; attention has been focused to the theory of relationship marketing (RM) because of 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 on the RM 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 to which these relationships are valued and managed; furthermore, the variations between these intricate relationships are considered by focusing on those held with the organisation's consumers and sponsors, the results of which have provided the ability to establish the importance and relevance of RM to the industry and further identify the marketing communication methods employed to establish and maintain such relationships. In-depth, convergent interviews have been conducted 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

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has been established that RM 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 because of the complexity of organisational relationships and the varying categories of festivals.

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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, 2008b); 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 to festivals, identifies the need for maintaining strong stakeholder relationships in order to succeed in a business environment; attention has been focused on the theory of relationship marketing (RM) because of the recognition that this practice is complementary to the marketing of festivals (Benito, 1997; Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002).

There are many ways in which to maintain consumer relationships, particularly because of 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 is because of the experiential qualities of festivals (Masterman and Wood, 2006; Webb, 2007). This study intends to identify the importance of RM to the organisation and the techniques that are considered to be valuable in achieving stakeholder relations; it is also 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 and Duyck (2002) will act as a basis for further research; although the article evaluates the role of RM 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 findings are highly relevant because of the structure and network of relationships found commonly within festival organisations. There is little research to be found in the field of RM for the UK music festival industry, nor 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 on the research topic, particular attention has been paid to the consumer and 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 (Intel, 2006, 2008b). 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 per cent growth period in new music festivals between 2003–2007, nearly one-quarter failed to achieve success and ceased to exist during this period, illustrating the difficulties in long-term prosperity (Anderton, 2008). The negative effect of this intensified marketplace is becoming evident, perhaps more so in the light of the current economic climate and increasing artist fees instigated by today's downloadable music trends (Atkinson, 2008a; BBC, 2008; Intel, 2008a, b; Quinton, 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, b; Intel, 2008b).

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 and 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 and Duyck, 2002; Leenders *et al.*, 2005; Mehmetoglu and 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 and 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 RM. This theme of stakeholder 'cooperation and collaboration' is understood

to gain serious competitive advantage, hence the RM thesis of 'cooperate-to-compete' (Agrusa, 2008; Grönroos, 1994; Fuan and Nicholls, 2000; Möller and Halinen, 2000; Christopher *et al*, 2002; Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002; Masterman and Wood, 2006; Gummesson, 2008).

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 (Fuan and Nicholls, 2000; Möller and Halinen, 2000; Bowden, 2009). The popularity of the RM concept grew during the 1990s 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 (Möller and Halinen, 2000; Hui, 2006; Fernandes and Proença, 2008; Gummesson, 2008). Despite the criticisms of RM, 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 (Fuan and Nicholls, 2000; Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002).

A study by Collin-Lachaud and Duyck (2002) investigates the relevance of RM and finds that it is better conformed to the nature of festivals because of the interdependency of the stakeholder relationships; in addition, 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 and Duyck (2002, pp. 59–60) that there are three key characteristics of festivals that are directly related to RM; 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 because of the collaboration needed in relationships with sponsors and stakeholders alike (Daellenbach *et al*, 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'

(10 000 or less capacity), 'mid-scale' (10 000–50 000 attendees) and 'large-scale' (over 50 000) may be likely to have differing consumer and sponsor relationships, particularly as larger audiences meet more challenges in maintaining strong ties with the consumer (Anderton, 2008). There is an 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 (Yeoman *et al*, 2004; Kotler *et al*, 2008). A diverse range of philosophies interrelate into RM 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 (Harwood *et al*, 2008; Bowden, 2009). This word-of-mouth promotion may be viewed as highly significant when exploring marketing communications for music festivals because of the experiential and social characteristics of the product, particularly owing to the materialisation of social networking and online forums; this trend will be examined further in terms of RM and researched within the study topic.

When looking specifically at the consumer–organisation relationship, businesses have more recently adapted customer relationship management (CRM) because of technological developments over the past decade (Payne, 2006). This strategic approach is based on the theory of RM, 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 and 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 and Wood (2006, p. 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 and 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 (Sterne, 2000; Masterman and Wood, 2006); 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 (Masterman and Wood, 2006; Godson, 2009). 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 because of 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 RM’; this allows multidimensional relationships not only between organisation and consumer, but also 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 meaningful and qualitative information on their consumers’ needs than other database marketing techniques. Through these communities, organisers are able to understand audience opinions better 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 may 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 RM is founded upon. This may be difficult to monitor because of 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 and this is a clear example of community empowerment (Webb, 2007; Masson, 2009). 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 audiences gaining empowerment, but participants are able to become actively and physically involved within the festival and its offerings; this epitomises the notion of RM in the festival industry. New technological advances can only aid in strengthening these relations; mobile ticketing and on-site festival updates are already 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 RM.

METHODOLOGY

The focus of the study was to provide '*an investigation into the RM techniques used in the music festival industry*'; the desired outcome of this study is to establish the importance of RM in the UK festival industry and identify the prominent techniques used. Particular interest has been

shown with regard 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 United Kingdom; this interviewing has engaged in open-ended questioning rather than more formalised methods enabling in-depth research; Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 108) describe this qualitative research form as, 'a conversation with a purpose'. Interviewees included marketing and 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 and Rossman, 1999, p. 113). Convenience sampling methods were utilised as the interviewees were in some cases difficult to access; therefore, interviews were retained because of 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 various categories of festivals for comparison (Marshall and 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 and Corbin (1998, p. 11). Interviewees were informed that the festival names would be removed during transcription; however, permission was given 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 and 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 was 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 RM 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 with the secondary data gathered, enabling the researcher to triangulate the findings, hence strengthening the discussion of findings (Gummesson, 1991; Gill and Johnson, 1997; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

A 'template analysis strategy' was adapted, in which 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. In addition, this allowed irrelevant points of the research conversations to be 'filtered' and 'revised' during the coding process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overall awareness of RM 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 that its practices are down to '*common sense*'. RM is evident within the industry, and immediately two respondents acknowledged that the very notion of RM 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 RM 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 (Payne, 2006; Godson, 2009).

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 use 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 described 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, to the extent of providing funds for individuals wishing to become involved; the organisers adopt a principle of '*made for you and by you*', which demonstrates a 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 because of staffing or time constraints.

When looking at 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 and 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 and Duyck, 2002; Masterman and 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 of meeting 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 (that is, facilities and 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 and 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 'VCM'; this technique will no doubt become more accepted as online trends develop (Kozinets, 1999).

Although the need to manage online forums or social networking spaces is undoubtedly represented in the interviews, the importance varies

between organisations because of 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'*. In contrast, most participants had noted that forums were advantageous in terms of cost-effectiveness, for consumer observation and to keep open communications with the audience. Although 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 the 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, they 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 because of its similarity to 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 and 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 RM theory (Gummesson, 2008; Rowley and 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 that corporate branding would '*compromise (their) position*', whereas 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, 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 with 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 RM 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. In addition, festival organisers are working collaboratively with the consumers 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 RM approach is generating competitive advantage and will aid these organisations in overcoming current issues in the market.

Overall, the study coincides with Collin-Lachaud and Duyck's (2002) findings, in that the RM 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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