

Chapter 8

Marketing Experiential Events Through New Media: The Ferragnez Wedding Case

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the event marketing literature to show how events play a crucial strategic role in the new mediascape. In the context of new media, events could be used to amplify a brand communication strategy at all event stages: before-during-after. In particular, this chapter explains how companies realize augmented and adaptive marketing experiences in omni-channel environments, thanks to the positive effect of digitalization. The chapter employs the Why-How-What framework and the Hero model to analyze a successful event case-study, the Ferragnez wedding, which has become a brand itself. The authors make the case for using events to communicate companies' value propositions within their sectors and to advertise their brands, products and services.

INTRODUCTION

In today's business world, an increasing number of brands are competing to gain market share. According to Liu et al. (2018), the only critical factor that distinguishes a company's value proposition from that of its competitors is their ability to establish a dialogue with their target audience, starting with their advertising campaigns. As a result, alternative types of marketing promotion - including new media marketing, experiential marketing, event marketing, and digital advertising - have become more and more crucial to raise brand awareness and reach target customers.

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Within this dynamic scenario, so-called event marketing plays a significant role. Event marketing has been defined as a “communication tool whose purpose is to disseminate a company’s marketing messages by involving the target groups in experiential activity” (Drenger et al., 2008, p. 138), and as “the practice of promoting the interest of an organization and its brands by associating the organization with a specific activity” (Tafasse, 2016, p. 40). As companies are continually searching for new methods to appeal to customers and to position their products and services, the use of events has emerged as a strategic dimension to leverage on (Wu, 2016; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). This is due to the ability of an event to create authentic experiences that generate high levels of audience engagement (Tafasse, 2016), not only during the event itself but also in the ‘before’ and ‘after’ event stages.

Event marketing can be combined with experiential marketing to produce a unique outcome. While event marketing is unidirectional (employing one-way communication), experiential marketing uses two-way communication whereby brands interact with a customer to inform them about the brand’s products and services, and where customers have the opportunity to share their reactions. Experiential marketing offers customers an opportunity to engage with the brand and create a strong relationship with it.

For the purpose of this study, this chapter will deal with the use of experiential marketing as a strategic tool in order to advertise, in a more interactive way, brand promotion activities. The chapter is organized as follows. First, it reviews the literature on event marketing, with a focus on experiential events. Second, it presents the Ferragnez case. Finally, it presents managerial implications.

BACKGROUND

Event Marketing

Events have long been confined to a grey area that made it difficult to distinguish them from other types of communication tools, such as public relations, traditional advertising, guerrilla marketing, and sponsorship (Rinallo, 2019). Up until few years ago, official statistics on promotional expenditures did not consider events as a standalone category, thus contributing to the undermining of the relevance of the events sector. Surprisingly, there is a dearth of academic research on event marketing, especially when compared to the abundance of studies on more established marketing tools, such as sponsorship or trade shows (Rinallo, 2019). As a result, both from an academic and a business stance, the approach to the world of events was frequently hasty and superficial (de Lima et al., 2020).

However, in the last few years, things have started to change, and events have finally come to prominence as a communication tool with unique characteristics (Rinallo, 2019). The rise of the reputation of using an event as a strategic tool to promote brand awareness and to give visibility to new products and services is also supported by the multiplication of event marketing specialist agencies and by the increased budget companies allocate to this specific tool.

Many large organizations are switching advertising expenditure to this method due to the belief of such agencies in the effectiveness of event marketing and their ability to produce creative, highly tailored, and amazing experiences (Wood & Masterman, 2008). Many reasons explain the relative success enjoyed by using events as a tool in the marketing communication mix. Firstly, due to the overuse of traditional media, advertising has lost its hegemony, and consumers are looking for novelty, individualism, and added value. As a consequence, investment in the renowned *below-the-line communication campaign*

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