

The Impact of Experiential Marketing on the Customer's Perception of a Brand's Essence

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Abstract

The use of experiential marketing (EM) as a communication tool is rapidly growing with companies believing that it can provide them with a competitive advantage in comparison to traditional communication. However, very few studies have assessed its impact on consumers. Therefore, this paper aims to assess the impact of an experiential marketing event on the customers' perception of a brand's essence. The chosen brand was Innocent Drinks. The research had an exploratory approach and involved investigation of the existing literature, examination of documental analysis and a qualitative research using ethnography. Firstly Innocent Drinks' brand essence was constructed based on branding theory and documental analysis and then a primary research was carried out at the Innocent Village Fete, an experiential marketing event organized by Innocent Drinks in London. The objectives of the research were to develop an understanding of experiential marketing, to characterize the essence of the brand, to understand customer's perception before, during and after the event, to contrast them, to observe the attendees' behaviour during the event and finally to discuss the changes of perception. The findings suggests that experiential marketing events can be successful, when immersing customers in experiences, in changing customers' perception about a brand's essence in a positive way and might even trigger word of mouth and stimulate buying behaviour and lead to loyalty. The paper can help marketers to better understand EM and moreover, its impacts on customers' perception which might help them develop new strategies and obtain a competitive advantage.

1 Introduction

The increase of offerings to customers and the rise of competition have made it harder for organisations to differentiate themselves solely by providing products or services that satisfy customer needs. The companies, in order to have a competitive advantage, are pressured by both the market and their customers, to come up with experiences that stimulate their target's emotions and sensations (GENTILE; SPILLER; NOCI, 2007). The focus has changed from product to experiences, and in order to manage and create those experiences; marketers have started using experiential marketing (EM) tools.

Organisations are using EM so that they can create a strong customer-brand connection and therefore increase loyalty, word-of-mouth and brand awareness. However, despite the growing adoption of EM, there is still not much research on the topic, especially regarding their effects on customer's perception. Understanding the change of customer's emotions and thoughts towards a brand, after going through a brand experience, is especially relevant for organisations that intend to use EM events as part of their communication platform. The authors that have investigated experiences related to marketing activities such as Close *et al.* (2006), Masterman and Wood (2008) and Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) highlight the lack of concepts and literature in the area, drawing attention to the need for research in short and long terms.

Given these considerations, this paper aims to contribute in the improvement of this matter by taking an exploratory approach on the change of perceptions of attendees of a particular

experiential marketing brand event ('Innocent Drinks' Village Fete). The issue was addressed more specifically by answering the following question: What is the impact of an experiential marketing event on the customers' perception of a brand's essence?

The brand essence can be defined as a brand's nature, what makes it unique, and can be better understood by comprehending the brand's attributes, rational benefits, emotional rewards, values and personality traits (CHERNATONY, 2006).

In order to answer this question a few objectives have been established:

1. Develop an understanding of experiential marketing, its tools, challenges and desired objectives based on the most relevant academic authors exploring the topic;
2. Characterise the essence of 'Innocent Drinks' brand;
3. Understand customer's perception of 'Innocent Drinks' before, during and after the event, according to their inputs
4. Observe attendees behaviour during the event
5. Discuss the possible changes of customer's perception.

In the following chapters, firstly the literature is reviewed based on the most relevant authors that have been exploring the subject, then the methodology is presented as well as the techniques and sources of secondary and primary research used. Subsequently the findings, analysis of data, discussion of results and final conclusion are presented.

2 Literature Review

The rise of competition in the current global market has made companies create new strategies focusing on customers in order to develop a competitive advantage and therefore survive. Several business managers believe that differentiating their business only with the traditional elements such as product, price and quality is no longer a competitive advantage and the Customer Experience (a set of interactions between a customer and an object) is said to be the next competitive battleground (GENTILE; SPILLER; NOCI, 2007). The consumers have changed their demands; nowadays they have more interest in hedonistic gratifications within a social context than on maximizing their benefits. They are looking for consumption that stimulates sensations and emotions that not only satisfy their needs (CARÚ; COVA 2008); it has to be meaningful to them as an individual (Schmitt 1999).

Besides, the access to information has increased greatly and the consumer-to-consumer communication has an enormous impact on decision making (PRAHALAD; RAMASWAMY, 2004). The customers have more power than ever, which forces the organisations to treat them as partners, sharing information, letting them contribute in the decision making and to join the competences in a profitable and beneficial way (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). For the organisations, the challenge of building and sustaining strong brands is connected to the ability to win consumer's cognitive and emotional support and commitment (Boyle and Ponsonby-McCabe, 2006) and more importantly, to manage their experiences. The focus has changed from the product-centred notion towards the experientialist consumer-centre notion (TSAI, 2005) providing high quality interactions that allows the customer to co-create experiences and values connecting them with the organisation's offerings (PRAHALAD; RAMASWAMY, 2004). The value is changing from utilitarian to hedonistic from commodities to transformations of customers through guided experiences (CARÚ; COVA 2003a) and to be successful the managers must concentrate on a new set of building blocks such as in-depth communication with customers, transparency and freedom to exchange information (TSAI, 2005).

2.1 The Customer Experience

Based on all these changes in the market, marketers have started to focus on customer experiences through experiential marketing. According to the experiential interpretation, the interaction between a subject (the consumer) and an object (a product, an event, a person, an idea) within a given context originates the consumption experience (ADDIS; 2005) and the companies benefit from this set of interactions. This experience has some characteristics: it has a temporal dimension originated from the set of contact points between the subjects and the object. It is personal, each consumer has his own experience and it involves the subject at different levels: rational, emotional, sensorial, physical and spiritual (GENTILE, SPILLER; NOCI, 2007). For the modern consumer, consumption is not only using things nor the end of the economic cycle but a way to enhance and enchant life, exploring all the aspects of being human. Life is to be constructed through different experiences which they go through, the embodied experiences (CARÚ; COVA, 2003a). However, the utilitarian value of a product cannot be forgotten, they are still one of the main factors of customer's evaluation and perception of a good, they should be explored in order to enable factors for great experiences when possible (GENTILE; SPILLER; NOCI, 2007).

According to Carú and Cova (2008) the consumption experiences are spread over a period of time that has four major stages that influences consumer's decisions and future actions:

1. Pre-consumption experience: related to the expectation, the search, planning and foreseeing of the experience;
2. Purchasing experience: the selection, payment and packaging of a product as well as the interaction with service and environment;
3. Core consumption experience: involves sensations, satisfaction levels and transformation;
4. The remembered consumption experience and the Nostalgia experience: classification of memories, used to re-live and remember past experiences.

Therefore, the experience is not limited to purchase, use and post-purchase activities and marketers should try to make the customers go through memorable positive experiences through all those steps. Schmitt (2003) argues that experience provides more guidance in order to add value to the customer than satisfaction, due to the fact that it forces the managers to pay attention to what causes the satisfaction. Experience is usually what generates customer satisfaction and that is where the focus should be. Moreover, managing experiences may differentiate a company, where concentrating only on satisfaction will not.

2.2 Experiential Marketing (EM)

The increasingly influential role of experience in brand evaluations encourages brands to use different strategies from the traditional advertising in order to create a deep meaning on customer's mind (CLIFFE; MOTION, 2004). Fragmented media advertising has no longer the power of enhancing the persuasion and practices that concentrate only on customer satisfaction are not sufficient to maximise the holistic customer experience. Therefore, the marketing efforts should focus on developing a brand value structure that meets customer's expectations and aspirations on the cognitive, affective and social levels (TSAI, 2005); moreover the experiences related to products have to be connected to the individual's needs, dreams and motivations (BATTARBEE; KOSKINEN, 2004). After all, the individual's perception of a product is generated through the interaction of his mental faculties and the environment (TSAI, 2005).

Experiential marketing intends to supply the factors that help to develop the experiential side of the company's offerings helping the consumer to access it. "As a marketer you need to provide the right environment and setting for the desired customer experiences to emerge" (SCHMITT, 1999, p.58)

The organisation has to show that it cares about the consumer's experiences with them and in order to do that, a key element is developing marketing communications that "tell a story", which the customers can use to interpret their own lives and consequently develop trust in brands. To achieve this objective it is necessary to establish a consumer-brand relationship based on personal experiences with perceptions of intimacy. Before the consumer makes an emotional investment in the brand, there must be repeated experiences for them to build beliefs about its predictability and dependability.

Summarising, Experiential Marketing is managing and creating those experiences in the best possible way. In order to better understand EM, this chapter will develop on Customer Experience Management (CEM), the CEM framework, consumer immersion, some of the most ordinary EM tools as well as its objectives and challenges.

2.2.1 Customer Experience Management (CEM)

The Customer Experience Management (CEM) is a customer-focused process of managing all the experiences a customer might have with a product or company in a strategic way, taking into consideration how they can be meaningful to the customer's life. CEM has an integrative approach (looking the organisation internally as well as externally) and aims to provide value to customers by delivering information, service and interaction with them at every touch point. Consequently it builds loyalty to the customers and value to the organization (SCHMITT, 2003).

Gentile *et al.* (2007) suggests that the customer experience has six components that can be explored by marketers:

1. Sensorial Component: stimulates the senses as sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell in order to generate aesthetical pleasure, satisfaction, sense of beauty (e.g. Jamba Juice bars or Lush stores);
2. Emotional Components: stimulates feelings, emotions and moods reaching the affective system with the aim of creating an emotional relation with the company, brand or products (e.g. Barilla, Kinder Surprise);
3. Cognitive Component: stimulates thoughts, conscious mental processes and creativity which can make customers revise assumptions of products (e.g. Barbie, a doll with the image of a young woman);
4. Pragmatic Component: stimulates acting, use of something. It is not restrictive to the post purchase stage but to all the product's lifecycle stages (e.g. Apple iMac);
5. Lifestyle Component: stimulates people's values and beliefs through the adoption of lifestyle and behaviours (e.g. no logo products);
6. Relational Components: stimulates relationships, social life, communities, social identity, related to the previous component (e.g. Disneyland, Harley Davidson, *Haute Couture* apparel)

However, just stimulating these components is not enough. To be significant, the experiences have to be extraordinary and not ordinary. An ordinary experience is related to routine, everyday life, past and passive acceptance of events whereas an extraordinary is more intense, is related to epiphany which is when people re-define their selves. Pleasure is not the aim,

enjoyment is; the intensity of the experience is key (CARÚ; COVA, 2003a). Based on that, experiential market activities have to surprise the consumer, propose the extraordinary, stimulate the five senses, create a link with the consumer and use what the brands refer to (SCHMITT, 1999).

Masterman and Wood (2008) have identified seven event attributes that enhance the experience:

1. Involvement with the event, experience and brand that has emotional characteristics;
2. Interaction with brand, attendees and brand ambassadors;
3. Immersion of all senses
4. High impact intensity which leads to memories;
5. Individuality of experience;
6. Innovation concerning content, location, timing, audiences...;
7. Integrity providing real, authentic and genuine benefits to the attendees.

By providing customers with memorable positive experiences EM objectives are more likely to be achieved.

2.2.2 Consumer Immersion

As mentioned before, consumer behaviour research considers experience a central factor on customer's current lives; another key concept that goes along with it is immersion. There is a growing pursuit from consumers in being immersed in varied experiences; they want to be stimulated, entertained, educated and challenged by the brands which are expected to have a meaning and become part of their lives. Marketers can take advantage of that through experiential marketing. Those immersion experiences can be used to enhance a service, to be infused into a product or as an entity itself providing consumers a manner to engage with the brands in a real significant way developing a strong connection (CARÚ; COVA, 2003b). There are three major appropriations involved in the immersion processes which are: nesting, investigating and stamping. The first one is the familiarisation process where the individual will probably stick to one activity, product, group or place until he feels comfortable. In the investigating phase the person will start to explore the environment in order to establish a point of anchorage and control extending his territory; finally the stamping is when the person gives the experience a personal meaning based on his history and own references. The customer expects the marketers to provide resources that stimulate their imagination and not a pre-planned package so they can achieve the last stage of immersion (CARÚ; COVA, 2006).

2.2.3 Experiential Marketing Tools

Marketers use a set of tools in order to provide experience to the consumers; they have transcended from shopping experience and are exploring a whole new range of consumption fields as sporting, arts and leisure (CARÚ; COVA, 2008). All of these tools have to be directed to a target audience, but that does not mean that the audience will have the same experience since they are personal (MASTERMAN; WOOD, 2008). Some of the most ordinary tools used to provide experiences are: Sponsorship, Brand communities, Product placement, Events, Brandscape. It is important to highlight that some experiential marketing tools are used for hedonistic purposes (art, sport, music), others have instrumental purposes (sampling, trade shows) and others combine both (consumer shows) (MASTERMAN; WOOD, 2008). However in order for the organisation to transmit the right message to the customers these EM tools, when applied, have to provide an experience that has a meaning connected to the essence of the organisation's brand.

Brand essence is the centre of the brand which defines its central nature enabling those who come in contact with it to have a clear representation of its uniqueness. (CHERNATONY, 2006, p. 204)

After going through an extraordinary experience the customer should be able to absorb (even subconsciously) and give a meaning or feel connected to at least one of the items from the brand pyramid. All sorts of advertising involved in EM have to provide value, inform and entertain in order for the customer to absorb the message. Marketers should replace the USP (unique selling point) with an ESP (experiential selling paradigm) which is based on the experiential platform (SCHMITT; 2003). The brand essence can be visualised in the form of a pyramid in FIG. 2:

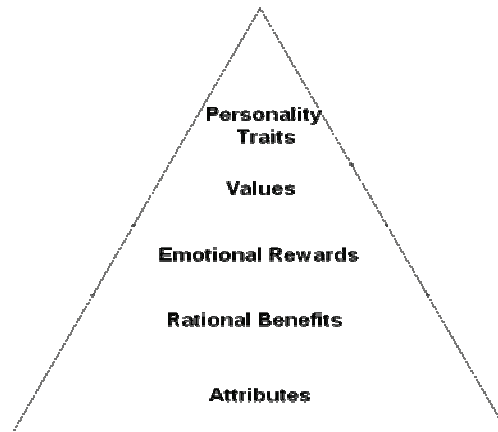


Figure 1: The components of the brand pyramid (CHERNATONY 2006, p. 205).

2.2.4 Experiential Marketing Objectives

The use of those tools and experiential marketing in general has several objectives as strengthening the relationship between brands and consumers since experiences can create an emotional tie between them (GENTILE, SPILLER; NOCI, 2007) and build long term changes in attitudes and beliefs (MASTERMAN; WOOD, 2008) through the leverage of social identification. EM also aims to gain customer trial given that the audience is exposed to the product and very commonly have the opportunity to try it (CLIFFE; MOTION, 2004). Moreover it simplifies choice decisions for consumers (SCHMITT, 1999), as people purchase and use products and services that have a user image consistent with their own because it reinforces their personal identity (SIRGY et al., 2007). Furthermore those tools help to enhance brand awareness with the exposure of the brand and diffusion of its values (BOYLE; PONSONBY-MCCABE, 2006).

Finally, one of the most important objectives of EM activities is creating buzz and consumer conversations about a product since live experiences are considered to be one of the main triggers of word-of-mouth (WOM) (MASTERMAN; WOOD 2008). Positive word-of-mouth can offer distinct competitive advantage and is much more effective in converting unfavourable or neutral predispositions into positive attitudes when compared to traditional advertising because the communicator is not seen as selling the product and is likely to share the information in a meaningful way. In addition, WOM is vivid which is more accessible in memory and have more weight in cognitive judgments (MAZZAROL, SWEENEY; SOUTAR, 2007).

Those objectives have a final goal which is increasing loyalty and therefore achieve high returns on investments. Customers that feel better about a product have greater loyalty and

moreover are willing to pay more for a product which gives the organisation the opportunity to charge premium prices for their goods (HOMBURG, HOYE; KOSCHATE, 2005) however the consumer experience of the item has to offer them unique value (BOYLE; PONSONBY-MCCABE, 2006). Furthermore, customers of a particular product who can identify with the rest of attendees of an event, especially if they are emotionally involved with the event, are more likely to feel more loyal towards the brand (SIRGY et al., 2007). The loyalty can be stimulated by organisations through the promotion of interactions with groups of enthusiastic consumers that are managed together by the firm and the customers (BAGOZZI; DHOLAKIA, 2006).

It is important to highlight that the use of experiential marketing is still new and still far from its maturity, since it lacks precise terminologies and structured, standardised approaches (GENTILE; SPILLER; NOCI, 2007). In addition, despite of the fact that more and more people are using those tools, there is very little objective and reliable research that determines the effectiveness of this practices.

3 Research Methods

The research has an exploratory nature since it aims on providing insights and understanding on the effects of an experiential marketing event on customer's perceptions, feelings and behaviour towards a brand (MALHOTRA; 2002). It involved analysis of the literature review on the topic, examination of documental data and qualitative research in the form of ethnography.

3.1 Primary Research

With the intention of answering the research question, primary research has been carried out in an experiential marketing event. The Innocent Village Fete event was chosen due to the fact that it is a brandscape event where all the values of the brand are exposed to the customers in the form of entertainment, which is a favourable scenario for customers' experiences. Furthermore, the event was organised by Innocent, so there was no interference of other brands and activities. Due to that, it was considered by the author to be the most adequate event to take place during the time available for the research.

In order to assess the change of perceptions, emotions and behaviour from consumers towards the Innocent brand after going to an experiential marketing event, it was necessary to analyse their feelings and opinions before, during and after the event for comparison; to do so a typical method of the experiential consumer research field was applied: ethnography (HACKLEY; TIWSAKUL, 2006). Ethnography is a methodology derived from antropology which is the study of people involving its costumes and societies. "*Ethno*" means people and "*graphy*" means description, therefore ethnography can be explained as a research methodology that uses a set of methods as open ended observation and description, involving the participation of the ethnographer in people's lives in a explicit or implicit way watching what happens, asking questions, listening to opinions with the aim of collecting every possible piece of data relating to the research objective (HAMMERSLEY; ATKINSON 1995). The goal is to be able to interpret the context in the same way that the observed people do. In order to be successful, Collis and Hussey (2003) give some suggestions: Develop trust as soon as possible; get involved with the phenomenons however keeping an analitic view; use different methods in order to gather as much data as possible from the different people; capture people's perceptions through their own words but taking into consideration its restrictions; make diagrams of physical layouts; include your own thoughts and opinions as part of the notes during field research; by the end of the research summarise your notes.

The practice of ethnography cannot be programmed, because it is filled with the unexpected, moreover it requires judgment (HAMMERSLEY; ATKINSON 1995). Taking those factors in consideration, the research has been carried out in four steps. The first step was to interview them before the event using in-depth interview and projective techniques. The second phase was developed in order to access the subjective experience of the consumer; besides the notes made by the author about the respondents behaviour and opinions inside the event, a set of question was developed to help the author to analyse the participants involvement in the event and have focus on the relevant issues stated on the literature review. The third phase was similar to the first one, applying the same techniques but after the event in order to identify any changes of perceptions, emotions and behaviour after the attendee has gone through the experience. In order to better capture introspective narratives, it is important not to draw it up on the spot, but a bit later, usually one day after the experience so that the respondent will have completed his reflexive work and the memory will still be strong (CARÚ; COVA, 2008). Finally the fourth step was doing in-depth interviews with the attendees one week after the event. This last approach was taken in order to identify the effect of the event on purchase behaviour, loyalty and word-of-mouth. The intention is to find out if the attendees have purchased Innocent products or talked to someone about it. Awareness will not be measured in this research since all the attendees were aware of the brand.

The high importance of experiences for marketing leads to the importance of verbatims to study them (CARÚ; COVA, 2008), therefore the respondents opinions on the event were recorded. An understanding of the effects of experiential marketing practices is reliant on the interpretation and analysis of the gathered data and to do so the author used the NVivo software (MACER, 2008). This software is helpful when handling very rich information since it facilitates the analysis by reducing the manual tasks.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population was defined as being the same as Innocent's core target which are people from *"20-35 years old, health conscious but time poor, interested in good food"* (Innocent Drinks 2006). The primary research has been applied to a non-statistical sample of 4 people on the 8th of August 2008. All of them being in the profile of Innocent's core target as presented below:

- Attendee 1: female, dentist, 29 years old.
- Attendee 2: male, website designer, 28 years old.
- Attendee 3: male, audio technician, 30 years old.
- Attendee 4: male, computer science professional, 28 years old.

As explained before, in order to achieve better results using ethnography the ethnographer has to be trusted by the sample, due to that all the people chosen already knew the ethnographer and had a good relationship with her.

4 Findings

4.1 Secondary Data

Innocent brand first appeared in the summer of 1998 when three friends had the idea of developing a product to make it easy for people to do themselves some good since they believed that the modern life activities made it hard for people to be healthy. Therefore they bought around £500 worth of fruit, created their first smoothie recipes and sold them at a music festival in London of small proportions. However, they were so successful and also

encouraged by the consumers of the event to keep producing them, that the three friends gave up their proper jobs in order to start a new smoothies business (Innocent Drinks 2008)

Since the beginning they had clear brand values which were being responsible, entrepreneurial, generous, commercial and natural. Moreover they have always invested in funny, simple and clear (innocent) marketing communications. Innocent has however taken a different approach concerning marketing communications. They invest a lot on packaging by changing the products' labels every few months in order to get people willing to buy an innocent drink when they see one. Moreover they have invested a lot in sampling with the objective of making people try their products and therefore purchase it, especially in the summer where they visit events, festivals and innocent stockists. Their aim is

To make natural drinks which taste great and do you good. The ingredients have to be 100% natural and look and taste great. We promise that everything innocent ever make will always be natural, delicious, healthy and sustainable (Innocent Drinks 2008)

Their core target group is “20-35 years old, health conscious but time poor, interested in good food” people (Innocent Drinks 2008). Innocent's share of marked for chilled juice is at 14%, however they lead the smoothies market with 71% in the UK.

Based on the previous findings an experiential platform can be described. Innocent has become the category-defining leader in the smoothies market and it maintains its reputation by using only environment-friendly natural ingredients (without additives, concentrates, artificial sweeteners and preservatives) and using funny, simple and clear communication created by stimulated people. The Innocent name and logo (FIG. 3) reflects its simplicity, its natural ingredients and funniness and that is the core of the brands experiential positioning: Natural Drinks That Taste Good and Do You Good



Figure 3: Innocent logo (Innocent Drinks 2008)

Having analysed the platform, it becomes easier to build the brand pyramid and therefore understand the brand's essence (FIG. 4). The essence of Innocent which encloses all the factors presented in the brand pyramid was used as a base for the primary research, since the objective of the research was to identify the impact of an experiential marketing event on the customers' perception of a brand's essence. Innocent drinks launched The Innocent Village Fete in 2003, with the name of Fruitstock, an event that was about making customers have fun and feel the brand spirit and taste (since there is lots of sampling) and consequently raise money for charity. It was a free festival with music attractions, relaxing environments, food and beverage and other sorts of entertainment. In 2008 the festival has changed its name and theme to a Village Fete. The Innocent village fete is also a non-profit making event and has the same objectives as the Fruitstock. However due to its success from previous years, since 2007 the event is paid and the attendance has not decreased, in 2007 the tickets were sold out.

4.2 Primary Data

The construction of the brand's pyramid made it easier for the development of the research structure and the topics to be investigated. In order to analyse the data, the information

acquired before, during and after the event (Innocent Village Fete) was separated in different clusters or nodes with the help of the software NVivo.

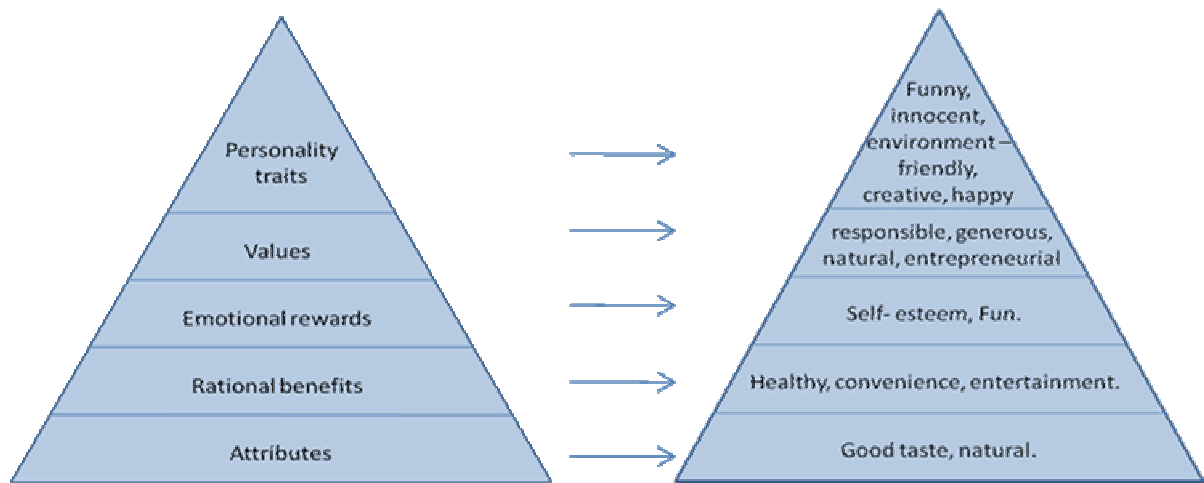


Figure 4: Innocent's brand pyramid (CHERNATONY, 2006)

Those nodes were established according to the factors identified in the brand's essence and the previous concepts highlighted in the literature review (Table 1):

Table 1: Nodes based on brand's essence and literature

Brand's essence	Node1	Components of customer experience	Node2	Wood and Masterman's 7 'I's	Node3
Funny/ Fun	Fun	Sensorial Component	Sensorial Component	Involvement with emotional characteristics	Emotions
Innocent, simple	Innocent	Emotional Component	Emotions	Interaction with brand	Interaction with brand
Environment-friendly/ Responsible/ Generous	Responsible	Cognitive Component	Cognitive Component	Immersion of all senses	Sensorial Component
Creative	Innovation	Pragmatic Component	Pragmatic Component	High Impact Intensity that leads to memories	Memories
Natural	Natural	Lifestyle Component	Lifestyle Component	Individuality of experience	-
Entrepreneurial	Entrepreneurial	Relational Component	Relational Component	Innovation	Innovation
Self-esteem	Self-esteem		Impressions - People	Integrity	-
Healthy	Health				
Convenient	Convenience				
Entertainment	Entertainment				
Taste	Taste				
Happy	Happy				

GENTILE, SPILLER; NOCI (2007), MASTERMAN; WOOD (2008) AND CHERNATONY (2006)

The information was also divided in four parts, before the event, during the event, after the event and three weeks after the event. The information collected before the event was used in order to compare the changes of perception to the information collected after the event and

three weeks after the event. The data collected during the event was used in order to analyse the event itself as follows.

Before analysing the impact of the experiential marketing event (Innocent Village Fete) on the customers' perception of the brand's essence it is possible to identify if the event was successful in involving and immersing the researched attendees. The analysis of this process was based on three theories previous explained in the literature review:

- The three major appropriations involved in the immersion processes (CARÚ; COVA, 2006);
- The components of customer experience (GENTILE, SPILLER; NOCI, 2007);
- The attributes to enhance the customer experience (MASTERMAN; WOOD 2008).

4.2.1 Appropriation Phases Involved in the Immersion Process

By observing the attendees behaviour during the event and their opinions about it, it was possible to confirm that they went through the three steps involved in the immersion process. When they got there they stuck together and were mainly observing and stayed at a restricted area. They went inside the first music tent, which was close to the entrance and stayed there for about 45 minutes observing people, firstly sitting down and later getting up and moving their bodies a little bit, that was the nesting phase. Then they were more comfortable, talking more and their body language was more relaxed (loose arms, dancing a bit) so they decided to explore the fair, walking around experimenting new things, interacting with the features of the event, which was the investigating phase. Finally it was clear through the three weeks after the event interview that they gave a meaning to the event and had positive memories about it as saying it *"was a good experience for me"* (Attendee 2) or *"the way it was laid out, the whole vibe, happy people, positive energy"* (Attendee 3). That reflects the last phase, stamping.

4.2.2 Attributes to Enhance Customer Experience

With the aim of having an impact on the attendees, the event should stimulate the customer experience. Based on Masterman and Wood's (2008) attributes that enhance customer experience theory the author could identify if the Innocent Village Fete event provided an adequate environment in order to enhance the attendees experience. This analysis was made based on observations and attendees feedbacks that were classified according to the previous nodes.

1. Involvement with the event, experience and brand that has emotional characteristics: The attendees got involved with the event and expressed emotions both verbally and in their behaviour, especially happiness. They laugh, smiled and made jokes frequently and also said they felt content, happy and excited and also attributed those characteristics to the other attendees of the event.
2. Interaction with brand, attendees and brand ambassadors: There were Innocent brand ambassadors in the sampling areas of the event as well as in some information centres. Besides giving away products they were giving information about them and available for chats with attendees. Some researched attendees asked questions and they all tried products.
3. Immersion of all senses: All the senses were stimulated as follows: a) Sight: animals show and live performances besides the whole event decoration and lay out; b) Taste: Innocent products sampling and food market; c) Touch: The only identified feature by the attendees that stimulated their touch was the environment-friendly hand washer and drier. The music tents also stimulated their bodies, since they were all dancing at

some point; d) Smell: There was the food and drinks smell; e) Hearing: There were two music tents.

4. High impact intensity which leads to memories: There were several activities that the attendees could engage to and since each experience is unique they have highlighted different features as the dog show, the food market and the decoration.
5. Individuality of experience: There were several options of things to do and play with, so each attendee could experience different things according to their preferences. There were features more focused on children as well as on adults.
6. Innovation concerning content, location, timing, audiences: The attendees considered the place (London's Regents Park) to be really eccentric and unexpected, innovative. Moreover the event itself was something new, that they had never been to. Some of the attractions were really creative as well as the ferret race and live flea circus.
7. Integrity providing real, authentic and genuine benefits to the attendees. The attendees could really enjoy their selves during the day by drinking free smoothies, dancing in the tents, playing games and interacting with other people.

4.2.3 Components of Customer Experience

It is also possible to identify which components of the customer experience were explored in the event.

1. Sensorial Component: The sensorial components were really explored by Innocent in the event as previously highlighted in the third item of the factors that enhance experience and it generated satisfaction, enthusiasm and excitement.
2. Emotional Components: The most stimulated feeling was happiness by creating attractions and features that the attendees could have fun with. Another feeling stimulated was of trust since the attendees got to know a bit more about the brand and its social responsibility.
3. Cognitive Component: the whole event had an environment friendly atmosphere and that became clear to the attendees, they started relating Innocent not only with its product but as a company that helps the environment.
4. Pragmatic Component: the event stimulated acting with games and music as well as environmental things as separate rubbish bins so the attendees could do their part to help the environment and also help charities.
5. Lifestyle Component: The attendees related to the event mainly in three ways the opportunity of hearing nice music and eating good food, the environmental and health concern and the opportunity of enjoying life and spending the days with friends in the park. All the attendees expressed that they enjoy doing that and it strikes similarities with their lifestyles and values.
6. Relational Components: The attendees appreciated the fact that there were multicultural people of all ages at the event. They said they were friendly and enjoying life. Furthermore this was one of the most mentioned aspects of the event, which is very important since people relate not only to products but to other people that use it.

The analysis of the attributes that enhance customer experience and the components that can be explored are relevant in order to assess if the event was successful in immersing and involving the attendees in the experiences they provided. Without this, the messages cannot be transmitted. Innocent has provided features that were able to do that, therefore the attendees got involved and went through memorable experiences. The next step is to assess if those experiences had an impact on the perception of the brand essence and if the right message was delivered.

4.2.4 Brand's Essence Impact Analysis

With the purpose of analysing the impact of the brand's essence in the perception of the customers, a comparison of the items that compose the brand pyramid was done according to the attendees' perception before and after the event: The researcher asked several questions to the attendees in order to capture what feelings, emotions, behaviours and thoughts they related to the brand. The analysis was based on their answers and opinions before, during and after the event based on what they mentioned or spontaneously. It was assumed that what they mentioned was what was more relevant to their perception. The comparison of perception was then classified as having changed, being reinforced or not changing according to each factor

Most of the factors for all the attendees have being either changed or reinforced after going to the event. The outcome is different for each participant, due to the property of experiences to be singular to every different person and created taking into consideration the previous experiences each person has had. In this case for example there were two attendees that were already Innocent consumers (Attendees 3 and 4) and had already captured a little bit about the brand's essence before the event, therefore most of their results were 'reinforced'. However, the other two attendees that didn't know the brand very well before the event had most of their perceptions changed. Another factor that was considered to be relevant to analyse, was the attendees' perception of the drinker profile. This factor is not part of the brand essence but is related to it, since people not only connect to brands that they relate to but also to be a part of a group or community. Moreover, the perception of a brands consumer profile is very likely to be similar to the brand's personality traits which are the top of the brand's pyramid. Therefore the same process was carried out in order to understand the attendees' perception of the drinker profile, before and after the event (Table 2). All the perceptions about the drinker profile has changed, three of the attendees thought the brand's products were mainly for kids and after the event it has changed to mainly young, happy, trendy people, which is more related to Innocent's brand essence. One of the attendees however, thought the brand was not for kids before the event and then changed his mind saying it could be anyone who likes healthy convenient food, which is also related to the brands essence.

Table 2: Attendees' perception of drinker profile before and after going to the event

Drinker Profile	Before Event	After Event	3 weeks after event	Changed?
Attendee 1:	Mainly children, also people looking for a good quality and an environment friendly product	Young, healthy people, happy.	young, healthy, environment friendly, successful, well informed	CHANGED
Attendee 2:	Mainly children, also vegetarian people, who are more interested in good food	Friendly, anyone, quality oriented	mainly 20 - 30 years old with good taste and quality oriented but also kids and older people	CHANGED
Attendee 3:	Mainly children, also people health oriented people and happy.	Happy, likes to have fun	People who have a good taste and are health conscious	CHANGED
Attendee 4:	Wealthy, more fashionable, young, in a hurry, not for children	Someone who wants natural quick food.	Trendy people who likes fruits and are concerned about health	CHANGED

In conclusion, the event was successful in changing the attendees' perception of the brand's essence by stimulating each one of the factors in different ways and generating different experiences. Not all the factors had the same impact or stimulated the same memories to everyone. Self esteem for example had an impact on only one participant who said that drinking Innocent made him feel "cool"; the others did not assimilate that in a relevant way.

After analysing the impact of the event in the attendees' perception of the brand's essence, it was considered relevant to assess the impact of the event on word of mouth and purchase intention, which are final objectives of experiential marketing tools. In order to do so, the author interviewed the same attendees three weeks after the event with the aim of knowing if they had talked about the event and Innocent to other people and how was their purchase behaviour.

4.2.5 Analysing the impact on word of mouth and purchase behaviour

As previously explained, positive word-of-mouth can offer distinct competitive advantage and is considered to be really effective on changing people's opinions as compared to traditional advertisement (MAZZAROL, SWEENEY; SOUTAR, 2007). Therefore, the author asked the attendees questions in order to assess if they have spread communication about Innocent in a positive way and to how many people. All the attendees researched have talked about the event to circa of 17 people in total in a positive and enthusiastic way. The brand Innocent was mentioned to 14 people including people from abroad (France) where Innocent is starting to develop the market. This outcome is very positive since the event had an indirect impact on three times more people than the ones that attended it in this case.

In order to assess the impact of the event in the attendees' purchase behaviour some factors were taken into consideration as how often they used to buy it, what were there intentions of buying it after going to the event and finally if they have bought it three weeks after the event and how many times.

The intention of purchasing has changed in two cases and was reinforced in the other two. The attendees that were not Innocent consumers before the event said they had the intention of buying it from now on, but that compared to other brands they are more expensive and that is an issue for them at the moment. However, despite of the price they believe Innocent is a very good and tasty product and feel connected to it in some way. One of those attendees said that her behaviour changed even concerning the other juices since now she pays more attention to the ingredients of it and looks for something more natural. The other two attendees who were Innocent consumers before the event have reinforced their preference for the brand. They said they feel connected to the brand in some way and would prefer to buy it as compared to other brands.

Once again there has been a change of purchase behaviour after experiencing the event and all of the attendees mentioned at some point that they felt more connected to the brand after the event. It is important to highlight that buying intention does not always become purchase due to other factors as, in this case, price. Even having changed the perception of the brand's essence and their buying behaviour, some of the attendees are not going to buy Innocent products as often or become loyal to the brand, due to its price. Even the remarkable experiences they went through during the event were not enough to convert them to loyal customers. This is however a strategic decision that should be taken by Innocent, they could either lower their prices and sell to more people or keep their premium price and premium brand focusing on wealthier people or people that are willing to pay higher due to the products benefits and brand's characteristic.

5 Conclusion

The lack of research about the effects of experiential marketing on consumers and the interest for the topic led the author to develop this research in order to investigate the impact of an experiential marketing event (The Innocent Village Fete) in the customers' perception of the brand's essence. In reviewing the concepts and theories of experiential marketing and branding, and through research of secondary data it was possible to build the essence of Innocent brand, which is based on the following factors: health, natural, fun, responsible, entrepreneurial, innovation and entertainment among others.

The next step was the primary research where four attendees of the event were observed and interviewed in order to capture their perception about the brand. Moreover, the whole event was analysed in order to assure that the right attributes and components were available in order to lead the attendees to a memorable experience. The three major appropriations involved in the immersion processes (nesting, investigating and stamping), the components of customer experience (sensorial, pragmatic, emotional, cognitive, lifestyle and relational) and the attributes to enhance the customer experience (involvement, interaction, innovation, immersion, intensity, individuality and integrity) were analysed.

The findings indicate that consumers' perception about a brands' essence can be changed by making them go through a significant experience in an experiential marketing event and the impact of the event on the attendees was positive, having most of the factors positively changed or reinforced. Each factor had a different impact on each attendee since the experiences were individual and unique.

Furthermore this experience can lead to positive word of mouth. All the attendees researched have talked about the event to other people and the brand Innocent was mentioned in a positive and enthusiastic way. Nevertheless, the events should be well designed and its attributes and components have to be based on the brand's essence in order to send the right message to the attendees. In this way they can immerse in the experience and change their perception about a brand in accordance to its nature and in a positive way.

The impact of the event in the attendees' purchase behaviour was also analysed and the findings showed a positive change of purchase behaviour in two cases and was reinforced in the other two which might lead to loyalty. Furthermore all of the attendees mentioned at some point that they felt more connected to the brand after the event. However, despite of the changes in behaviour regarding the purchase of smoothies in general, in some cases the price of the products of the analysed brand was an issue and there was no increase in purchasing it until the last interview, although it can still have an impact in the future.

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