

THE ROLE OF EVENT MARKETING IN CREATING TOURIST EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to make an attempt at discovering how events, as a communication channel of event marketing, complement promotional strategies of towns and regions through their psychological impact on tourists. The study is based on the concept of event marketing, which emphasises the undeniable role of emotions and experiences in the process of satisfying social needs. It can be assumed that the presented conclusions are true for all events dedicated to tourist promotion of the region. Providing theoretical foundations, the article demonstrates that self-government units are ever more often using event-based strategies, since they increasingly employ the model of competition in the tourism market based on tourists' emotions and experiences rather than on the material resources of the place.

Keywords: Event marketing, events, tourist promotion, experience economy.

1. Introduction

The growing competition in the tourism market has made it necessary for certain destinations to use instruments from beyond the framework of standard forms of promotion. Recent years have also shown an increase in the number of events organised. A difficult economic situation suffered by a lot of regions has contributed to the fact that event marketing may become the fastest developing promotion area. Today's perception of events stems from neither a target group's nor competitors' expectations; in fact, it derives from specific market occurrences. The search for new forms of appeal to customers, who no longer respond in a desirable way to advertisement and personal sale stimuli, result in the development of event marketing. The use of this form of promotion in tourist reception areas is an increasingly common phenomenon, because events in themselves constitute a tourist attraction and contribute to a higher tourist traffic in the region. Also, events deprive tourist reception areas devoid of such attractions from wider tourist interest and, as a result, the product or service on offer there loses its appeal.

Event providers at all cost strive to create the best experience and memories among an event's direct participants. Event organisers are fully aware that highly satisfied event participants will prove their loyalty by their repeated participation in the event and/or recommendation of both the event and the place visited in their community. Thanks to the use of event marketing for tourist promotion of a particular place, creators of tourist reception areas may gain a free medium of information which will be far more effective than some advertising campaigns. Recent research shows that 90% of consumers rely on recommendations, while only 33% give their trust to advertisement (Przeździek, 2017). The fact that people rely on recommendations given by their friends and relatives as well as opinions found in the Internet much more than on advertisement is becoming a key aspect also in the promotion of tourist destinations.

2. Definitions and characteristics of events

In the era of information noise, the definition of an event causes a lot of difficulties due to the broad spectrum of this phenomenon. The first definition of 'event' was formulated by D. Getz and J.J. Goldblatt in the early 1990s. According to them, an event is something 'special', 'extraordinary', 'unique', 'beyond everyday experience', something that distinguishes a particular moment from other, more routine activities, such as work, for example. J. J. Goldblatt defined an event as 'a unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, McDonnell, 2011, p. 17). D. Getz, however, stated that it is 'an opportunity for leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience' (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, McDonnell, 2011, p. 19). The authors draw attention to the fact that an event is composed of both physical (ceremony, ritual) and psychological factors (need, experience).

O. Nickel talks about 'staged events, whose [...] main objective is to provide specific experience to participants and to evoke in them emotions which will positively contribute to the implementation of a marketing strategy, i.e. fostering the values promoted by an enterprise or a brand' (Nickel, 1998, p. 7). The proposed definition strongly highlights the experience- and emotion-related aspect of events. A more detailed definition of the analysed concept was presented by M. Pfadenhauer, who indicated its most specific characteristics, namely: 'a mass spectacle [...], a specific target group, funding, communication of a specific message, presentation of a product when there is no competition, staging of a wealth of experiences and feelings' (Pfadenhauer, 2008, p. 222).

The idea behind events is to guarantee 'a unique moment in time' to participants (Getz, 2005, p. 10). In order to provide unique emotions to participants, such an unusual event must be process-based. A lot of authors put a huge emphasis on the very process of event

management, setting aside its outcomes. The process is composed of a series of characteristic activities, such as: designing, planning, organising, producing and evaluating – jointly called ‘event management’. The outcomes of this process include creation of everything that is extraordinary and worth remembering. The uniqueness of events does not only rely on participants’ emotions and experiences but, first and foremost, on a specific process which helps generate such experiences.

In the above-presented line of thinking, an event is to denote a venture which is purposefully planned in advance, absorbing financial and technical resources and targeted at specific groups of participants. An event is a kind of performance presenting a reality which differs largely from the reality of participants’ everyday life. In principle, it is supposed to awake in participants intensive emotions and a belief that they are a part of something extraordinary, remarkable and memorable. It is characterised by rich symbolism, as it combines diverse means of communication adjusted to participants’ needs and expectations. An event is to create a brand image or a brand identity of a particular destination and rise brand awareness, preferably on an international level.

To conclude the considerations over the notion of an event, U. Holzbaur should be mentioned, as he is right in claiming that ‘the term “event” does not describe an objectively measurable feature; in fact, the event-like nature of a specific affair or incidence is subjective: an event is created in the mind of every person who experiences that event’ (Holzbaur, Jettinger, Knauß, Moser, Zeller, 2005, p. 6).

3. The essence of event marketing

A critical review of the relevant literature has proved that the term ‘event marketing’ defines the same occurrence in different ways. The online Cambridge Business English Dictionary provides two meanings of the term. Firstly, event marketing is ‘the job of advertising products by selling or providing them at events in order to gain new customers. Secondly, it is ‘the job of advertising different events so that people will go to them.’ Another definition is given in Business Dictionary, where event marketing means ‘the activity of designing or developing a themed activity, occasion, display, or exhibit (such as a sporting event, music festival, fair, or concert) to promote a product, cause, or organization.’

While analysing the queries in foreign sources, it may also be observed that event marketing has been defined from the perspective of experiences, rituals and emotions. In today’s world, society is more and more often focused on one’s own emotions and experiences related to participation in a specific event. Such an approach was taken in 2006 by M. Wohlfeil and S. Whelan who defined event marketing as ‘the creation of three-dimensional, interactive and brand-related realities for consumers with the aim of forging an emotional bond with the brand’

(Wohlfeil, Whelan, 2006). Their definition highlights the role of emotions in communicating important messages related to the object that is promoted by means of events. In light of the presented definitions, the emphasis put on the emotional aspect of event marketing is crucial, because it is thanks to emotions and experiences that people define their attitude towards an event provider. The communication factor and the important role of emotions and experiences are inseparable elements used in the communication between an event provider and event participants.

In the Polish literature relevant to the analysed problem, A. Grzegorzczuk defines event marketing as ‘a promotion instrument involving organisation of various kinds of mass events for accomplishment of a company’s commitments to the external and internal environments: customers, decision-makers, contractors, opinion leaders and workers’ (Grzegorzczuk, 2009, p. 56). In the case of a town, the internal environment comprises the town inhabitants, local mass media, opinion leaders and business entities located there. Whereas a town’s external environment is composed of: potential investors, tourists, authorities of other territorial units, State administration, external media, etc. K. Celuch in his publication *Przemysł spotkań – wiedza, produkt, motywacja* uses A. Grzegorzczuk’s definition, complementing it with strategic planning – the foundation of every event. According to K. Celuch, event marketing is not only a promotion instrument, but also an element of a marketing strategy which includes planning, implementation and outcome evaluation (Celuch, 2014). The author points to a very broad notion of event marketing because, indeed, its scope covers both widely-available public concerts and small press conferences. The researcher adds, however, that what links events in general is the communication goal, which is strictly related to a product promotion (Celuch, 2014). P. and M. Jaworowicz claim that ‘event marketing is one of the instruments of integrated marketing communication, based on the use of various kinds of events organised for the purposes of satisfying a company’s commitments to the external and internal environments through direct contact with event participants or by means of media’ (P. Jaworowicz, M. Jaworowicz, 2016, p. 108). The authors highlight the aspects of intermediacy and directness of impact. A consumer of an event who does not participate in an event but who has contact with it, for example via TV or radio, is also susceptible to sender’s/broadcaster’s influence. Yet, this influence is indirect and engages fewer senses, as a result of which its effect may totally differ from what was intended (Jaworowicz, P., Jaworowicz, M., 2016, p. 108).

4. Psycho-emotional determinants of event marketing

Organisation of events is strictly related with the era of ‘experience economy’ which is connected to human development. Experiences are understood here as a source of personal values, remaining in consumers’ memory in the form of personal impressions and experiences

in the following four fields: education, entertainment, aesthetics and escape from everyday life (Pine, Gilmore, 1999). People are constantly looking for new and unique experiences associated with these areas. Events satisfy certain vital needs of modern people, i.e. a sense of belonging to a group, joint participation in a spectacle, exclusiveness, belonging to the selected few or the desire to celebrate extraordinary moments and to experience emotions 'live' – the quality which cannot be delivered by any TV broadcast. The foregoing research on the reasons for participating in events demonstrates that the most frequent motives include:

- social bonds or external influence – meeting new people, spending time with friends and maintaining social ties in the most directly related group,
- unity of the family – participation in events provides an opportunity to spend time in the family circle and among the closest friends, which adds permanence to relations with relatives and friends,
- departure from everyday life and recovery of psychological balance – events provide a perfect opportunity for rest, relax and break-away from routine,
- learning about new cultures – participation in events broadens participants' cultural horizons,
- excitement, desire for unique experiences,
- gaining new experiences.

Events have a communal nature, which is emphasised by various indications to group membership. What characterises sports events are attributes such as: scarves, flags or banners; whereas at concerts a specific dress code is important. An event is supposed to evoke and enhance certain experiences and emotions. All participants experience those feelings simultaneously.

Primarily, events should keep participants' minds occupied with a brand for some time after an event. Influencing people by means of events boils down to accomplishing goals predefined by an event organiser. This person strives to make as many positive impressions on a participant as possible. When it comes to Robert Cialdini's principles of influence (Cialdini, 2003, pp. 14-32), five of them find their application in event marketing: reciprocity, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. The American psychologist claims that people respond to and use signs indicating group belonging and that an individual copies group behaviour.

The principle of reciprocity is understood as a basis for social coexistence. It means that one good turn deserves another (Cialdini, 2003, pp. 14-32). This principle is deeply-rooted in the consciousness of many societies and its observance is inculcated in society members since their childhood (Grzywa, 1997, p. 146). Failure to follow this principle would prevent creation of any social cohesion (Cialdini, 2003, p.17). The principle works perfectly in event marketing. An event provider gives participants unique experiences and impressions, which results in event-related communication with family or friends, for example through messages sent by

participants in social media. By delivering these unique, extraordinary moments to participants, an event organiser expects feedback in the form of positive recommendations or a revisit.

The next principle – social proof, positive recommendation or revisit – states that it is easier to persuade another person to do something if people from that person's environment, or even the whole community, also do it (Winich, A., Winich, S., 1999, p. 125). An individual copies behaviour of others and often claims it to be his or her own, because it is in human nature to adjust oneself to the environment, rather than stand out from it. Some tourist destinations are highly popular, while others have far less tourist traffic. People assume that if others had good reasons to choose that particular place, it must be better and more attractive than other places. Similar things happen in the case of events. If during an event participants start enjoying a particular attraction (for example the observation wheel at St. Dominic's Fair in Gdańsk), it is highly probable that other tourists will embark on it too. Social media are governed by similar rules: if a large part of a society supports certain event and informs about participation in it, other people also want to be present in the next editions of that event.

The principle of authority says that a person is able to persuade another person to particular attitudes if someone else's authority is invoked. Psychologists think that trustworthiness involves two factors: familiarity and trust (Winich, A., Winich, S., 1999, p. 126). Event marketing takes advantage of celebrity influencing, i.e. people from the world of fashion, music, film or town authorities. Engaging a famous person in an event makes participants more willing to take part in it. The higher the rank of a celebrity, the bigger interest in the event exhibited by potential participants.

Still another principle – scarcity – can be observed at events; according to this principle, everything rare and hard to come by becomes very attractive. As a rule, people assume that if something is rare, it must be good (Cialdini, 2003, p. 17). This principle is crucial for the effectiveness of a region's promotion. Unfortunately, town authorities often do not manage their portfolio of events well, which consequently discourages people from participation in the next events. If an event is to achieve its objectives, it must be unique; it cannot be widely available nor can it take place too frequently, because then it will become unattractive.

The above-presented principles of social influence, which are reflected in the idea of event marketing, apply to every individual. Often being deluged with messages and enjoying virtually unobstructed information availability, an individual succumbs to the power of influencing and to one's habits. Event marketing takes advantage of various persuasion techniques of goal accomplishment.

Summary

What unites today's consumers is the wish to experience something new. Therefore, it is essential to create a rich and non-standard offer which will act like a magnet. Events should be perceived as a form of collective behaviour characteristic of post-modern society.

Events are supposed to reach target groups by referring to emotions. Emotional stimuli very positively affect the image of a product which is offered. The strength of influence and effectiveness of events depend on whether they make a cohesive whole with other marketing activities of an organiser, including: advertisement, sales promotion, public relations or personal promotion. Event marketing should be perceived as a communication strategy consisting not only in planning and organising events whose aim is to evoke specific emotions in participants and create a bond between them and a particular product or brand, but also in combining those events with various methods of influencing used to foster an emotional bond between a consumer and a brand. Event marketing is a communication style which is not focused on direct advertisement and still less on sales; it is rather interested in establishing an intensive contact with a target group, i.e. potential or existing consumers. Event marketing means activities which engage an individual in the realms of brand culture and town community (or any other community) and which are organised within the framework of a particular event. This form of promotion may be a cheaper alternative to expensive TV commercials, because direct participation in an event tightens relations between participants and, by the same token, encourages personal experiencing of an event. Event marketing is becoming a confirmation of a town's good organisation – it is a presentation of its power, attractiveness, factors awakening interest, which consequently shows that it functions perfectly not only in the marketing area, but also in any other field.

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