Brand molecule theory: An exploratory study of a telecommunication company's events

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Abstract

Over the past decade or so, events have become key elements in strategic marketing initiatives with event marketing or, as it is sometimes known, live or experiential marketing, dominating some promotional budgets. The aims of these initiatives are not only to drive sales, but also to increase brand awareness, loyalty and image. Brands provide the basis for differentiation between competitive offerings and are often conceived in terms of the consumer's perspective or that of the brand owner; other definitions refer to purpose or characteristics. A traditional perspective therefore is of a brand created by the marketer but Grant (2006) suggests that brands are built up of a number of interconnected cultural ideas, which he conceives as a brand molecule. The brand therefore develops from the reception and enculturation of the associated aspects of the brand and is therefore a co-creation between marketer, audience and wider society. Grant gives the example of 501 s - Levi's flagship brand which rather than the intended 15-19 year old target audience became associated with men in middle age through the 'Jeremy Clarkson effect'.

This exploratory study considers events as an integrated element of the business activity of O2, a leading UK mobile 'phone provider. Seven semi-structured interviews were undertaken with employees in the organisation's Events and Sponsorship Team. These showed that the cultural ideas associated with their events and sponsorship related not only conventionally to the organisation's brand values but also to the employees' own cultural perspectives and experiences.

Grant, J. (2006). *The brand innovation manifesto*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

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Introduction

The corporate world has been quick to discover the benefits of events and their power to increase market share in marketing and image making (Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnell, 2008). As Close, Finney, Lacey and Sneath (2006) note '*…events provide an opportunity to engage the consumer with a company, its brands, and the community'* (Close *et al.,* 2006, p.420). It has been shown that by creating a social setting, attendees' level of involvement is raised which makes them more perceptible to marketing messages than if those same messages had been presented through a different medium (Pope & Voges, 2000). This seems to hold true irrespective of whether the event is sponsored by an organisation or staged by it (Sneath, Finney &

Close, 2005). This process of engaging the consumer at an event (known as event marketing) has been found to offer a better Return on Investment (ROI) than other marketing communications media (MPI Foundation, 2004 as cited in Close *et al.,* 2006.)

The inclusion of events as part of the marketing mix is a feature of what Grant (2006) calls *brand innovation*. This is a move from what he labels, 'the Old Model of Branding' to the new in which a different definition of a brand is offered. Moving from a *brand image,* the old model, to a brand being defined as '*a cluster of strategic cultural ideas'* (Grant, 2006, p.27), the new model represents a shift from the creation of a brand by marketers to a co-creation between marketer, audience and society in general. Such brands are built up over time and stem from successive and associated ideas. These connected ideas are shown through a visual representation which Grant refers to as a brand molecule.

This exploratory study considers events as an integrated element of the business activity of O2, a leading UK mobile telephone provider. It seeks to create a partial brand molecule for the organisation, relating to its events programme. O2 is one of the UK's top three leading network providers, with 25% of the market share in 2008, 4% more than previous market leader Orange and 3% more than Vodafone (Mintel International Group Ltd, 2008).

Review of the Literature

Brands
Narrow definitions of brands have included that of Aaker who stated that a brand is a

> …distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify goods and services of either one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. (Aaker, 1991, p.109).

However, Murphy (1988) stated that the elements of a brand include; the product or service, its packaging, brand name, promotion and advertising that is used alongside the overall presentation.

Pringle and Thompson (1999) suggest that there have been a number of waves of branding theories and that through the first and second waves, unique selling point and emotional selling point were used by companies to brand products and services. They argue that these selling points produced a practical manifestation where companies created a brand icon that personified the brand through advertising and association. The third wave outlined by Pringle and Thompson suggests that brands can be viewed as the promises a company makes to its customers.

Grant (2006) argues however, that these formulas were not so much theories of brands but of *brand advertising* because they were adapted to advertising and similar media. Accordingly, brand marketing was therefore about messaging because advertising in its formative stages was about messaging.

He suggests that marketing is now separated into two alternative and competing approaches, which he refers to as *brand image* and *brand innovation*. Companies, he

argues, are using one or other or combining both approaches. Brand image is static, passive, about advertising, messaging, fantasy and the look and the feel. Brand innovation, in contrast, is dynamic, interactive, about culture, involvement, authenticity and the experience.

A central tenet of brand innovation is therefore the *experience* and Close *et al.* (2006) confirm that experiential marketing provides a new approach to branding and has developed a key role in the contemporary marketing mix. The main aim of experiential marketing outlined by Schmitt (1999) is to create holistic experiences for customers that relate to the brand. These can also provide an opportunity to develop stronger and deeper interactions with customers (Robertson & Wilson, 2008). Pine and Gilmore (1999) contend that *'companies stage an experience whenever they* <u>*engage*</u> *customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way'* (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p.3, their emphasis).

Schmitt (1999) identifies a number of different types of experiences a company can create for its customers. These include sensory; affective and physical experiences. He explains that different types of experiences are created using a combination of aspects and approaches, referred to in the literature as experience providers and including:

•   Communications
•   Visual and verbal identity
•   Product presence
•   Co-branding
•   Spatial environments
•   Web sites/ electronic media
•   People

More companies, particularly those in commoditised markets, are now moving away from features and benefits marketing and targeting their attentions on creating experiences for customers which incorporate the brand. This in turn provides their customers with perceived benefits over and above the products and services which they purchase (Close *et al.,* 2006).

Event marketing is linked to experiential marketing; however it concentrates on consumer experiences specifically at *events* (Close *et al.,* 2006). Event marketing is defined by Shimp as the *'practice of promoting the interests of an organization and its brands by associating the organization with the specific activity'.* (Shimp, 1993, p.8).

The main motives, he suggests, behind event marketing is to accomplish three goals:

•   Increase brand awareness
•   Drive sales
•   Enhance brand and company image

Sneath *et al.* (2005) distinguish between an event which is staged by an organisation and one that is sponsored by a company. Sponsorship of events is an integral part of the event marketing process as a company needs to be able to access and associate

themselves with the event to be able to successfully blend their brand and messages and engage consumers at the event (Close *et al.,* 2006).

This however, provides a different experience to one in which the audience is directly engaged with a brand. Close *et al.,* suggest that by providing customers with experiences and showcasing that the brand is associated with the event, positive emotions will be gained towards the brand that in turn will develop brand loyalty and brand preference. However, Robertson and Wilson (2008) emphasise that this will only happen if the brand goes about communicating with customers in the right way. Activities need to add value to the customer's experience of the event and not impose upon it by turning the activity in to a brand and product showcase.

Johnson confirms:

> A decade ago, event marketing rarely was a major component of a brand's promotional plan. But event marketing, or live marketing as it is sometimes known, has grown in popularity. In fact, event marketing now claims the largest proportion of many promotional budgets and accounts for half of all promotional spending. (Johnson, 2008, p.269).

Brand molecule

If organisations are to turn to a brand innovation approach, brands need to be similar to stories in that they have meaning, brands therefore *'... are a means to an end, not an end in themselves'* (Grant, 2006, p.34). These 'stories', Grant maintains, need to be told through different media so that customers and potential customers have an understanding of the meaning behind the brand. He advises that companies use branding to encompass all business activity under one identity so that it is easily recognisable through all forms of media, so that *'branding becomes more like the frame around the picture, than the picture itself'* (Grant, 2006, p.10).

Grant suggests that a brand can be viewed like a molecule, as *'a cluster of strategic cultural ideas'* (Grant, 2006, p.27). The culture of an organisation is the:

> …basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously and define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment (Schein, 1985, p.6).

Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008) advocate the development of a 'cultural web' to understand the culture of an organisation. The web has at its core the paradigm or the collective experience, whilst around the periphery are stories, symbols, power structures, organisational structures, control systems, rituals and routines. These elements underpin the assumptions of the paradigm.

The brand molecule is also socially mediated but goes further as it builds up successive and associated ideas and therefore, *'A brand is not about one consistent idea, but rather an ongoing string of innovations'* (Grant, 2006, p.49). This idea of innovation enhances a company's credibility with its customers (Aaker, 2004). Each new idea that is added to a brands portfolio is understood to add to a brand's interest.

Many cultural ideas are seen as a combination of pre-existing ideas. Brand molecules however are made up of an ongoing string of ideas that interconnect with each other, these will change over time as new ideas are introduced and old ones are discarded, creating flexibility for the brand (Grant, 2006). An example of a brand molecule for the Starbucks brand is shown in Figure 1.
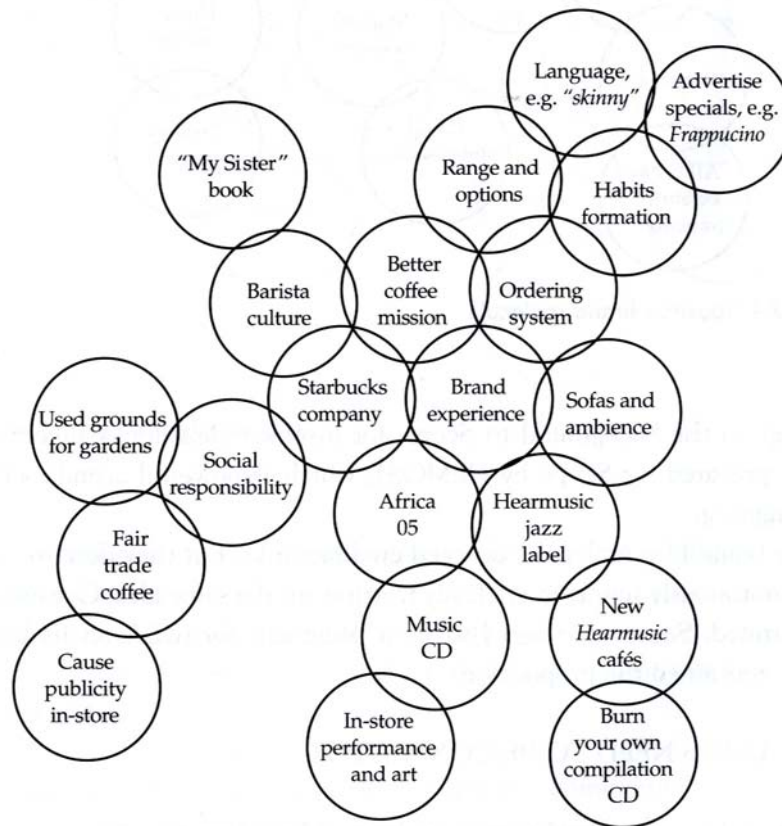

Figure 1: Starbucks brand molecule
Source: Grant, 2006, p. 39.

Through cultural ideas the brand molecule facilitates how a company is currently using and could potentially use other means to promote its brand other than through advertising. Although Grant cautions that a company may develop ideas that are disjointed and when implemented do not add any value to the brand. He therefore advocates that as with any other marketing plan, there must be a business case when using the brand molecule concept.

Finally, Grant shows that the molecule is not only created by the brand owner and the intended audience as society in general can have an impact on the way in which brands are perceived and how products and services are used. He cites for example, *'501s - Levi's flagship brand – in particular suffered from the so-called 'Jeremy Clarkson effect', the association with men in middle youth'* (Grant, 2006, p. 30).

The context of the research

O2 demerged from BT in 2001 and has since concentrated on building brand loyalty rather than launching the latest technology in handsets and services (Benady, 2007). The organisation has gained status as one of the UK's leading mobile phone providers and has developed a customer base in the region of 18.4 million customers using loyalty deals for existing customers, creative advertising and weighty sponsorship deals (Benady, 2007). In an interview for Marketing Week, Sally Cowdry, O2's Marketing Director stated, '*Our customer strategy is to put experience at the heart of everything that we do*' (Benady, 2007, p.21). In another interview for Conference & Incentive Travel, the Head of Events stated that '*It's not so much about face-to-face sales anymore but experiential marketing*' (Baggot, 2006, p.17). Therefore, events are an integrated element of business activity. O2 view their sponsorships as ways to add status and value to the brand (O2, 2008) and refer to them as '*interactive partnerships*' (Benady, 2007, p.20).

In this exploratory study of the O2 brand, data from interviews conducted with employees from O2's Events and Sponsorship Team is used to identify the cultural ideas associated with O2 events. This is then assembled into a partial brand molecule (Grant, 2006) of O2.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author to explore the theory of brand molecule through the specific context of O2's events and the thoughts of the participants. Clark, Riley, Wilkie and Wood (1998) suggest that a semi-structured approach to interviewing allows the researcher to identify and assess the respondents' '*emotions, values and attitudes*' (Clark *et al.,* 1998, p. 132) and was therefore an appropriate methodology.

Specific areas and topics needed to be addressed throughout the interviews and these were therefore set out in a schedule to ensure that the interviewee and resulting data were focused. However, a semi-structured approach also enabled the interview process to be flexible and therefore when any interesting or new subject areas were introduced by participants they could be developed and explored further. Kane and O'Reilly-De Brun (2001) believe that by conducting inductive research, patterns, themes and relationships unfold or emerge, rather than be restricted to a conceptual framework or theory.

Seven interviews were conducted; the first was undertaken to act as a pilot interview in which to trial the interview questions and their relevance to the research topic. Very minor modifications were then made to the interview schedule. Subsequently six further interviews were carried out with members of the Events and Sponsorship Team. The team is small and the seven people interviewed represented the departmental heads and a selection of managers. The roles of the participants within the organisation are detailed below:

- Head of Events
- Senior Event Manager
- Event Managers (A) & (B)

- Head of Sponsorship
- Music Sponsorship Manager
- Sport Sponsorship Manager

With their permission, the participants have been referred to by their job title in the findings below.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and the researcher compiled notes throughout the interviews outlining interesting and reoccurring thoughts, opinions and details. The recordings were reviewed and transcribed. These were used in conjunction with the field notes to outline and group any patterns, themes, reoccurrences, interesting comments and relationships that became apparent in the interviews (Fisher, 2007). Colour coding was then used to highlight different cultural elements as outlined by Grant (2006). From these themes, three categories were identified. These were used to organise the successive, and associated cultural ideas that relate to O2's events, namely:

1. Partnerships
2. Propositions/Objectives
3. Beliefs/Values

Thereafter, a brand molecule diagram for the O2 events was developed.
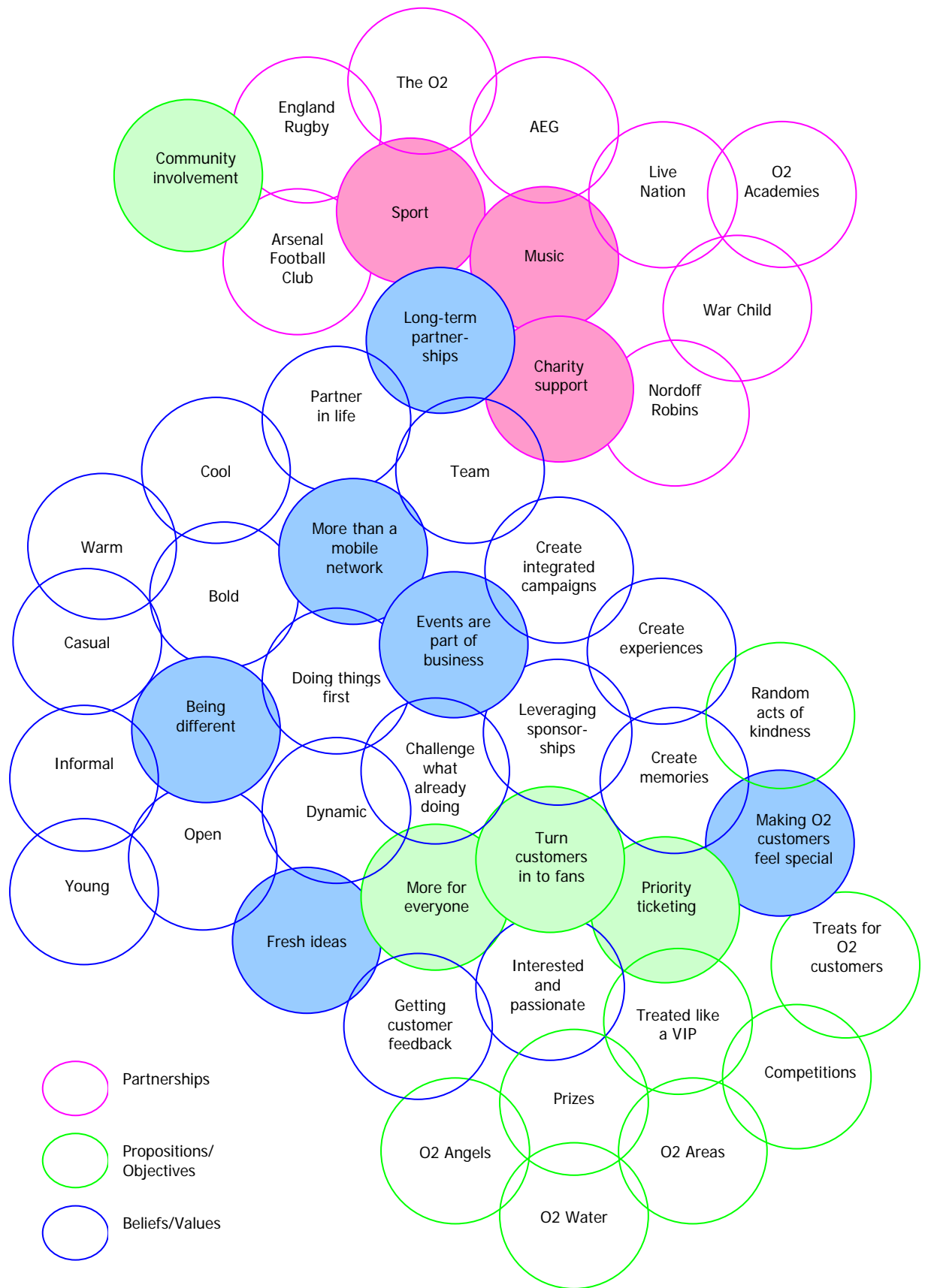
Figure 2 - O2's events brand molecule

Findings and discussion

1. Partnerships

Throughout the interviews and research conducted on O2 it became apparent that O2's partnerships and sponsorships are predominantly across three areas, sport, music and charity. The molecule (see Figure 2) shows the individual partnerships that are associated to the three areas and how they relate to each other.

All of the partnerships that O2 have are due to the development of long-term relationships. Five of the participants mentioned O2's partnership with England Rugby. The Sport Sponsorship Manager commented:

> *England rugby we've sponsored that since 1989 in one form or another, BT and Cellnet before we changed to O2 in 2002, so we've got a long standing relationship with both in the sporting field and when we changed over to O2 in 2002 we used that to really help launch the brand and we used England rugby especially as a platform to do that.*

Another long-standing partnership identified by the Sport Sponsorship Manager, amongst other participants, is with Arsenal Football Club:

> *And then we have Arsenal, which we've been involved with for seven years we started sponsoring them in 2002 erm and again to help launch the brand and obviously get to a completely different section of the industry.*

The O2 (arena) is connected to sport as the venue is becoming increasingly used to host sports events, which O2 have and are going to be involved with. In addition to the partnerships in sport, two long-term relationships were identified within the music industry.

The first is with music promoter Live Nation. For the past four years O2 have been the headline sponsor for one of Live Nations festivals in Hyde Park, which was called O2 Wireless. The Senior Event Manager stated:

> *After four years O2 Wireless has become part of an established brand, one that is recognised you know by our customers.*

Although Live Nation and AEG are separate partnerships they are connected on the molecule as the AEG partnership has been seen to develop from the Live Nation partnership and their activities are interconnected. The relationship that O2 developed with Live Nation has recently provided O2 with the opportunity to take over the naming rights of a number of venues owned by Live Nation, forming an alliance. The venues previously named Carling Academies are now known as O2 Academies. The molecule does not show the O2 Wireless Festival, as O2 will no longer be the headline sponsor. However the O2 Academies alliance is a natural progression from the O2 Wireless Festival hence they are shown on the molecule.

The second involvement with music is with Nordoff Robins a charity for children with learning difficulties. Event Manager (A) explained:

> *We work heavily with Nordoff Robins, which is a music charity, we do a lunch with them and have been for the past four or five years erm and we've started to do other little events with them, just before Christmas we did a quiz night with them.*

The molecule shows this relationship and its connection to the recent partnership O2 have had with War Child, another music related charity. This partnership developed from O2's association with Nordoff Robins and the alliance with Live Nation, as a launch event was held at one of the O2 Academies. The molecule illustrates that these partnerships have developed from one another and Live Nation, O2 Academies and War Child are associated.

The participants' personal cultural perspectives also feed into the molecule. The Event Manager (A) referred for example, to her own love of music and how she likes to work on music events. Similarly, the Event Manager (B) revealed that he is a music and sports fan and likes to support underprivileged kids. The Head of Sponsorship and the Music Sponsorship Manager in addition to the Sport Sponsorship Manager also described their love of sports.

2. Propositions/ Objectives

During the interviews a number of propositions that O2 provide for customers and the strategic objectives associated to them became apparent. The propositions identified include:

- Priority ticketing
- Random Acts of Kindness
- Treats for O2 customers
- Prizes / Competitions
- Treated like a VIP

These are things that O2 try to incorporate across all of their events to enhance their customer's experience. The Head of Events explained that priority ticketing is something that the company is using across events and commented:

> *We are trying to get it into every event that we do in some way or another so that people feel as though they're special you know.*

The O2 customer areas referred to include:

- O2 Bars
- O2 blueroom
- O2 Chill
- O2 Create
- O2 Lounge
- O2 Concierge

The Sport Sponsorship Manager explained:

> *The O2 blueroom is a priority area that O2 customers can gain access to and get above and beyond what the normal public get.*

The Head of Sponsorship justified why these areas are used and commented about the O2 Bars and blueroom specifically, stating:

> *We use them to really enhance the experience and create a fantastic experience for our staff and customers when they go to the events rather than just sticking our logo on and not having any presence.*

Other properties that O2 have developed include:

• O2 Angels
• O2 Fast lanes for queuing
• O2 Branded water

O2 Angels are promotional staff that are branded O2 and wear wings to differentiate them from other staff. They have been used by O2 at events for a quite some time, the Music Sponsorship Manager commented:

> *There's our Angels I think they're at every event their roles obviously differ but they're consistently with O2.*

Many of the participants stated that these simple aspects are beneficial to customer experiences and are used throughout the different events and partnerships. When talking about the fast lanes for queuing the Head of Events explained:

> *It is at the O2, and it will be at the Academies. It's those sorts of benefits that customers think it's worth being on O2 for.*

Highlighted on the molecule are four of O2's main objectives, community involvement, more for everyone, turning customers in to fans and priority ticketing. These have been the main focus for O2 events over the past few years and will continue to be the main areas of focus going forward.

O2's involvement with community projects is currently being developed and executed through partnerships in the sports industry. As a result of this, community involvement is detached from the other propositions on the molecule. Although they are all closely connected the way in which brand molecules are constructed makes this difficult to show. From the interviews it became apparent that O2 support a children's community project at Arsenal Football Club and through the partnership with England Rugby O2 support a wide variety of community rugby events nationwide.

It also became evident that more recently O2 are making a conscious effort at events to provide benefits for all attendees not just O2 customers. Event Manager (A) outlined that in previous years attention was focused on O2 customers only, which often excluded other attendees at public events, thus creating a negative image for the company. Event Manager (B) referred to how this had changed:

We let our customers' friends, whatever network they're on, jump in to the party as well.

The molecule shows that this change in focus is connected to getting customer feedback, as this is how the company became aware of the negative effects. It is also connected to the idea of challenging what you are already doing as it is a new focus for the company that differs from what they have done in the past.

Turning customers in to fans is one of the most important objectives for O2, and was identified by five of the participants throughout the interviews. O2 make a conscious effort to leverage their sponsorships and incorporate assets in many areas of business activity in addition to events. The molecule shows that leveraging sponsorships and creating memories are connected to turning customers in to fans. This is because these are the ways in which O2 provides added value for their customers and seeks to create positive associations with their customers through their interests and hobbies. This in turn, it is hoped, will increase brand loyalty and preference as customers become emotionally attached with O2's brand and the partnerships that they have.

The Senior Event Manager explained:

Two years ago the business, the board of O2, recognised that events were the only way to get close to the customer so it became a big focus for erm the top key objectives within O2 which is amazing.

Providing priority ticketing for customers is also a main objective for O2, this proposition started with partnerships in the music industry. However providing this benefit for customers in sport is becoming increasingly important and a focus for the future. Once again the way in which a brand molecule is constructed causes issues in making these connections visible. The molecule shows that creating memories, making O2 customers feel special and turning customers in to fans are connected to priority ticketing. These four areas are very closely connected as the benefits that priority ticketing offers for O2 customers is affecting the experiences and perceptions customers have of the brand and the services it offers.

When talking about customers Event Manager (B) commented:

We want to look at the ways in which we can touch them and speak to them and potentially turn those customers in to fans which is one of our big objectives.

The Head of Events compares this idea of customers being fans to being a football fan and explained:

If you're an Arsenal fan and they lost every week and they lock you out, you still queue up for three hours to get in the door, you would never change your religion and that what you aim to get and it's very hard to say that about a mobile 'phone. But that's the sort of response you want from a customer is I will always stay with O2 because they look after me.

The objective of turning customers in to fans is expanded upon by the Sport Sponsorship Manger who talked about emotionally engaging customers and stated:

> *We do a lot of branding, and that branding creates a lot of affinity and association but it's the events that really go beyond that and it's the events that really drive the emotional engagement erm provide something that is a little bit more memorable.*

This again relates to the view of Close *et al.* (2006) who believe that by creating positive emotions in relation to event activity, customers will develop a higher level of loyalty towards the brand.

Throughout all of the partnerships, events and activities that O2 undertake, the main focus is always on the customer, making them feel special. Event Manager (A) explained:

> *We weave in the brand into all of our events that we do whether it be the look and feel, our promotions, our Angels and through the experience activity that we do at the events but basically we make sure that our customers feel wanted, liked, loved.*

3. Beliefs/ Values

Throughout the interviews the participants identified a number of reoccurring beliefs and values and highlighted on the molecule are the five which appeared to be most important: more than a mobile network, events are part of business, making O2 customers feel special, being different and fresh ideas.

The idea of keeping things fresh was mentioned by all of the participants, the Head of Events explained:

> *I think that we continually strive to improve we talk about freshness and differentiation and these are the two biggest words in events for us.*

This idea of differentiation was also mentioned by two of the other participants, Event Manager (B) commented:

> *I think that one of the key things is that erm actually doing things a little bit different, erm and not shouting and not doing things in an arrogant fashion so sort of enhancing someone's experience other than kind of taking over it.*

They also mentioned when talking about O2's events and partnerships:

> *We try to not be followers of the crowd but leaders.*

Grant (2006) believes that brands are built up through innovative ideas and Aaker (2004) stresses that innovation enhances a company's credibility with its customers. As well as fresh and different, when talking about the company's culture a number of

recurring words associated to the values of O2 and its brand were detailed, these included:

- Bold
- Open
- Dynamic
- Cool
- Young
- Casual
- Relaxed
- Warm
- Informal

The Sport Sponsorship Manager explained:

> *O2's values are to be sort of bold, to be open, to be fresh and to think along those lines is to challenge what your already doing to make it better and erm making an influence with what you're doing.*

The idea of challenging what you are already doing was also mentioned by Event Manager (B) who stated:

> *I think we are a lot more as a brand, and one thing I really like about O2 is we are really proactive with our sponsorships and we actually go out and do things from a new extent like the O2 Academies its taking leveraging to a different level.*

The leveraging of the sponsorships and partners provide O2 with a competitive advantage. It was mentioned by three of the participants that O2 want to be more to customers than a mobile network and they use their events and partnerships to make this happen. The Head of Events believes:

> *We're about going out there and saying we're O2. We're not just a mobile 'phone network. What we are, is we're your partner in life.*

On the molecule the 'more than a mobile section' is connected to 'partner in life' as this is something that O2 are hoping to achieve through event activities and customer benefits via existing and future partnerships. This idea of being more than a mobile network and becoming a partner to customers' lives means that these two areas need to also be connected to the different partnerships O2 have and a number of the propositions that O2 offer customers, including priority ticketing and turning customers in to fans.

The Head of Events believes:

> *The experiential stuff does your brand more good than the labelling and branding stuff does.*

The Senior Event Manager goes in to further detail and explained:

It's not just about giving free things and it's not just about badging things and sticking an O2 stamp on them. It's actually about the experience and the memories that people take away from the event.

In addition to being more than a mobile network to customers, events are increasingly becoming part of O2's business activity. The Head of Sponsorship at O2 reiterates that events are not one off occasions for O2; they have their own in-house events team and are involved with around 500 events per year. This area is connected to creating integrated campaigns and leveraging sponsorships on the molecule as the sponsorships and their assets are used to their full potential across all business activity with events are being used to support this. Although these connections are illustrated on the molecule, connections need to be apparent with the different partnerships and some of the propositions, such as treats for O2 customers and again turning customers in to fans.

The Sport Sponsorship Manager mentioned a related idea:

If you associate yourself with success people will love you and want to follow in your footsteps you know.

Making O2 customers feel special is connected to creating memories and priority ticketing on the molecule as previously mentioned, these activities are affecting customer's perceptions of O2. Shown on the molecule are connections between priority ticketing, treats and random acts of kindness. Providing customers with such added benefits for being an O2 customer are some of the ways O2 are making their customers feel special, as their friends and family on other networks are not receiving the same service from their network providers.

The brand molecule for O2's events shows how the different cultural ideas associated with the partnerships, propositions/objectives and beliefs/values are connected and have progressed and developed overtime. As the activities are kept relatively consistent across different events and partnerships as well as being part of integrated campaigns a large number of the ideas are connected. This has proved difficult to illustrate due to the way in which a brand molecule is constructed.

Conclusions

This research has been contingent upon the perceptions of the O2 Events and Sponsorship Team participants and must therefore be considered a subjective view. Nonetheless it reveals that the cultural ideas associated with O2's events are not simply about the brand values the company has identified and sought to pass on to their employees. Rather, they are more about the partnerships that the Team manage and are involved with, the propositions and objectives that they develop and achieve through event activities and the beliefs of the people that organise and run the events.

Furthermore, it has been shown that not only do the company's objectives relate to the cultural ideas of O2's events, but also that a number of them have become part of the culture itself. Activities in the form of propositions and beliefs that are directly related to some of the objectives are shown on the brand molecule. Turning customers in to fans and providing customers with priority ticketing are two of the main objectives

that O2 have developed over the past few years and will continue to focus attention on. The molecule shows how three beliefs; leveraging sponsorships, creating memories and making O2 customers feel special are directly associated to the objectives. However due to the difficulty of illustrating a number of connections on the brand molecule these areas are unable to be connected with the partnerships that are directly associated with achieving the objectives.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to determine:

- Whether the same cultural ideas are perceived by O2's customers and partners.
- Whether O2's customers and partners *value* these cultural ideas, which will assist the company in developing events and event activities that customers desire and are credible within the industry.
- Any similarities and contrasting cultural ideas associated to the events of other network providers, to see how events are being used and perceived within the telecommunications industry as a whole.

This research project had several limitations, including the often cited, time and financial constraints. Also, however, as the Events and Sponsorship Team within O2 is relatively small, there had been a limited number of people that could be interviewed. The Sponsorship Manager for The O2 had recently left and a replacement was not yet recruited, therefore reducing the number of available employees. Additionally, due to their heavy workloads, access to the participants was limited to the time scheduled, with a number of participants running late or having to deal with work related issues. Finally, the brand molecule produced is, of course, only a partial molecule of O2, but it does provide a revealing and interesting example of event marketing.

Acknowledgements

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Biographical details

Aimee Goodwin
Aimee Goodwin graduated with the first cohort of BA Events Management students in the School of Services Management at Bournemouth University. She spent her placement year with O2, the telecommunications company that is the subject of this research and undertook the study for her final year dissertation. She returned to O2 after graduation, but in order to broaden her horizons she is now doing a post graduate qualification in International Business Management in New York whilst working as a HR intern for 12months.

Dr Dorothy Fox
Following completion of an undergraduate degree in environmental studies Dorothy undertook her PhD thesis and adopted a conceptual framework of affordance theory to understand participation in garden visiting. She is currently a lecturer in Events Management at Bournemouth University and is contributing to the management of the 2010 Bournemouth Bicentennial celebrations. Her particular area of interest for research is in the interactions between people and socio-natural environments. She is at present engaged in a project comparing the perception of nature and ecotourism by visitors to Jiuzhaigou National Park in China and the New Forest National Park in England.