

## **CHAPTER 12**

# **DEVELOPING BRAND RELATIONSHIP THEORY FOR FESTIVALS: A STUDY OF THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE**

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### **FUTURE POINTS**

- This chapter illustrates the relevance of the brand relationship paradigm to future festivals through the present setting of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe;
- A typology of Fringe-consumer brand relationships is presented;
- The chapter provides a predictive forecast of a future festivalscape scenario, iterates the significance of festival-consumer brand relationships to this future and highlights consumers' symbolic engagement with festival brands.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Relationship principles prevail in consumer marketing practice where brands are imbued with human traits to strengthen their consumer appeal. The brand-as-a-person metaphor has gained momentum in consumer research (Aaker, J. 1997; Aaker, J., Benet-Martinez and Garolera 2001; Aaker, J., Fournier and Brasel 2004; Azoulay and Kapferer 2003; Patterson 1999). Consequently, the related concept of consumer-brand

relationships has attracted interest (Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998, 2009; Hess and Story 2005; MacInnis, Park and Priester 2009). Tourism research has applied brand personality constructs to destination branding and image (e.g. Ekinici and Hosany 2006; Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal 2006; Murphy, Moscardo and Benckendorff 2007). Nevertheless, brand relationship theory remains unused in developing equitable and differentiated festival brands contributing to future survival and success (Aaker, D. 1991).

This chapter proposes the significance of brand relationship theory to future festivals. With forecasted shifts in festival marketing, production and consumption (Ringland 2006; Schultz 2006) it is essential for festivals to foster strong, competitive and resonant future brands. These can competitively differentiate festivals and build valuable equity with consumers (Aaker, D. 1991). Further, positive, sustainable, stable and interactive festival-consumer brand relationships can successfully engage consumers (Fournier 1998).

A study of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (The Fringe) is presented to illustrate the potential value of the festival-consumer brand relationship paradigm. Fournier's (1998) consumer-brand relationship research is applied to the setting of the Fringe and its consumers where phenomenological interviews reveal a typology of festival consumer-brand relationship forms. Although specific to the Fringe setting, this application of brand relationship theory provides a revealing account of consumers' engagement with festival brands. This is relevant and applicable to future festivals in contributing to theory and brand management practice.

In considering the significance of contemporary Fringe consumer-brand relationships to future festivals, this chapter applies marketing scenario planning principles (Pattinson and Sood 2010; Ringland 2006). It also draws upon Bergman, Karlsson, and Axelsson's (2010) ontological typology of future forecasts. The application of these to statements on the future assists in understanding the future of festivals, as this may be. The present study thus presents a prediction forecast of a future festivals scenario. Its drivers are based upon a potential scenario exploring the future (Ringland 2006) while founded on today's standard world (Khan and Weiner 1967). This chapter therefore presents a future view where the festival brand relationship paradigm will be a useful and rewarding strategic marketing approach to engage consumers.

## **THE FUTURE FESTIVALSCAPE**

Porter (1998: 234) emphasizes the importance of strategic planning in an uncertain future. While forecasting is complex and contingent on unknown variables, 'scenarios' provide 'discrete, internally consistent views of how the world will look in the future'. Scenario planning anticipates real life and is a useful in expressing tacit and explicit future visions of a particular phenomenon (Ringland 2006). It involves pushing 'thinking to a place (or space)... to start to explain possible future developments' (Pattinson and Sood 2010: 418).

Festivalscapes are where festival benefits are produced and consumed. They involve cues that are intrinsic, such as the physical environment; and extrinsic, including brand perceptions (Bitner 1992; Lee *et al.* 2006). This chapter forecasts a future

festivalscape scenario based on truth and explanatory claims and applies scenario planning principles to develop a predictive forecast described in terms of external driving forces (Bergman, Karlsson, and Axelsson 2010; Pattinson and Sood 2010). It continues by illustrating the significance of the present Fringe-consumer brand relationship typology to the future in relation to this envisioned festivalscape.

### **Drivers of future change**

In marketing and branding practice increased consumer empowerment is facilitating a power shift away from brand owners (Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie 2011; Ind 2003). Indeed, as consumers are progressively individualized (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009), festival brands are correspondingly co-created amongst consumers and stakeholders rather than managed by their owners (Ind and Todd 2011). This is influenced by greater consumer choice; accessibility (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009); growing ease of digital communications; and social networking, as society becomes increasingly interconnected, (Ind 2003; Schultz 2006).

In a 'standard world context', entrenched by 'salient features of the real world' (Khan and Wiener 1967:8) the expected primary generators of future change in marketing and branding will be: technological advancements; challenges of channel fragmentation; and the growing shift of power from brand owners to consumers (Schultz 2006). The particular key drivers shaping the future of festival brands will therefore be: provision and consumption modes; the future festival consumer; and increased substitutability fuelled by digital connectivity. This forecast is framed by

competitive forces of: future festival provision and consumption; the power and nature of consumers; competitive rivalry; and threats to the future festivalscape from emerging entrants and substitute experiences (Porter 1998).

### **The future festivals scenario**

Future festival consumers will face greater choice than they presently do, being 'increasingly exposed to and influenced by events' of all forms (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009: 388). Accordingly, managers must not be complacent in marketing accessible and engaging experiences (Fyall 2011). The polarization of global-local-ization (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009) suggests that festivals and events will witness paradigmatic shifts in their tangible provision and consumption. Consequently, festival managers must be responsive and equipped to build brands (Fyall 2011) demonstrating consumer-facing values that are 'trustworthy, ethical and sustainable' (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009: 389).

Underpinning festival provision is post-industrial society's prevailing leisure- and service-orientations (Bergman, Karlsson, and Axelsson 2010; Khan and Weiner 1967). In this context future festival consumers will have excess time to experience festivals and events. Nevertheless, sustainability will remain a concern (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009) with consolidation and collaboration as future drivers across the festival industry. Similarly, alienation, crises, fear of natural disasters and terrorism; tempered by prolonged global economic concerns, rising fuel costs and taxes will feature in an uncertain global future (Fyall 2011). Conflicts between consumer conscience and desire to travel may impact on global festival tourism (Getz

2012). The ability to provide physical and virtual festival experiences will therefore be essential to future survival. Maintaining differentiated brands with trustworthy and sustainable values (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009) will assist in building positive equity with consumers (Aaker, D. 1991).

Being societally and individually significant (Getz 2012), festivals address intrinsic consumption motivations and consumers' social and experiential needs (Crompton and MacKay 1997; Gelder and Robinson 2009). As today's festival consumer has unique motivations, those of the future will also be highly individual with bespoke preferences, expectations and behaviours (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009) and this will impact on industry trends and practices. In predicting future festival consumers' traits it is useful to consider today's emerging Generation Y cohort, born between 1979 and 1994 and sharing life and time characteristics (Kupperschmidt 2000). Research reveals distinct character traits and expectations influenced by rapidly emerging technological servicescapes of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries (Neuborne and Kerwin 1999). For example, 'Gen Y' consumers are highly brand aware but lack brand loyalty (Bakewell and Mitchell 1999). Further, expectations of heterogeneity in service provision leads Gen Y to seek co-created personalized experiences that resonate with their own identities (Beckendorff and Moscardo 2010). In engaging this cohort recent efforts include branded 'Lates' events where attractions have created special Gen Y focused events (Leask and Barron 2012). In the future festivals must be able to adapt to new consumers' traits and expectations, e.g. increased customization and co-creation (Fyall 2011). Such features will be most evident in brands that resonate personally with a range of consumers (Aaker, D. 1991; Fournier 1998).

Consumption modes and distribution channels will be altered and fragmented within the future festivalscape (Fyall 2011). The continued importance of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998) will increase desire for authenticity (Yeoman, *et al.* 2009). Today's Wifi, 3G and 4G technologies allow 'virtual' experiences to be 'authenticated' through live streaming and social media. The recent (re)emergence of 3D (as well as 4D and 5D), augmented reality, pod-casting, and similar technologies have formalized a perceptible shift in how events are encountered. Now consumers can experience the reality of arts and cultural exhibitions, the *Bolshoi Ballet*, and *National Theatre Live* productions at their local cinema. Indeed, entertainment, arts, and events are already being distributed simultaneously 'live' via cinema, mobile platforms, television, DVD and the Internet (Picturehouse Entertainment 2013). Consumers' desire for authenticity and co-created experiences, countered by time, mobility and sustainability (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009) means that future festivals will be conceptualized, produced and consumed in these ways. Rapidly evolving technologies will facilitate a vividly competitive environment amongst existing industry players and an unprecedented provision of substitute and virtually authentic arts and entertainment experiences. Festival brands must strive hard to differentiate themselves in this congested market-place (Fyall 2011).

This is a briefly envisioned future festivalscape scenario as precise future variables are not yet known. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that in successfully engaging future consumers, festivals must recognize the importance of building and maintaining trustworthy and sustainable brands (Yeoman, Greenwood and McMahon-Beattie 2009). Such brands must resonate across functional, symbolic and experiential

domains, addressing consumers' identity needs, while being purposive and dynamic relationship partners (Fournier 2009).

## **THE BRAND CONCEPT**

Brands communicate and differentiate products while enhancing equity and image. Their specific personality characteristics can facilitate formation of consumer relationships (Richards and Palmer 2010). Despite being owned by organizations, brands 'only properly exist in the minds of consumers and represent the totality of experience' (Ind 2007: 79). On these bases it is vital for festivals to manage their brands effectively to engender positive consumer perceptions, focus upon strategic approaches, and build upon competitive advantage (Aaker, D. 1991).

Brands are ambiguous concepts (Haigh 2006), being collections of tangible, intangible, and often experiential, attributes correlating with consumers' needs (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986; Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan 2011). Functional elements include names and logos and symbolic elements are loyalty, equity, image and personality. Positive brand equity is desirable in building consumer loyalty, dependent on the particular assets and liabilities that consumers link to functional brand names or logos (Aaker, D. 1991). It is defined as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand' (Keller 1993: 2). Brand knowledge is composed from consumers' brand awareness and brand image and is 'conceptualized according to the characteristics and relationships of brand associations' (Ibid, p.8).



Consumers' awareness and perceived image of brands are central to forming relationships (Fournier 1998). Both involve memory as brand awareness relates to consumers' recall and recognition, while brand image is 'a set of associations usually organized in some meaningful way' (Aaker, D. 1991, p.109). Strong, favourable and unique associations (Keller 1993) result in the formation of 'pictures which are wholly resident in the consumer's mind' (Patterson 1999: 412) and a positive brand image.

Brand image is supported by two constructs. Firstly, brand personality, is an emotional aspect, where consumers' personification of particular brands generates emotions with personal meanings (Aaker, J. 1997; Ekinci and Hosany 2006; Keller 1993; Patterson 1999). The second construct, consumer image or 'self-concept' (Burns 1979: 2), is underpinned by principles of interpersonal attraction, meaning consumers favour others they perceive as being congruent to themselves (Backman, Secord and Peirce 1963; Burns 1979). There is theoretical justification to suggest consumers also prefer brands they perceive as similar to themselves. This is termed 'self-image congruency' and in such situations consumers' brand preferences can expedite the attachment of personal meanings to the corresponding products, services and experiences (Belk 1988; Chon 1992; Ross 1971; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983).

Self-concept and self-image congruency are aligned with experiential brand elements, adhering to consumer 'desires that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation' (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986: 136). On this foundation consumers' brand choice involves communicating and reinforcing their social identities (Aron,

Paris and Aron 1995; Hirschman 1992; Richins 1994; Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan 2011), contributing to ‘symbolic self-completion’ (Schouten 1991: 412).

Festival brands are particularly complex, being symbolic of their host destinations, and of significance throughout lived experience, social worlds, and subcultures (Getz 2012). They are high in experiential elements, encompassing consumers’ perceptions of a festival and what it promises (Bowdin *et al.* 2011). Engagement with festival brands therefore addresses consumers’ tangible, symbolic and experiential needs, serving as expressions of self-concept in situations of festival brand-self-image congruency (Belk 1988; Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989; O’Cass and Frost 2002; Solomon 1983; Xue 2008). Accordingly, effective management of festival brands is fundamental to positioning strategies (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986). As such, festival managers must develop and nurture strong, equitable brands that resonate with consumers on a personally meaningful level. The brand relationship paradigm is a useful means of achieving this.

## **BRAND RELATIONSHIPS**

To compete and survive in the future festivalscape scenario, festivals must develop positive, reciprocal and enduring brand relationships with their consumers. Fournier (1996) pertinently describes the role of brand relationships as ‘soothing the ‘empty selves’ left behind by society’s abandonment of tradition and community and (providing) stable anchors in an otherwise changing world’ (Fournier 1996, cited in Keller 2008: 8). Future festival brands must strive therefore to provide continuity and self-image congruency with consumers to ensure engagement and loyalty.

Brand relationships are complex and purposeful constructs, existing between consumers and brands. They have numerous characteristics, meanings and related motives (MacInnis, Park and Priester 2009). The theory is grounded in 'consumers as active meaning makers' (Fournier 2009: 5), reframing the brand personality construct (Keller 2008) and expressed in the context of the brand-as-a-person (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy and Pervan 2011). The underpinning proposition is consumers and brands have similar connections and characteristics to interpersonal relationships such as relatives, friends, partners, and enemies (Fournier 1998; 2009). Such relationships evolve over time and are not mutually exclusive. They are influenced by lived-experiences and identities and characterized by measures of interdependence, temporality and perceived commitment (Hinde 1979). The interpersonal relationship norms of interactivity, continuity, and mutuality are applicable to consumer-brand relationships (Aggarwal 2004; Hess and Story 2005). Brands are thus viable partners, contributing to purposive, multiplex and dynamic relationships with features characterized by loyalty and trustworthiness (Fournier 1998, 2009) and imbued with personal meanings based on equity, interaction, affinity and stability levels (Aaker, J., Fournier and Brasel 2004). Consumers have portfolios of brands with which they have relationships. These are influenced by life-worlds and identities, linked to self-concept, and act as meaning-based communication systems (Fournier 1998).

Brand relationship theory has gained interest in its proposition (Bengtsson 2003; Breivik and Thorbjørnsen 2008; Jevons, Gabbott and de Chernatony 2005; Smit, Bronner and Tolboom 2007), in consumer and in psychology contexts (Aggarwal 2004; Esch *et al.* 2006; Heath, Brandt and Nairn 2006; Ji 2002; Kates 2000; Morgan-

Thomas and Veloutsou 2011). In *The Handbook of Brand Relationships*, MacInnis, Park and Priester (2009) present selected research in this area. Despite this interest there has been little consideration of brand relationships between festivals and consumers. Nevertheless, it is suggested that brands with unique and exciting personalities have the potential to be strong relationship partners (Smit, Bronner and Tolboom 2007). This feature is seen in festivals' embodiment of experiential brand elements. Brand relationship theory is therefore a significant conceptual framework for future festivals to apply to the festival-consumer domain.

In presenting the significance of brand relationships to the success of future festival brands, Fournier's (1998) pioneering interpersonal brand relationship paradigm (MacInnis, Park and Priester 2009) is applied to the setting of the Fringe and its consumers. This research involved phenomenological interview case-studies of three women and the brands they use to develop relational phenomena in the consumer products domain. A typology of distinct and meaningful forms of consumer-brand relationships was developed by studying the women's in-depth brand relationship accounts.

### **Consumer-brand relationship forms**

Fournier (1998) identified the fundamental continua of relationship elements as: voluntary-imposed; positive-negative; intense-superficial; enduring-short-term; public-private; formal-informal; and symmetric-asymmetric. These opposing elements were applied to the development of 15 meaningful relationship types, based upon theoretical interpersonal relationship forms. These are characterized in

dimensions of 'friendships', 'kinships', 'affect-based' relationships, 'interim' relationships and a series of 'dark-side relationships'.

In Fournier's (1998) typology of relationship forms, the first series identified are friendships, classified as 'best friendships', 'casual friendships', 'childhood friendships' and 'compartmentalized friendships'. 'Kinships' are defined as family-based relationships. Affect-based relationships range from 'committed partnerships', to 'arranged marriages', 'marriages of convenience' and 'secret affairs'. 'Interim relationships' are characterized as 'flings' or 'courtships' and a final range of 'dark-side' relationships, are 'dependencies', 'enmities', 'enslavements', and 'rebounds'.

These consumer-brand relationship forms may be applicable to one individual across different brands or to one brand across individual cases. Each form is characterized by particular dimensions and further defined by a multi-faceted Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) construct, indicating relationship strength and depth (Fournier 1998; Keller 2008; Smit, Bronner and Tolboom 2007). These are: love and passion; self-concept connection; interdependence; commitment; intimacy; and partner quality (Fournier 1998).

## **RESEARCH SETTING AND APPROACH**

### **The Fringe and its consumers**

The Fringe first occurred in 1947 when eight theatre groups, not invited to Edinburgh's new post-war, International Festival, decided to perform independently

(Moffat 1978). As an open-access, non-programmed arts festival, many features of the Fringe have since developed organically (Ind and Todd 2011), with even its brand name not a strategic decision, but designated by playwright, Robert Kemp, writing in 1948 of the activities: ‘round the fringe of the official Festival drama’ (Moffat 1978: 17).

The contemporary Fringe brand demonstrably contributes to Edinburgh’s experience economy and festival city reputation (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Richards and Palmer 2010). The 2013 Fringe featured 45,464 performances of 2,871 shows in 273 venues; with an estimated 1,943,493 tickets issued (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2013). As one of 12 city-wide festivals it accounts for half of Edinburgh’s four-million annual festival attendances (Festivals Edinburgh and BOP Consulting 2011). The Fringe provides a rich example of a festival with longevity and a mature and recognized brand.

Those stakeholders most engaged in consuming the Fringe were relevant to this study and were accordingly differentiated as primary or secondary (Clarkson 1995; Reid and Arcodia 2002). The 21 consumers interviewed were members of at least one of five primary groups (Table 12.1), based on their self-perceived primary role although there was considerable overlap amongst groups (Todd 2010, 2011).

**Table 12.1: Fringe consumer categories and informants**

<b>Fringe consumer group</b>	<b>Examples of roles within group</b>	<b>Number of informants (assigned pseudonyms)</b>
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Organizing consumers	Fringe Society staff, volunteers, board members	Three (Susan, Margaret, and Mark)
Participating consumers	performers, venue workers, managers, programmers	Seven (Emma, Jenna, Alison, Lydia, Gordon, Alistair, and John)
Attending consumers	audience, ticket-buying public, attendees	Four (Robert, Sophie, Kate and Neil)
Supporting consumers	government /civic organizations, grant funders, independent sponsors	Five (Clare, Daniel, Catherine, Moira and Robin)
Supplying consumers	Ticketing / design agency	Two (Tom and Andrew)

### **Fringe brand relationship interviews**

In applying Fournier's (1998) existing consumer brand relationship forms to the 21 Fringe consumers, the original theoretical underpinning and methodological approach was adapted to the present setting. The interview process was based on Fournier's (1998) approach, sharing the concern of entering informants' worlds without preconceptions and focussing on lived-experience from a first-person perspective (Fournier 1998; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). This phenomenological method was applied to understanding consumers' lived-experiences of the Fringe brand (Thompson, Locander and Pollio, 1989).

The sampling technique was 'snowballing' where initial informants recommended others of theoretical relevance (Goodman 1961). Loosely-themed questions were developed in a semi-structured format and interviews were audio-recorded with consent. During the interviews, complimentary information was sought in the Fringe

brand context, i.e. ‘a first person description of the informant’s brand usage history and... contextual details concerning the informant’s life world’ (Fournier 1998: 357).

Analysis involved verbatim transcription and assignation of pseudonyms to informants. The transcripts became the basis of a hermeneutical circle ‘part-to-whole mode’ of interpretation (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989: 141). A cross-case analysis identified themes that were compared with the dimensions and qualities of Fournier’s (1998) specific brand relationship forms. Emerging brand relationship themes varied, but commonly encountered were Fringe brand loyalty, image/personality, and Fringe-self-image congruence.

## **A TYPOLOGY OF FRINGE-CONSUMER BRAND RELATIONSHIPS**

The typology of Fringe-consumer brand relationship forms is based on the interview findings. The revealed Fringe-consumer brand relationships forms align with Fournier’s (1998) dimensions and BRQ measures. The 21 informants’ Fringe-consumer brand relationships correspond to 11 of Fournier’s (1998) 15 existing consumer-brand relationship forms. These are categorized in terms of brand relationship form dimensions.

### **Best Friendship: Susan**

‘Best friendships’ are voluntary and based on reciprocity, with high self-image congruency and endurance ensured through positive rewards. There was one example of a Fringe-consumer ‘best friendship’ and this involved Susan, (organizing



consumer). Susan has a close and positive relationship with the Fringe. A former reviewer, performer and venue manager, she has been involved for 18 years. Susan is highly enthusiastic about the Fringe and the personal opportunities it has brought. She believes the Fringe reflects her own personality and has high affect for it, saying. ‘I feel very involved. I feel this is just not a job here. I feel very affectionate towards it and also quite protective of it.’

### **Casual friendship: Emma**

‘Casual friendships’ are characterized by infrequent engagement with low intimacy and few expectations for reciprocity. There was one case of a Fringe-consumer ‘casual friendship’ with Emma (participating consumer), a performer of more than 20 years. In the past she had ‘superb fun’ in amateur productions. She characterizes her emotional connection with performing as stronger than her commitment to the Fringe: ‘I’m not very loyal at all!’

### **Childhood friendships: Clare, Robert and Sophie**

While ‘childhood friendships’ are high in affect, they involve infrequent engagement which would have been regular previously. Being reminiscent of earlier times they yield comfort and security of past selves. Three instances were evident. The first was with Clare (supporting consumer) whose Fringe ‘childhood friendship’ was previously based on ‘common associations’ through sponsorship. Once close, this relationship has grown distant, which she attributes to a change in organizational direction: ‘(The Fringe) was like a good friend. It was reliable... you could talk...

there was communication. But I don't think that that's there anymore, we're quite remote now!'

Robert (attending consumer) has 15 years' history with the Fringe as an audience member and previously worked with the Fringe. He describes himself as 'an audience member now, but one who is definitely interested in the success of the Fringe.' Robert has fond Fringe memories and attributes his experiences to contributing to his development and career. Robert is 'sadly, less involved now', but acknowledges since growing older he has had to move on, 'I don't think I'll ever see 40 shows in a festival again!' He describes his relationship as 'a close friend who you trust and can rely on, but don't have to be in contact with all the time!'

Sophie (attending consumer) considers herself as an audience member, although plans to become a performer. She also has eight years' history working with festival organizations. Sophie describes her relationship with the Fringe as 'buddies... we'd catch up when we're in town... I think it would be long term, but it wouldn't be weekly. It'd probably be seasonally.'

### **Compartmentalized friendships: Tom and Jenna**

'Compartmentalized friendships' are highly specialized and situationally confined. Endurance is due to interdependence through contractual obligations. There are socio-emotional rewards associated with these relationships, but having lower intimacy than other friendships, they are easily accessed and exited.

There were two ‘compartmentalized friendships’. The first was Tom’s (supplying consumer). Tom’s organization has supplied the Fringe for three years, contracted in a specialized role. He describes a strong attachment with rewarding opportunities to work creatively, saying: ‘Financially we couldn’t just work for the arts. The Fringe is unique, and it’s such a high profile thing, it’s something we were very keen to be involved in.’ Jenna (participating consumer) manages independent venues leased to production companies during the Fringe. These otherwise operate differently. She depends on having a ‘trusting and open relationship’ with the Fringe saying, ‘it does bring a lot into the organization.’

### **Kinships: Mark, Daniel, Catherine, Moira and Robin**

‘Kinships’ are non-voluntary unions with lineage ties and such family-based relationship forms were seen across five cases. The first was seen between Mark, a venue manager (organizing consumer), and the Fringe. Mark described a ‘close-knit family... we’re all part of a big dysfunctional family and people support each other.’

Four ‘kinships’ were seen between the Fringe and supporting consumers. Daniel’s organization supports Edinburgh’s festivals. He describes the relationship as ‘nurturing but challenging’, a kinship because of mutual necessity, explaining: ‘you’re not just choosing to be together, you have to be together.’ Catherine’s organization supports the Fringe. She describes their relationship as siblings: ‘I’m not saying we’re the bigger brother, but maybe the older brother.’ Similarly, another supporting consumer, Moira describes her brand relationship with the Fringe as being ‘a close partnership’ and ‘trusted’. Her role involves working with related

organizations. Finally, Robin also represents a supporting organization and describes a family network: ‘we’re part of a big family, cousins rather than brothers and sisters.’

### **Committed partnerships: Andrew, Alison and Lydia**

‘Committed partnerships’ were seen in four cases. These are long-term, exclusive and voluntary in character with high commitment levels, so are true partnerships being socially-supported with high affect, intimacy, and trust. The first was Andrew’s (supplying consumer). His organization has exclusively supplied the Fringe 17 years. He works closely with it on a trusting and bespoke basis: ‘we wrote our systems specifically for the Fringe’.

Alison (participating consumer) is an independent venue producer of more than 20 years, and works exclusively with the Fringe: ‘(it) gives you that opportunity to create your own professional history through determination’. As another participating consumer, Lydia is a Fringe venue producer. Involved from childhood she first performed in the 1970s and has been an artistic programmer for more than 20 years. She describes herself as ‘sensationalist’ about the Fringe, seeing it as ‘a phenomenon’.

### **Arranged marriages: Margaret**

‘Arranged marriages’ are non-voluntary and generally third-party imposed. These are long-term, exclusive and tend to be relatively low in affect. Margaret (organizing consumer) is in an ‘arranged marriage’ with the Fringe. She was elected to her post with the Fringe Society more than ten years ago. Margaret has an exclusive

relationship with the Fringe. Admitting a low previous emotional connection, she is now however 'hugely proud of it'.

### **Marriages of convenience: Gordon and Alistair**

These relationships are long-term and committed in nature but influenced by environmental forces. There were two 'marriages of convenience', both between participating consumers and the Fringe. Gordon, a former actor and current producer, has attended the Fringe since its beginning. Involved in amateur dramatics for 40 years, Gordon was previously a keen audience member, saying: 'personally it was the highlight of the year.' Now the survival of his theatre company depends on the Fringe: 'today it's purely commercial'. Alistair programmes an independent arts venue. He sees opportunities to produce new creative work specifically for the Fringe, saying: 'it's completely different to what we do normally'.

### **Dependencies: Kate**

These 'dark-side' relationships are defined as obsessive and emotional. They evoke feelings of irreplaceability and separation anxiety, described as selfish attractions with high tolerance of transgressions. There was one 'dependency' Fringe-consumer brand relationship, seen in Kate (attending consumer). An audience member, Kate is a life-long theatre-goer. Seeing the Fringe as an intensive opportunity to attend productions by local amateur dramatic companies, Kate is emotional about the Fringe, saying: 'it's very important to me. If it wasn't there I would absolutely hate it... If it wasn't there, it would be awful. What would I do with myself in August?' Kate prefers to attend

performances alone: 'I am selfish! I go to shows myself, because then I don't have to worry about anybody else enjoying it!' While Kate believes the Fringe has become 'over-commercial and over-priced' in recent years, this does not deter her.

### **Flings: Neil**

As interim relationship forms, 'flings' are characterized as short-term or time-bounded. While emotional reward is associated with flings they lack commitment and reciprocity. Neil (attending consumer) is in a 'fling' with the Fringe. An audience member, Neil is 'not loyal'. Rather, he enjoys the Fringe atmosphere, saying: 'I see that huge kind of buzz and vibrancy and lots of activity as being good thing. I wouldn't want it all year round, but ...that to me signifies the festival is here!'

### **Courtships: John**

'Courtships' are also interim relationships however these will develop into future committed partnerships. John (participating consumer) is a founding member of a young theatre company that has performed at the Fringe for the past three years. John's 'courtship' brand relationship with the Fringe is based upon opportunities counterbalanced with financial and personal risk. As John's company becomes established this relationship is likely to develop into a partnership. Presently he sees the Fringe as 'very welcoming but very demanding... it has all the honey you can have, but it's also got all the bees that can sting you!'

## **DISCUSSION**

Fringe-consumer brand relationship forms are varied with the majority of Fringe defined in dimensions of friendship, kinship and marriage. There was evidence of three distinct organizing consumer-brand relationships an: 'arranged marriage', 'kinship' and 'best friendship', all sharing elements of longevity and characterized by exclusivity and intensity. Susan's voluntarily formed, intense and enduring 'best friendship' was the strongest relationship with high affect and reciprocity levels. Susan viewed her own interests and background as being highly congruent to the Fringe and her brand relationship was perhaps the most positive of all 21.

Of the seven participating consumers, there were five brand relationship forms identified across this broadly characterized group: a 'courtship'; 'casual friendship'; 'compartmentalized friendship'; two 'committed partnerships'; and two 'marriages of convenience'. All were positive in their dimensions. Both supplying consumers had enduring Fringe-consumer brand relationships. Andrew's 'committed partnership' had developed throughout the years and was characterized by high levels of reciprocal and exclusive support, commitment and trust. A well-established relationship, this would endure adversity because of its inherent intimacy. Tom's supplier brand relationship was a 'compartmentalized friendship', although had potential to become more established. Within the attending consumers group there were three forms of Fringe-consumer brand relationships: two 'childhood friendships'; a 'fling' and a 'dependency'. A homogenous series of brand relationships were seen in the five supporting stakeholders interviewed with four demonstrating 'kinships' of 'non-

voluntary unions with lineage ties' (Fournier 1998: 362). This similarity was unsurprising as these organizations work in a network.

The future significance of these festival consumer-brand relationship forms deserves further investigation as brand relationship quality and strength alters over time in line with personal perceptions, experiences and external forces (Fournier 1998). It may be possible to identify particular factors contributing to festival-consumers' 'courtships' evolving into longer-term brand relationships; or to determine why close, frequently-engaged brand relationships can become 'childhood friendships'. Examination of the festival consumer-brand relationship setting is required to establish any incidences of Fournier's (1998) 'dark' brand relationships, those secretly held, or based upon dimensions of addiction, pain, and compulsion. One 'dependency' Fringe-consumer relationship form was identified, although without the associated negative dimensions. It may be that such relationships do not have a natural fit with festival consumers who are engaged in brand relationships on voluntary and public bases. This is a worthy question for future festivals, meriting further investigation in festival-consumer brand contexts, where consumers' have intrinsic motivations to attend.

Being a contemporary investigation in the Fringe setting, this study would benefit from longitudinal consideration of consumers' changing roles and the consequent impacts upon brand relationships. As this chapter aims to present the relevance of brand relationship theory to future festivals, it should be highlighted the findings presented here summarise existing Fringe-consumer brand relationship forms. These may provide an initial grounding for future festivals research in this area.



## CONCLUSIONS

The implications for the future of the event industry based upon the present are manifold. Brands are 'no longer made by organizations. Rather they are constructed in a space in which organizations are influencers and listeners' (Ind and Todd 2011: 47). Based on the standard world context, the forecast future festivalscape scenario envisioned in this chapter predicts an increasingly fragmented festivals market.

Communications will be led by new technological abilities and numerous substitute experiential offers available by various means. The future festivalscape will therefore be highly competitive and consumer-led. As this future evolves, the successful engagement of consumers with festival brands, as equitable and viable relationship partners, is essential to the survival of festivals.

Actively assuming a brand relationship perspective rather than a traditional marketing approach allows enhanced understanding of the role of brands in consumers' lives (Breivik and Thorbjørnsen 2008) with advantages of: 'reduced marketing costs, ease of access, acquiring new customers, customer retention, brand equity and more profit' (Smit, Bronner and Tolboom 2007: 627). In developing future festival brand concepts managers must build profitable, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal relationships with consumers through effectively leveraging functional, symbolic and experiential conceptual brand dimensions. The present Fringe-consumer brand relationship typology provides evidence of such brand relationships within the setting of a festival-consumer setting and this is of relevance to successful future festival brand managers.

Being an exploratory study of festival-consumer brand relationship, this chapter provides evidence of Fringe-consumer brand relationships across various roles and stages. The resulting Fringe-consumer brand relationship typology contributes to future knowledge by presenting this conceptual framework. Although an initial study and specific to the empirical Fringe setting, it is applicable to future festivals in its methodological approach and findings. There is strong evidence of a series of positive Fringe-consumer brand relationship forms across the sample that are rewarding and reciprocal, rather than negative. These share core dimensions of Fournier's (1998) consumer brand relationships. There may be much to learn from these and further questions to ask in terms of application to future management practice.

Returning to Fournier's (1998) BRQ measures of: love and passion; self-concept connection; interdependence; commitment; intimacy; and partner quality, there are potential benefits to considering this matrix as an alternative to consumer brand loyalty levels. Furthermore brand personality theory may be useful in shaping future marketing decisions. Despite receiving little attention in festival settings to date, future consideration of these constructs is recommended. As noted, there is evidence of these in the present Fringe-consumer brand relationships, based upon friendship, marriage and kinship forms. It is timely to question the most effective means of applying these concepts to the future marketing of festivals.

This chapter closes by emphasizing the relevance of the interpersonal relationship paradigm to future festivals. This is particularly in terms of its potential deep resonance with consumers who are seeking highly personalized, self-image-congruent, attached and intrinsic experiences with festival brands (Park *et al.* 2009). While there

is much to be discovered about this important construct, managers of festivals should act now to harness this approach and develop their own brands as future-proof festival-consumer brand relationship partners, contributing to purposive, multiplex and dynamic relationships with consumers.

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