Engaging with consumers using social media: a case study of music festivals

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Abstract

Purpose – Social media has fundamentally changed the consumer decision process, and in the last decade a more nuanced view of how consumers engage with brands has emerged. Instead of the traditional purchase funnel, consumers research products and services during an extended evaluation stage, and after purchase, they often enter into an open-ended relationship with the brand, sharing their experience with it using social media. This paper describes the new consumer decision journey, and then adds to the body of research on events and festivals management by applying this new model to events and festivals.

Design/methodology/approach – The study uses a case study methodology with a multi-method approach to analyze the use of social media at three major music festivals. Case studies offer depth and comprehensiveness for understanding a specific phenomenon, enabling inductive and rich description, and are specifically welcome in new situations where little is known about the phenomenon.

Findings – In general, the music festivals profiled are proactive in their use of social media, engaging with consumers throughout the consumer decision journey. In particular, social media is making the “evaluate” and “advocate” stages of the decision journey more relevant for festival marketers.

Originality/value – This paper provides an illuminating view of the use of social media in an event and festival context. It supports the theory previously developed in this area, and is further evidence of the powerful impact that new technology can have on consumer behavior. The results have important implications for both researchers and practitioners interested in the marketing of festivals and events.

Keywords Social media, Music festivals, Consumer decision journey, Consumer behaviour

Introduction

The marketing communications environment has changed enormously in the last decade. Technology and the internet have fundamentally altered the way the world interacts and communicates. Via technology, consumers have more ways to interact with companies and brands, and importantly, have the means for initiating these interactions that did not exist a decade ago. Gone are the days of the passive consumers who were largely dependent on companies’ success in reaching them for engagement. Traditional approaches to branding that put emphasis on mass media techniques are less and less effective in a marketplace where customers have access to massive amounts of information about brands, products and companies, and in which social networks have, in some cases, supplanted brand networks (Keller, 2009).
Although social media still accounts for <1 percent of an average marketing budget (Divol et al., 2012), we are beginning to understand how social media interacts with consumers to expand product and brand recognition, drive sales and profitability and engender loyalty. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) suggest that tourism marketers can no longer ignore social media, and this is also true for marketers of music festivals – more so in fact, given their young audiences. This paper therefore explores the use of social media in the music festival sector. The paper begins by looking at social media platforms and how they have emerged as the leading digital communications channel for many consumers. The paper then describes the new consumer decision journey in the digital landscape, and follows with case studies on three music festivals from the USA and Europe, describing how they are using social media to engage with consumers at every step of this decision journey. A discussion section critiques the implementation of social media by the festivals and offers important practical implications for practitioners as well as an agenda for further research in this rapidly changing digital environment.

Social media
Social media platforms are emerging as the dominant digital communications channel, particularly for people under 34 years of age (Chappuis et al., 2011). In 2011, 33 percent of consumers in the USA used social networks to navigate content on the web, up from 13 percent in 2008, and the same year social network use doubled among those over 55. As consumers spend more time on these networks, decisions about what to purchase often reflect interactions with friends and other influencers. Marketers are therefore adapting their strategies to reach increasingly networked consumers, and are placing more emphasis on tactics such as word-of-mouth and storytelling. Social media advertising continues to grow and predictions are that it will increase further and yield relatively stronger results because of its ability to tightly target audiences based on social media activity (Cohen, 2011).

Many companies have embraced social media because of its potential for engagement and collaboration with consumers. Through social media, marketers can gain rich, unmediated consumer insights, faster than ever before. Others see the value of social media in its networking. According to Facebook, the average user has 130 friends on the social network, and when people hear about a product or service from a friend, they become a customer at a 15 percent higher rate than when they find out about it through other means. The growth of social networking is mainly driven by Facebook, which reached 90 percent of US social media users and 85 percent of European users in 2010, and grew more than 120 percent that year. YouTube and Twitter hold second and third position in the USA and Europe, but the European market shows much stronger growth (comScore, 2011).

The academic literature related to social media is still in its infancy, and offers marketing managers very little guidance for incorporating social media into their communications strategies (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Some researchers have suggested ways that marketing managers can leverage social media by shaping consumer discussions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mangold and Faulds, 2009), and others have offered strategies for measuring the success of social media marketing campaigns (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). What is becoming clear is that there is a strong return on investment for companies investing in social media (Dholakia and Durham, 2010; Cruz and Mendelsohn, 2010).
The literature on the use of social media by festival organizers is also quite limited, but we do know that for destination marketing organizations (DMOs), the most influential social media tools are Facebook (64 percent), Twitter (26 percent), TripAdvisor (4 percent), YouTube (3 percent) and Foursquare (1 percent) (Sparkloft Media, 2011). The two most common objectives for social media efforts for destinations are to increase awareness for the destination and to build engagement with consumers (see Figure 1). VisitBritain is a good example of a DMO with a strong social media strategy that embeds Facebook (LoveUK), Flickr, YouTube and Twitter, supported by utilization of new mobile technology. For instance, in 2010, they launched an iPhone application for British film locations which had over 40,000 downloads, and included Google maps and Facebook integration system allowing users to find their favorite film locations, take a picture and then post it on their social networking sites.

In the entertainment field, Rothschild (2011) has looked at how social media is used, managed and perceived by sports and entertainment venue managers. He found that many (57 percent) have a defined social media strategy, and experience higher revenues than those that do not. This supports emerging research that shows those how brands that conduct social media interactions with consumers in a meaningful way are seeing a positive impact on the bottom line. Chadwick Martin Bailey research (Cruz and Mendelsohn, 2010) states that the likelihood for individuals to buy/recommend increases after they follow a brand via social media (see Figure 2). The fact that almost 50 percent of a brand’s Facebook fans are already customers further boosts this proposition. A positive experience from direct brand interaction will lead to repeat purchases and recommendations.

**Consumer decision making in an online environment**

How consumers make decisions has been at the core of much of marketing examination over the past 60 or 70 years (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005), but very little is known about how consumers make buying decisions in online environments (Häubl and Trifts, 2000). The internet and the use of social media have fundamentally changed the consumer decision process (Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi, 2012). In the past, marketers assumed that consumers started with a large number of potential brands in mind and methodically narrowed their choices until they had decided which

![Figure 1.](image_url)

**Figure 1.**

DMO objectives of social media efforts

**Source:** Based on Sparkloft Media (2011)
one to buy. After purchase, consumer relationships with the brand typically focussed on the use of the product or service only. This traditional purchase funnel is depicted in Figure 3.

Court et al. (2009) have introduced a more nuanced view of how consumers engage with brands called the consumer decision journey (see Figure 4). They developed their model from a study of the purchase decisions of nearly 20,000 consumers across five industries and three continents. Their research revealed that rather than...
systematically narrowing their choices until they had decided what to buy, consumers add and subtract brands from a group under consideration during an extended evaluation stage. After purchase, they often enter into an open-ended relationship with the brand, sharing their experience with it online through social media. The four stages of the consumer decision journey are consider; evaluate; buy; and enjoy, advocate and bond.

**Stage 1: consider**
The consumer decision journey begins with the consumer’s top-of-mind consideration set: product, services or brands assembled from exposure to ads, a store display, an encounter at a friend’s house or other stimuli. In the funnel model, the consider stage contains the largest number of brands; but today’s consumers, assaulted by media and awash in choices, often reduce the number of products they consider at the outset (Edelman, 2010). Off-line channels such as television advertising, in-store browsing and direct word of mouth are at their most influential at this stage, but as the consumer moves from consider to evaluate, the internet plays an increasingly important role. The model proposed by Court et al. has been modified slightly here to include the “Zero Moment of Truth,” a term coined to describe the new reality where marketers have to compete for shoppers’ attention online long before a purchase decision is made (Lecinski, 2011).

**Stage 2: evaluate**
At the evaluation stage, consumer outreach to marketers and other sources of information is much more likely to shape their ensuing choices than marketers’ efforts
to persuade them. One study of a specific model of a television, for example, found that at the evaluation stage, consumers did not start with search engines; rather, they went directly to Amazon.com and other retail sites that, with their rich array of product-comparison information, were becoming the most important influencers (Edelman, 2010). One research study in the travel sector showed that a large percentage of consumers read reviews of hotels, attractions and restaurants prior to vacation, and over half “liked” Facebook pages or posted Facebook updates before their holiday (Lab42, 2012).

Having a presence in an online virtual world is another social media opportunity for marketers to showcase their services. An example is second life, an online world with a million registered users and a thriving virtual economy. Second life allows its users to create a new, and improved, digital version of themselves. “Residents” can buy land, build structures and start businesses. The service is fast becoming a three-dimensional test bed for marketers, including Sony BMG Music Entertainment, Sun Microsystems, Nissan, Adidas and Toyota. Retailers have set up shops to sell digital as well as real world versions of their products, and even musicians can promote their albums with virtual appearances. In January 2013, for example, second life hosted a virtual music festival called the London winter music festival, featuring ten (mostly British) musicians.

Online brand communities can be another effective social media tool for marketers at this evaluation stage. Brand communities are defined as “specialized, non-geographically bound communities, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006, p. 45), and participants in online brand communities use a web platform to interact with one another based on this common attraction for a brand. The emergence of brand communities has coincided with the growth in consumer empowerment. They are venues where intense brand loyalty is expressed and fostered, and emotional connection with the brand forged in customers. What makes these communities bond is “love” of something as demonstrated by members who go out of their way to help without any financial interest (Shirky, 2008, p. 104). Research on such communities has found that commitment to a brand can be influenced (positively) by encouraging interactions with groups of like-minded customers and identification with the group in social context offered (and sponsored) by the firm and the brand, but controlled and managed primarily by the consumers themselves. A challenge in building and managing online brand communities is that consumers can easily associate marketers’ efforts with extrinsic motives of profit exploitation and thus become less likely to engage with, and contribute to, such a community (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2011). One possible solution is to develop a platform of online brand communities encouraging consumers to voluntarily share and exchange their ideas rather than imposing the organization’s own ideas, such as sales coupons or sweepsstakes. This implies that marketers should employ a passive role when facilitating brand communities.

Stage 3: buy
Point of purchase – which exploits placement, packaging, availability, pricing and sales interaction – is an ever more powerful touch point. It has been suggested that companies should avoid hard selling on social media sites (Chan and Guillet, 2011), but for many marketers, social media platforms are fast becoming more than a customer relationship tool (Gibbons, 2010). Merchants on Facebook and MySpace have
added e-commerce stores to their fan pages, hoping users will scan lists of for-sale items and services – such as floral bouquets, hand-crafted jewelry and spa treatments – and click a button to add them to online shopping carts (Needleman, 2010). Many hotels too, now offer room-booking technology on their Facebook pages, which is leading to incremental rise in sales (Blank, 2011). But whether consumers will embrace shopping on social-media sites remains to be seen. Facebook has come under fire over its privacy policies, and some shoppers may feel uncomfortable entering their credit-card information on the site, while others may be wary of making a purchase that could be broadcast on users’ news feeds or profiles (Needleman, 2010).

**Stage 4: enjoy, advocate and bond**

Interestingly, after purchase, a deeper brand connection begins as the consumer interacts with the product and with new online touch points. For example, Court et al. (2009) found that more than 60 percent of consumers with facial skin care products conduct online research about the products after purchase – a touch point not entirely captured in traditional purchaser funnel models of communication. In the travel sector, research has shown that while on vacation, over 70 percent of travelers post vacation photos on a social network or update their Facebook status. After returning home travelers are still active on social media networks, posting reviews or photos, or “liking” Facebook pages related to a specific destination (Lab42, 2012).

One relatively new social media platform used by marketers to engage with consumers at this enjoy, advocate and bond stage is the emergence of geo-location sites such as Foursquare, Gowalla and Loopt. Geo-location is the identification of the real-world geographic location of an object. Increasingly, that object is the cell phone; and since the cell phone is attached to the owner, its geo-location can be a pretty accurate indicator of where people are. Foursquare encourages consumers to broadcast their whereabouts (or “check-in”) in exchange for discounts or coupons, etc. Foursquare recently hit one billion check-ins (Mogg, 2011). People use the Foursquare application on their smartphones to check in to places like restaurants, pubs and hotels, and just about any other type of physical and even non-physical location. Once they check-in, users often share that information with friends, families and followers on Facebook and Twitter. Foursquare users compete for badges, points and “mayorships,” awarded to those who check in to a place most frequently.

Finally, social media at this final stage of the decision journey can be used to involve consumers in the generation of new ideas. Brand communities were mentioned as an important influencer in the evaluation stage of the consumer decision journey, but because brand community members have a strong interest in the product and in the brand, they can also be a valuable source of innovation. In a study of brand community members, research found that the stronger the identification with the brand, and the higher the brand trust, the more likely a consumer was willing to contribute to open innovation projects initiated by a brand. This activity has been called “crowdsourcing,” a term coined in 2006 by *Wired* magazine contributing editor Jeff Howe (Sullivan, 2010). Crowdsourcing-led innovation means inviting customers, employees or the general public at large into the innovation process to help improve products, services or marketing efforts. Consumers get a direct line to the company and the opportunity to steer offerings to better reflect their needs, while companies benefit from getting more insights, opinions and wisdom that can be translated into actionable innovation ideas for less money than a typical R&D initiative. Dell, for example created an online
venue called IdeaStorm to give customers a central location where they could share ideas with the company. In the first three years, IdeaStorm crossed the 10,000 idea mark and implemented nearly 400 ideas.

Objectives and method
Given this new consumer decision journey with its four stages of “consider,” “evaluate,” “buy” and “enjoy, advocate and bond,” the main objective of this study was to apply the new model to music festivals and add to the body of research on events and festivals management in order to both validate theory and to provide practical advice to event marketers. The model applies to consumer engagement with brands, and although there are few studies on brand ownership and brand control related to festivals, Mossberg and Getz (2006) argue that “brand thinking” can be applied to festivals, as it can be applied to products, services, an organization, a person, a team or a symbol (p. 308). Based on a case study of 14 festivals and events, they concluded that festivals can be managed as brands. d’Astous et al. (2006) concur, although they do propose that festival brands have distinctive characteristics, in that consumption is mainly social, and occurs within a limited period of time.

A case study methodology (Yin, 1989) with a multi-method approach (Brewer and Hunter, 1989) was used to achieve this objective. Case studies offer depth and comprehensiveness for understanding a specific phenomenon, enabling inductive and rich description. Case research is specifically welcome in new situations where little is known about the phenomenon and in situations where current theories seem inadequate (Eisenhardt, 1989). Three major international music festivals were chosen for analysis; Bonnaroo music and arts festival, Manchester, Tennessee, Lollapalooza music festival in Chicago and Latitude festival in Suffolk, UK. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with music festival management, content analysis was conducted on festival web sites, blogs and social media platforms, and ethnographic research involved both participation in social media initiatives and attendance at the three music festivals. For example, one of the researchers obtained a wristband with built-in radio frequency identification (RFID) technology at the Bonnaroo festival, in order to experience the social media engagement that this technology facilitated. Ethnography is a qualitative research design aimed at exploring cultural phenomena which reflect the knowledge and system of meanings guiding the life of a cultural group (Geertz, 1973). It was pioneered in the field of socio-cultural anthropology but has also become a popular method in various other fields of social sciences – particularly in sociology, communication studies and history. It is often employed for gathering empirical data on human societies and cultures, and data collection is commonly done through participant observation, and this was the case for the three case studies presented in the following section. Researchers attended (and participated in social media initiatives) at all three festivals in summer 2012.

Bonnaroo music and arts festival, Manchester, Tennessee
The Bonnaroo music and arts festival is an annual four-day music festival created and produced by Superfly Presents and AC Entertainment, and is held at Great Stage Park on a 700-acre farm in Manchester, Tennessee, USA. It hosted its 11th annual event from June 7 to 10, 2012. The main attractions of the festival are the multiple stages of musical styles including indie rock, world music, hip hop, jazz, Americana, bluegrass, country music, folk, gospel, reggae, electronica and other alternative music.
The festival also features craftsmen and artisans selling unique products, food and drink vendors, a comedy tent, silent disco, cinema tent and a ferris wheel.

The event attracts between 75,000 and 85,000 fans every year, and a 2005 study calculated that the economic impact of the event on Coffee County was more than US$14 million in business revenues and more than $4 million in personal income (Arik and Penn, 2005). The event relies heavily on aggressive digital marketing campaigns to generate publicity and attract visitors. Tactics include establishing relationships with bloggers to stimulate excitement for the concerts, leveraging social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to achieve maximum exposure, and exploring mobile technology. At Bonnaroo 2011, for example, an air-conditioned barn in the middle of the festival ground sponsored by Fuse TV offered a private concert with an up-and-coming artist for those who checked into the barn on Foursquare. Once a visitor checked in on Foursquare, their followers would be able to see that they were at the Fuse TV barn and then choose to go there themselves. After the fans checked in, they were allowed into the barn for the show. Organizers provided the fans with a free buffet, ice-cold water and a chance to see an intimate live show with just 40 other people. For a simple check-in on Foursquare fans were rewarded with an experience not found anywhere else in the festival.

In 2012, instead of following the regular method and announcing the lineup on the official web site, Bonnaroo announced their lineup on music streaming social media program Spotify. Spotify has been popular in Europe since its release in 2006 but had only been available in the USA for six months when the festival used it for their lineup announcement. The initiative was a big success attracting over 25,000 subscribers who were able to listen to songs from all the bands in the lineup and discover new, exciting acts playing at the festival.

But perhaps the organizers’ greatest success with social media in 2012 was the use of RFID technology to foster engagement. Each attendee was given a wristband which served as the only form of ticket to the festival. The wristbands had built-in RFID technology, and could be swiped by attendees at one of 20 check-in-portals around the venue. Scanning their wristbands at the towers would check visitors in on Facebook, enabling their friends to see exactly where they were and what band they were seeing. This could be used not only to share experiences, but to also provide a location so that friends at the festival could find them. At the end of the day, the system made a second post to that guest’s Facebook: a recap of all of the acts the person had seen that day with a link to Spotify that provided the act’s Bonnaroo set list and a playlist of studio tracks of those songs.

Throughout the weekend Bonnaroo put announcements up on the big screens encouraging consumers to use social media and post pictures of their experience. Also, when the festival ended they posted pictures on their Facebook page, including a picture of all the campsites asking their followers to tag themselves in the picture where they camped. Of the 80,000 people who purchased wristbands, 74,000 registered them online and about half of those connected the wristbands to their Facebook accounts. Chad Issaq, executive vice president of partnerships for Superfly Presents, said on average each of those 200,000 check-ins received about seven “likes” or comments, leading to approximately 1.5 million social impressions (Sorrells, 2012).

In the weeks leading up to the festival, organizers encouraged guests to register their wristband online, offering incentives such as VIP upgrades and festival merchandize and the chance to win a Ford Escape from Ford Motor Company, which sponsored the social check-ins. “We also drove home the message of registration as a
way to personalise your wristband,” Issaq said. “We didn’t want to focus on ‘register’; it was ‘personalise’.” About 55,000 individuals opted in for a chance to win the car and another 10,000 agreed to receive future communications from Ford. In addition to that data, the auto company benefited from having its name associated with each Facebook check-in: the online posts included a graphic saying “Checked in by Ford Escape”:

“I think that was the most valuable piece – the content on the back end,” Issaq said. “That’s what people were most excited about.” Organisers plan to take what they learned this year to develop strategy for 2013. “I would want to communicate earlier,” he added. “We pulled this together in about four or five weeks. I would also want more incentives, more special offers, and at the physical event, more strategically placed portals.”

Monitoring social media at the event revealed some quirky trends. The national office of Zehnder Communications tracked social media data from the festival, and 91 percent of social media conversations for Bonnaroo were 140-character tweets (Wadhwani, 2012). Bonnaroo’s most mentioned subjects were crowd, hippies, shower, sleep, beer, camping and mud. The top fashion-related mentioned words were nude, followed by bathing suit, costume, tie dye, fanny pack, bandana, sandals and body art. The top slang words used were awesome, dude, sick, killer and dope!

**Latitude festival based in Suffolk, UK**

The Latitude festival is another annual festival and takes place in Henham Park, Southwold, Suffolk, England. First held in July 2006, Latitude has a comprehensive bill of musicians, bands and artists across four stages – The Obelisk Arena, The Word Arena, The Sunrise Arena and the Huw Stephens curated Lake Stage. The festival comprises elements of theatre, art, comedy, cabaret, poetry, politics, dance and literature. The festival is run by Festival Republic, who also run the Reading and Leeds festivals and are contracted to run Glastonbury festival.

The four-day event attracts approximately 35,000 people in total. Melvin Benn, managing director of Festival Republic, compares it to a Sunday newspaper supplement – a complete cultural offering where you can meander through music, theatre and dance to comedy, film and literature. In 2012, it hosted performances from 1,200 acts across 11 arts stages and four music stages – many more than other commercial festivals which might have five or six stages. Its big draw in 2012 was Lang Lang, a Chinese pianist, who gave majestic performances of Chopin and Liszt to a Sunday-lunchtime crowd on an open stage set in the lake.

Latitude has created an interactive blogging account on tumblr that can be followed by fans so they can be regularly updated on the happenings of the music festival. The blog is used to post interviews with artists, as well as Spotify playlists created by the artists themselves featuring their own favorite acts from the festival. Latitude also posts articles written about the festival and information about events preceding the festival. Followers of this blog are able to re-blog all of Latitude festival’s posts and show them to their own followers, creating more awareness for the festival.

The festival has also encouraged a brand community by developing an official forum where fans are able to post topics relating to the festival including the lineup, camping and ride sharing. The forum is managed by Latitude so they are able to post information and news for the fans to talk about but they are not too imposing so the fans get to talk about their own ideas and thoughts. The forum has been popular, with over 100,000 posts since its beginning. Latitude has built-in ticket sellers on its
Facebook pages. This enables fans to buy tickets to the festival without having to leave their Facebook page and they are then able to share their purchase with their friends.

Organizers use Twitter extensively to communicate with visitors, and to keep them informed of latest developments. When heavy rain was forecast for the 2012 event, organizers used Twitter to reassure ticket-holders that the event was going ahead. An example of a message sent out on the first day said: “News just in – the traffic is moving along nicely & there are currently no queues [...] hurry up and let’s get Latitude 2012 started!” After the event, visitors were encouraged (with the chance of winning tickets to the next Latitude festival) via the web site, to complete a survey about their experiences at the event.

The free Latitude festival app for the iPhone is full of information for the festivalgoer to use before, during and after the festival. It features a comprehensive guide to all the bands that played the festival with information about all of them and is categorized by what stage and day they played on. Along with the lineup, there is a guidebook of details about the festival including travel, maps, care and safety, and much more. While browsing the app, music from all the bands playing the festival can be accessed and played from the festival’s Spotify account. Festivalgoers can also see Latitude festival’s Twitter account straight from the app and are able to connect their Facebook and Twitter accounts to the app to communicate with Latitude festival.

By using this app, festivalgoers can access all of the information regarding Latitude festival that they need, in order to enjoy and relive the festival.

Jodie Sims is responsible for social media marketing at Latitude, and says: “Our social media platforms and channels are very successful as you can see by subscriber numbers (’likes’, ’fans’, ’followers’ etc.) and hence why we continue with certain avenues such as the ’See Tickets’ tab.” At the time of writing, Latitude festival had 31,385 likes on Facebook, 33,328 followers on Twitter and 166,177 video views on Youtube.

**Lollapalooza festival, Chicago**

Lollapalooza music festival is a Chicago festival that was attended by 100,000 people over three days in 2012. The festival is run by C3 Presents, an independent concert promotion, production and management company. In addition to Lollapalooza and Austin City Limits, C3 Presents is responsible for over 1,000 events across the USA every year. An early adopter of social media, C3 has seen huge success linking online conversations to event sales. The Lollapalooza web site was a first mover in allowing its users to engage and share through social channels that were integrated into the site itself. The festival has a large number of followers on both Facebook and Twitter, and has creatively used social media to engage consumers. For example, before announcing the highly anticipated lineup for the 2012 festival, organizers struck a deal with CTA, the Chicago Transportation Authority, and employed a successful tactic to get people talking about the festival on social media, especially Twitter. They used the screens usually taken up by advertisements on the trains that are frequented by large numbers of people every day. Instead of an advertisement, the screen had a line or two of lyrics from bands that would be playing the festival with a hashtag afterwards; something that fans could attach to their Twitter messages to increase buzz about Lollapalooza (the hashtag symbol – # – is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet and was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages). Once they started releasing these lyrics all over the city, Twitter users were writing about the festival and posting pictures, all trying to figure out which bands these lyrics came from. It created major excitement for the official lineup announcement and caused people all over the USA to start tweeting about the festival.
The same year, Lollapalooza announced a contest where fans created an application for the festival that would be the Official Lollapalooza Fan App. Once the apps were created, anyone could vote for the app that they like best and would like to use while at the festival. This created a direct fan relationship with the festival, giving consumers more choice over their experience at the festival. The winning app, powered by The Hard Rock Hotel, included stage schedules and lineups, and bios and details about the bands who were playing. Users could create their own schedule based on the bands that they wanted to see and there was a map to help navigate the appearance of groups on stage. Another feature of the app was a group texting tool powered by GroupMe, designed to help large groups of people connect all over the grounds. And of course, as with other apps, it was integrated with social media, so users could tweet, Facebook and Instagram their way through the festival without having to leave the app.

C3 Presents are confident that investing the time and resources in social media is worth the investment. The company employed marketing analysts Cardinal Path to implement and configure Google Analytics to provide information about their social media implementation, such as which fans are using social media and sharing content, what social media is being used the most, whether or not visitors that interact with social media are more likely to buy a ticket, if social media is driving more consumer traffic to the website, and if that traffic is buying tickets (Cardinal Path, 2012).

Cardinal Path looked at the difference in engagement and sales between those who use social media applications while on the site and those who do not. They also looked at the behavioral differences between those who arrived at the site via social media, and those who came through other channels. A combination of customized event tracking, campaign tagging, custom variables and a complex cross domain implementation and configuration was deployed to include the tracking of each social media outlet on the site. Some impressive social media related insights were gleaned from the data gathered. Fan engagement metrics such as time on site, bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who enter the site and “bounce” or leave the site rather than continue viewing other pages within the same site), page views per visit and interaction improved significantly across the board as a result of social media applications. Users of the social media applications on Lollapalooza.com also spent twice as much money at the festival as non-users. Over 66 percent of the traffic referred from Facebook, MySpace and Twitter was a result of sharing applications and Lollapalooza’s messaging to its fans on those platforms (Cardinal Path, 2012).

Discussion
The case study analysis provides support for the new model of consumer decision making presented earlier. The cases show that as festival goers progress through the four-stage decision journey, consumer driven marketing – word of mouth, online research, consumer reviews – has increasing impact (Court et al., 2009), and that social media is making the “evaluate” and “advocate” stages more relevant.

At the “consider” stage, social media is not widely employed by festival marketers, but as the consumer moves from “consider” to “evaluate,” online engagement plays an increasingly important role. Consumers are clearly turning to user-generated content to evaluate various festivals, and blogging web sites are an effective tool to reach consumer during this evaluation stage. Both Bonnaroo and Latitude have built relationships with bloggers who are creating buzz for the concerts, and Latitude’s interactive blogging account on tumblr is a good example of the passive engagement in a brand community referred to earlier (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2011). Prior to
the actual events, both Bonnaroo and Latitude are using Spotify to generate excitement and awareness – Bonnaroo to announce its line-up of musicians, and Latitude to showcase playlists created by their artists. Lollapalooza is continually messaging to fans on Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, and is also drawing interest from new fans by starting a competition to create an official festival app.

At the “buy” stage, the only festival that appears to be using social media to sell tickets is Latitude, who has built-in ticket sellers on its Facebook pages. It is during the festival, that social media is being integrated extensively to enhance the consumer’s experience and provide a more interactive music festival. As Lee et al. (2008) have suggested the festival environment provides a unique business opportunity to marketers because customer satisfaction and reactions are influenced in the “festivalscapes,” where festival benefits are produced and consumed. Marketers at Lollapalooza have been particularly creative, launching first a competition to create the official festival app – evidence of “crowdsourcing” (Sullivan, 2010); and then implementing the app itself, allowing consumers to view stage schedules and lineups, and bios and details about the bands who were playing. The app was integrated with social media, so users could tweet, Facebook and Instagram their way through the festival without having to leave the app.

Another innovative social media tactic used during the “enjoy, advocate and bond” stage was Bonnaroo’s use of RFID technology to foster engagement with visitors, creating nearly 1.5 million impressions. Bonnaroo also successfully employed geo-location software, using Foursquare to reward fans with a unique festival experience. When the Bonnaroo festival ended they encouraged visitors to continue the conversation, asking them for example, to tag themselves in the picture where they camped. Previous research has emphasized the importance of “post-visiting” (Brown and Chalmers, 2003, p. 352), allowing travelers to communicate and discuss their visit when they have returned home, and recent analysis of tourists shows that after returning home travelers are still active on social media networks, posting reviews or photos or “liking” Facebook pages related to a specific destination (Lab42, 2012). Latitude festival is also continuing to engage with visitors, encouraging them (with the chance of winning tickets to the next Latitude festival) to complete an online survey about their experiences at the event.

The case studies bring to light a number of very important practical implications for festival marketers. The data supports the suggestion that instead of focussing on how to allocate spending across different media (television, radio, online, etc.) festival marketers should consider targeting the various stages in the consumer decision journey (Edelman, 2010). Traditionally, a large proportion of the marketing budget has been spent on the “consider” and “buy” stages, yet clearly consumers are often influenced more during the “evaluation” and “enjoy-advocate-bond” stages. Marketing efforts therefore that help consumers navigate the evaluation process and then spread positive word of mouth about the festivals they choose can be as important as building awareness and driving purchases. Thus, it is vital that festival marketers be able to communicate with customers during – not just before – the purchase process (commonly referred to as “shopper marketing”). Along with paid media, marketers should therefore consider both owned media (channels of brand controls, such as web sites) and earned media (customer-created channels, such as brand communities). In fact, recent research has shown that earned media carries more weight than paid placements (Neff, 2012).

It is important to note that festival marketers in the case studies are aware that social media is not a stand-alone marketing tool, and needs to be integrated with other
Marketing communications efforts (Smith and Zook, 2011). Marketers generally are aware that traditional communications channels have retained their historically favored attributes, especially trust and reliability of information (Danaher and Rossiter, 2011). Lollapalooza used a combination of outdoor advertising and social media as part of a tease campaign to create buzz about the festival. The tactic created major excitement for the official lineup announcement and caused people all over the country to start tweeting about the festival.

Co-branding has also been employed by the festivals profiled. Co-branding refers to the efforts of two or more partners to associate their individual brands for mutual gain (Mossberg and Getz, 2006). Bonnaroo worked with Fuse TV and the Ford Motor Company in implementing social media tactics, and Lollapalooza partnered with The Hard Rock Hotel. Music festivals are an important and developing arena for sponsorship by major brands (Rowley and Williams, 2008), and in the last few years, fashion, technology, food and household goods have joined the well-established festival sponsor brands, demonstrating that there is no sector barrier when it comes to entering this market (Roberts and Akhtar, 2012). Research suggests that sponsor awareness and recall is high among music festival fans, but with an increasing number of brands attracted to the festival scene, brands need to do more than signage and sampling. A recent study of sponsorship at music festivals concluded that a memorable on-site experience combined with social network interaction, can help brands build long-term relationships with music lovers (Havas Sports & Entertainment, 2012).

Consumers are clearly seeking to personalize their experience at music festivals, just as tourists generally are expecting customized products and services aided by new technology (Buhalis and O’Connor, 2005). Festival marketers can follow the examples of the festivals profiled that have employed social media to provide such customization. Bonnaroo used Foursquare to provide fans with a unique experience not found anywhere else in the festival, and Lollapalooza created an official mobile app that allowed visitors to create their own schedule or connect with like-minded attendees. Festival marketers can also consider leveraging social media platforms for “crowdsourcing,” involving consumers in the generation of new ideas. Lollapalooza launched a successful competition among fans to create the official festival app, and then implementing the app itself, which allowed consumers to view stage schedules and lineups, and bios and details about the bands who were playing.

Finally, it is important that festival marketers have evaluation measures in place before embarking on a social media campaign (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). Lollapalooza festival appears to be the most proactive of the three, employing analysts to evaluate the behavioral impacts of their social media implementation. Their findings support other research referred to earlier that has found a strong return on investment for companies investing in social media (Dholakia and Durham, 2010; Cruz and Mendelsohn, 2010). Users of Lollapalooza’s social media applications, for example, spend twice as much money at the festival than non-users (Cardinal Path, 2012). To build on such measures, marketers may wish to look at tools that show them the influence that online consumers have on other customers with the content they generate. An increasing number of companies are using social media analytics tools in order to identify and reward key influencers (Birkner, 2011). Palms Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, for example, mines online data to give amenities and discounts to customers with the best social media footprint. Quasar Expeditions, a luxury cruise operator, similarly studies its Facebook page to find fans who have posted the most photos and positive comments, and then offers them discounts on future trips.
Marketers can also use free online tools such as Social Mention (http://socialmention.com) to locate brand mentions in social media, and online subscriber services like Klout (http://klout.com) to find and evaluate individuals based on their value as an online influencer.

As for the future, with an aggressive digital marketing strategy, festival marketers will continue to know more and more about their customers. While the “win-win” for festivals and their customers is greater brand value, the dark sides of customer information, notably lack of privacy and unwanted communications are bound to become more pervasive. Festivals must consider customer engagement empathetically, constantly considering their communications from the customers’ points of view. The future of marketing communications will continue to be all about relationships, and these will be irreparably harmed when an organization is perceived to violate a customer’s privacy or creep too much into their lives. Marketers must also anticipate increasing regulatory and legal scrutiny on issues related to privacy and security (Sengupta, 2012). The scrutiny is at its most intense in Europe; a proposed Europe-wide law requires Facebook, along with every online business, to expunge every bit of personal data at a consumer’s request.

Another downside to the proliferation of online social networking for festivals is the loss of control over the consumer evaluation process (Kim and Hardin, 2010). While reasonable criticisms taken from social networking sites could lead to further improvements in services, consumers can easily distribute damaging information using social media, without the opportunity for companies to resolve consumer complaints.

Finally, academics and researchers have an important role to play as social media spreads its wings. To accommodate a digital world, more research is needed to guide music festival marketers. Research must adopt new approaches to theory and method. Most of the research about digital media deals with small behavioral questions about online behavior and, even then, the work is often quickly outdated. Research on a deeper level, exploring consumer emotional and behavioral responses to digital media, for example is needed (Page et al., 2010). One fruitful avenue of further research could be the examination of social media’s influence on brand relationship quality (BRQ), described as a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the person-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998). Smit et al. (2007) have stressed the need to examine the influence of certain marketing tools on BRQ, and one could therefore study the impact that social media engagement has on the relationships that consumers have with festival brands. Future research could also address which social media applications have the most success across different customer age groups. If researchers can identify exactly how, when, and where social media influences consumers, it will help marketers craft marketing strategies that take advantage of social media’s unique ability to engage with consumers (Divol et al., 2012).

**Conclusion**

The internet has upended how consumers engage with brands to the extent that consumers are promiscuous in their brand relationships (Edelman, 2010). They connect with myriad brands through new media channels often beyond the marketer’s familiarity or control. In the past, marketing strategies emphasized brand awareness and ultimate purchase. However, after purchase, consumers may remain aggressively engaged, actively promoting or assailing the products they have bought, and collaborating in the development of the brand. The touch points when consumers are
most open to influence have changed, requiring a major adjustment to realign marketers’
strategy and budgets with where consumers are actually spending their time.
This paper has provided an illuminating view of the use of social media in an event
and festival context. It has supported the theory previously developed in this area, and
is further evidence of the powerful impact that new technology can have on consumer
behavior. The cases have highlighted a relatively high degree of sophistication in the
implementation of social media, and the high levels of engagement with consumers at
music festivals would suggest that social media has an extremely important role to
play in the future of marketing of events and festivals. This paper has therefore added
to our knowledge of a new marketing phenomenon by showing how social media can
be leveraged by festivals and events to expand brand recognition, drive sales and
profitability and engender loyalty.

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