

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

ScholarWorks@UARK

---

Human Nutrition and Hospitality Management  
Undergraduate Honors Theses

Human Nutrition and Hospitality Innovation

---

5-2021

## A study on the impact of social media marketing in the event industry: Executing a marketing plan

Adrian N. Bradley

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/hnhiuht>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#), [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#), [Marketing Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Bradley, A. N. (2021). A study on the impact of social media marketing in the event industry: Executing a marketing plan. *Human Nutrition and Hospitality Management Undergraduate Honors Theses* Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/hnhiuht/15>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Human Nutrition and Hospitality Innovation at ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Nutrition and Hospitality Management Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [ccmiddle@uark.edu](mailto:ccmiddle@uark.edu).

A study on the impact of social media marketing  
in the event industry: Executing a marketing plan

Adrian Bradley

Mentor: Dr. Way

University of Arkansas

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	P.3
Introduction.....	P.4
Literature Review.....	P.6
Methodology.....	P.12
Results.....	P.16
Conclusion Discussion.....	P.16
References.....	P.17
Appendix A: Survey Model.....	P. 35

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 1:</b> SWOT Analysis for SMASH 2022.....	P.23
<b>Table 2:</b> Marketing tools effectiveness.....	P.26
<b>Table 3:</b> Marketing Timeline for SMASH 2020.....	P.27

## **Abstract**

Marketing is a large part of growing one's business or event. The objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how social media marketing increases brand loyalty, attendance, and engagement within current and potential guests over traditional event marketing methods. Through this study a data collection survey for the University of Arkansas' Hospitality Management annual event Students Mastering the Art of Hospitality (SMASH) to gather information on the effectiveness of e social media marketing's influence on their attendees. Unfortunately, due to a global pandemic SMASH was canceled and the researcher and honor's committee thought it to be best to create a social media marketing plan for the 2022 event year because the appropriate data could not be collected. Through this marketing plan one can see how social media additives to the SMASH marketing plan will create a stronger engagement with guest and grow the event.

Keywords: Virtual events, SMASH, event marketing plan

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In today's business world becoming one of the top companies in your field is very competitive. A key aspect in the road to business success is marketing. Marketing creates one's presence; in addition, it helps build relationships with one's audience. Marketing is essential to a company's growth; without it a company will not thrive and be profitable. A major question in the business world (specifically in the event world) is: How is marketing used as an effective tool to increase attendance and awareness of events? One answer is by inclusion of the internet and social media marketing strategies. This study explores the question: Has the internet and social media impacted reputation and brand awareness in the events industry as opposed to traditional print marketing?

### **Background and Need**

Companies continue to search for effective and cost efficient methods to connect with potential buyers or clients via marketing. As the event industry grows, it is important that business owners understand the importance of marketing and the impact it can have on the success of their businesses. Research indicates that companies, on average, spend about 12% of their annual revenue on marketing (Gartner, 2016). Traditionally, companies have been willing to invest in marketing methods if they have shown to be effective.

Marketing comes in many forms such as: paid advertisements, word of mouth, newspapers, commercials, publications, and the most up and coming form which is social media. Not only does marketing increase sales but it has been shown to also create brand loyalty. Brand loyalty has been defined as: the extent of the faithfulness of consumers to a particular brand,

expressed through their repeat purchases, irrespective of the marketing pressure generated by the competing brands (WebFinance INC, 2020).

In recent years, social media marketing has begun to play a large role in the way brands reach consumers. Social media has taken over the traditional methods of marketing and currently has about 3.5 billion users annually (Emarsys, 2019). Social media users, if utilized correctly, could be a pipeline for companies to interact with and recruit prospective new clients/customers and attendees to events.

Though extensive research exists on the impact of social marketing in general, little exists on the impact of social media on private and corporate planning. Events are a major component of the hospitality and tourism industry; accounting for \$325 billion in direct spending in the U.S annually (Oxford Economics, 2018). Many customers booking private and corporate events in 2019 were members of the millennial generation: a generation that grew up with, and are extremely comfortable with, social media. It is speculated that event companies who only use traditional forms of marketing (radio, television, newspaper, and magazine ads) are missing out on maximizing their business opportunities. Event planners could increase visibility by utilizing social media marketing and, as a result, increase attendance and participation.

The Events Industry Council found that business events involved more than 1.5 billion participants across more than 180 countries in 2018 (Event council, 2018). The event industry is generating a growing number of participants and is an area worth researching based on its economic impact and an increased number of event companies who have entered the market. As more competition enters the event industry it stands to reason that the marketing methods of events would increase; thereby, the use of social media marketing would increase. Social media marketing allows event planners to advertise events as well as encouraging attendance by

reaching larger numbers of demographic segments using a single platform. To ensure longevity in the event industry and company growth, companies must realize the importance of differentiation through marketing as a key to business success. Social media event marketing helps each individual company do just that: distinguish themselves from their competitors while reaching the largest possible number of people who are potential clients.

### **Problem Statement**

Event planners may not have a full understanding of the impact social media marketing can have on varying generations with intent to attend events. By utilizing social media marketing these individuals or companies can increase opportunities, potential revenue, and attendees.

### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing in Northwest Arkansas through a quantitative analysis utilizing a University of Arkansas event called SMASH a virtual event.

### **Research Objectives**

1. Determine if social media marketing increased brand loyalty to the SMASH event held at the University of Arkansas.
2. Is there difference between generational association regarding brand loyalty, social media, and the SMASH at the University of Arkansas?
3. Determine what forms of social media marketing is most recognized in promoting the SMASH event.



## **Definitions**

SMASH: (Students Mastering the Art of Southern Hospitality) is an event hosted by University of Arkansas Hospitality Management students to raise awareness and funds for the program. This event typically has an attendance of 150 to 200 individuals.

Social Media: a term used to describe websites and applications that allow users to create content as well as share and socialize over the internet (Julian, 2017).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The integration of widely available technology and social media into a marketing strategy is a means to increase event attendance and awareness with a targeted population. Event planners need to be able to identify their target population while understanding the use of social media in an effort of attracting new customers while also retaining current consumers.

#### **Marketing**

Marketing is a central aspect of a company's growth and presence (Hanssens, 2016). Traditional means of marketing consist of newspaper, magazines, flyers, radio, TV ads and billboards to name a few. These methods of marketing allow brands to reach a higher number of consumers with information about their products and services but often come with a high financial cost. The most valuable aspect of marketing to a company is the return on investment (ROI). The ROI indicates to a company the return value of the cost they are receiving from the initial investment they put into the advertisement or marketing techniques. However, there is more to marketing than just the ROI. The value of marketing can be expressed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and the use of technology such as social media can increase effectiveness while reducing cost thus having a positive impact on ROI (Hanssens, 2016).

Having effective marketing has shown an increase in overall all sales. One study of QSR (Quick Service Restaurants) promotions confirmed that price promotions increased sales for the promotion brand (Spotts et al., 2019). Being able to effectively execute a marketing strategy is the key to the success of a company. If one does not have a successful marketing platform, then

the business will begin to struggle and ultimately fail. The recurring costs in traditional marketing can prove to be a huge investment that may or may not give a good return (Sherman, 2019). This is why it is important to explore all options of marketing and understand who the target audience is when it comes to one's choice of execution.

### **Introducing Social Media Marketing**

Social media marketing allows marketing to become more effective and allows for a connection with the audience that traditional marketing cannot replicate (Sherman, 2019). Recent reports show an increase in total spending on social media advertisements worldwide (Kumar, et al., 2016). When companies incorporate social media marketing as a key aspect of their strategic plan it can reduce the cost of marketing and increase sales and have an overall positive impact on the bottom line.

Social media marketing allows for a connection with the audience that traditional marketing cannot replicate by making the audience feel they are more up to date with the company and have a means of communication through direct messaging and comments. As well as a new way to reach a large number of individuals through one advertisement. According to Ismail (2017), 97% of marketers are utilizing social media to increase their sales and build their brand. Understanding marketing is essential for professional event planners to be able to succeed in the fast growing event industry. The use of a tool which grants access to large, targeted populations with a relatively low cost can help attract targeted populations to particular events or sales opportunities is one main reason why social media has become a key component to a successful marketing plan.

With the emergence of smart phone and tablet usage, social media access has become a normal part of life in the twenty first century. By allowing constant access to individuals through

the internet, companies would be foolish to ignore the many instant and cost effective opportunities social media grants them as a marketing tool.

### **Target Populations**

Identifying a specific target audience in a marketing plan is essential as it helps reduce cost, eliminates unnecessary effort and has a greater ROI (Fu, Phillips, & Phillips, 2018).

Knowing who a companies' audience is serves and what techniques they relate to is a vital part of any marketing strategy. By identifying the target market, one is able to adjust the means of marketing to have the greatest impact on the target population. The purpose of marketing is to promote services and commercial products while optimizing the profit by advertising to the correct buying audience (Calderwood et al., 2013). Creating advertisements directed towards one's target demographic helps achieve just that.

The millennial generation roughly accounts for children born between the years of 1981-1996; which makes the millennial generation's age currently between 22-37 (Ketter, 2020) Millennials travel and spend more money than any generation at this time, making them the largest consumer market presently available (Ketter, 2020). This generation is widely influenced by technology, as they have basically grown up with a technological device of some sort in their hands. When comparing the millennial generation to their largest predecessors (the Baby Boomers) a clear distinction can be drawn. The millennial generation is referred to as the largest group of digital natives whereas Baby Boomers are considered digital immigrants (Kesharwani, 2020). As millennials and subsequent generations have grown up utilizing technology they are highly reliant upon it and consider it a normal part of their everyday life. This includes apps, social media, and new technology. When marketing towards the millennial generation, a large number of companies are using things such as app sales, i.e. Instagram and Twitter

advertisements. These companies are utilizing social media marketing by understanding their target audience is spending most of their time online. This will, in turn, create a better ROI because they know their audience and are using their reliance on social media as an advantage. For example, certain products may naturally have different target populations, such as a walk-in bath tub: the target population would be the Baby Boomers or older generations. Why would a millennial, in their prime of health, be worried about a walk-in bath tub? Therefore, a walk-in bath tub company, for example, might find it beneficial to focus their advertising on the platforms their target population would relate to such as newspapers or even TV channels. This population would be considered digital immigrants and as such are not as reliant, comfortable or as trusting in technology as the digital natives would (Kesharwani, 2020).

While millennials carry a large spending power it is important to not dismiss the other generations. Baby boomers, generation X, and generation Z all have a spending power of their own. Baby boomers are in their prime income and spending years in their 50/60's. Studies show that younger generations believe in spending because of pleasure or things that bring them joy while the older generations tend to purchase the necessities and save (Pooja Tyagi et al., 2017). Knowing these patterns becomes a great marketing tool. You can target each generation's interest as well as method of advertisement.

Generation Z are currently responsible for \$29 to \$143 billion dollars in direct spending (Fromm, 2018). They have a large influence on the market both through themselves and influence within their household. This generation similar to millennials are very influenced through social media. As a baby boomer would be influenced by an ad in the paper or television commercials generation Z depends on influencers and celebrities through social media to tell

them what to buy (Fromm, 2018). Marketing to gen Z is different in the way that brands are called to be more transparent and accountable about their products than before.

In summary, targeting the ideal audience can bring advertising to the next level. When applying this to the events industry one can look at a target marketing as being an identity. The millennial generation are slowly taking over the event industry in large numbers (Pietikäinen, 2016). Knowing what group will likely attend the festival or hospitality fundraiser changes the way one markets their event to this generation.

### **Brand Loyalty**

Brand loyalty is established through and tied to an identity. Brand loyalty is determined by repeat customers who chose to stand by a business or brand as well as valuing one brand over another because they have been exposed to it over time, and buy into the image connected to the product (Helme-Guizon, & Margnoni, 2019). It is important for a company or organization to find ways to encourage self-brand connection with their target population (Helme-Guizon, & Margnoni, 2019). Consumers that are loyal and have a sense of self-brand connection are more likely to invest in and purchase the products throughout their lifetime. Brand loyalty helps increase sales over time and allows the brand to grow or even maintain their consumer base (Erdogmus et al., 2012).

An anecdotal example of this would be the brand loyalty many people around the world have to Apple products. Many buyers of Apple products continue to return and buy replacement or new products created by Apple through their life span as they have developed a self-brand connection which has led to brand loyalty (Helme-Guizon, & Margnoni, 2019). Brand loyalty can be applied to both large and small scale events. To keep individuals coming back to a

fundraiser, festival, etc. An event planner would want people to support the brand created for the event.

## **Event Industry**

The event industry has been around since as far back as literature can document. Individuals and businesses have historically been accommodating others and gathering together for small and large social gatherings and corporate conventions. In 2017, the Events Industry Council conducted a study on the impact of the events industry. The council found that there are 1.5 billion participants across more than 180 countries and more than \$1.07 trillion in spending (Event Industry Council, 2017). This was in business events alone, it did not include festivals, fundraisers, and trade shows.

With such a large amount of funds coming into this industry, it is important for businesses to realize the potential revenue they can acquire by taking advantage of social media marketing that specifically focus on their target populations. When hosting an event and attempting to reach and market to a huge population, social media allows for the broadcast of valuable event information while allowing consumers to feel a close connection with the event.

Event marketing has transformed the corporate and social world by bringing creative and innovative ideas to companies and their brands. As the millennial generation are becoming the market spenders it is more and more crucial to attract this age group to events and create long lasting customers that return each year and continue to spend their money. Social media marketing is a crucial piece that potential companies that organize large scale events could be missing. Being able to keep clients informed, up to date, and most importantly excited about the event is one way to increase attendance. Social media platforms allow companies and individuals to do this with ease.

Now more than ever it is important to showcase your events unique features and memorable moments. Virtual events have become the new big events in the year of 2020 and continue into 2021 due to the global pandemic, COVID 19. AS the industry has shifted its format from in-person, highly attended meetings and events it is more important than ever to have a marketing plan to drive attendance. This is the prime reason social media marketing can make or break one's event. These new and rapid changes to the event industry have caused a shift in social media marketing and has become more relevant now than it ever was.

This literature review discussed the importance of marketing when applied to social media platforms in the event industry. It is important for companies to identify their target audience and in the case of this study, understand generations and their attractions through social media advertisements and how that translates into self-brand connection and leads to true brand loyalty. The millennial generation has become the largest generation of spenders at the moment; it is crucial that companies take a look into these marketing opportunities and meet this valuable generation where they live, function and operate: as digital natives (Finneman et al., 2017).



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter discusses in detail the research design for this study. This section shows why quantitative survey research is the best method utilized for this study. In addition this chapter defines the procedures to conduct this research, as well as, collect and analyze the data. Finally this section explores the contents of the survey and the process as by which it is conducted.

NOTE: As this research study was being conducted COVID 19 had become a world health event and SMASH in 2020 was canceled. The committee decided to proceed with the study as it was hoped that the pandemic would be under control and SMASH 2021 would be held in April 2021 and relevant data could be collected and the study completed as planned.

Alas, the committees' hopes did not become a reality and SMASH 2021 was canceled as the pandemic worsened nationwide. The hospitality faculty and University of Arkansas administration decided to not hold a virtual event due to people being "zoomed out", "virtual event exhaustion" and the workload it takes to hold a virtual event and the amount of students enrolled in the SMASH class.

The committee and the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences Honor's Director decided a great deal of work had been done by the student and to proceed with the honor's thesis but change the direction from a traditional research design where data was collected and analyzed to the honor's student designing a virtual event social marketing plan for the SMASH event. This solution was deemed acceptable as an alternative to finish the honor's thesis due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

The methodology section was written by the time SMASH was canceled and it was determined to proceed with a thorough social marketing plan. It was decided to include the methodology in this thesis to establish that the plan was in motion, and the design was complete. The research design, population and sampling, validity, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis are discussed further in this section.

### **Research Design**

The proposed study was developed to follow a quantitative research design by conducting a survey with a population of attendees to the SMASH event, specifically millennials. Data was to be collected from attendee surveys. Attendees were to be asked a series of questions regarding the impact and use of social media had on attendance decisions and, what modes of social media were recognized and questions related to the content of the social media marketing and its development of brand loyalty.

Planning and development for the research design began in the spring 2020. A literature review in combination with the objectives of this study was used as the guideline to build the questionnaire. A quantitative approach was used in this study in order to develop a non-experimental research design for the purpose of exploring the current trends and impact social media has on the industry while gaining information from a first-hand point of view. This research method allows for enriched findings even with a larger studied population (Cope, 2005). This research's primary purpose was to determine the effectiveness and value of social media marketing on events attendance and brand loyalty.

## **Population and Sampling**

For this study the theoretical population included event attendees who potentially use social media to gather information regarding an event. It is shown that individuals are most likely to participate in surveys over things they are actively interested in (Lucianetti, Roster, & Albaum 2016). This demonstrates that the selected group would best represent event attendees in the survey. The participants were aged 21 and above, male and female with no particular emphasis placed on gender or race. The accessible population will have consisted of the 150+ attendees at (SMASH), a University of Arkansas fundraising event put together by faculty and students for the Hospitality Management program. The main goal of SMASH is to raise funds for the program and student scholarships. The attendees are not only large companies in the area coming to support the department but also business owners looking for new innovative ideas in the event industry. This event brought in an accessible population of individuals who actively work in the industry and attend many events like the one in this study.

## **Validity**

Efforts were made to reduce threats to internal and external validity and ensure the development of reliable outcomes. In order to reduce threats to validity, efforts would have been made to control as many variables as possible by sending out the survey the day before the event in order to reduce conversation between guests. It was planned to send an email to all registered participants with a link to the survey of 25 questions through survey monkey. In order to increase reliability, it was planned to send the survey to 200 participants in order to receive approximately 70 replies. To ensure data saturation is controlled for, the survey was asking questions over brand loyalty, social media usage both related to SMASH and on average, as well as generational data on social media marketing.

## **Instrumentation**

The instrument design was to consist of a descriptive, online (electronic) survey. A self-administered questionnaire was to be developed for this study based on the review of literature. The data was to be collected through electronic surveys sent to the SMASH attendee database. The survey was to consist of 4 sections with questions related to: social media marketing, brand loyalty, the SMASH event itself, and demographics. These questions were to be developed by the researcher and consultation with experts in the event industry. The use of a five point Likert scale was to be utilized, as well as, other variations of scales including yes or no, ranking, and prioritization. An approval form for research involving human subjects was designed but not submitted to the Institutional Review Board due to the change in the research design

This survey was to include questions that discussed the impact the social media presence had on attendance, donations, and availability of helpful information. In addition, questions related to brand loyalty and the SMASH event were to be explored. The group in this study was to be made up of complying attendees who are or have been SMASH attendees. The survey was to be sent out to attendees in an email with a link to the survey via Qualtrics. This event traditionally takes place in April and is designed, set-up and hosted by the Hospitality Management program at the University of Arkansas. The answers collected were to be used to give a clearer understanding of the true impact social media has on event advertisement, attendance, and brand loyalty.

## **Data Collection**

The planned method of data collection for this study consisted of past and present SMASH attendees via an online/electronic survey. There was no incentive for taking the survey. The respondents were to be informed that participation was voluntary and all information gathered as

a result of the survey was confidential. No names or identifying information of any kind was obtained. Once data collection was complete, the data was to be imported to The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2019). After data collection and input, the survey data would've been destroyed. (See Appendix A: Survey)

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected would have been analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentages, frequencies, and ANOVA analysis. Data was to be coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Inc. 2019).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results: Marketing Plan**

The results section of this thesis conclude with the design of a social marketing plan for the 2022 SMASH event. Marketing plans allow for companies and event planners to determine exactly their goals for their event and create an effective plan to execute their goals. Marketing plans are crucial in knowing an event's strengths and weaknesses. This is extremely important now more than ever in a world of virtual events. An event's audience engagement in a virtual event is more important than ever as many are experience virtual exhaustion. Which raises the question of how do we recruit attendees and keep them interested in an event? The answer is through social media and other web applications. The following is a breakdown of how to accomplish this for the SMASH 2022 event.

#### **Event overview**

SMASH (Students Mastering the Art of Southern Hospitality) is a University of Arkansas event. SMASH is a dinning and event experience put on the hospitality students to highlight their skills and fundraise for the Dale Bumpers College. SMASH also gives out scholarships to students, awards to local industry workers and students, as well as student learning.

#### **Goals**

The goal of this marketing plan is to create an analysis on the SMASH 2022 event while establishing a successful marketing path. This marketing plan will cover SWOT, target audience, virtual events, marketing strategies, budget, and timelines. The objective is to be able to execute a virtual event in 2022 that brings in guests while keeping them engaged, entertained and driving donations while producing solid student learning outcomes.

## **Target Audience**

The target audience of the SMASH can be looked at in five different categories. Students, students' families, faculty, alumni, and local industry leaders. Students from both the hospitality program, other colleges on campus, and alumni can assist by supporting through attendance with discounted ticket rates. SMASH is a fun experience for students and many of their parents love to attend to watch their students excel in their degree program. Faculty from both the Bumpers College as well as other colleges on campus typically love to support the student body and fellow colleges. Lastly local industry leaders bring their support and networking opportunities for the students in hopes of finding the star intern or employee of tomorrow.

## **SWOT ANALYSIS:**

A SWOT analysis is a form of strategic management that evaluates the internal and external factors of one's event, marketing plan, etc. A SWOT analysis is useful to analyze one's environment and pinpoint all the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. SWOT analysis is a simple but powerful tool for sizing up an organization's resource capabilities and deficiencies, its market opportunities, and external threats to its future (Thomas et al., 2007:97).

Table 1. SWOT Analysis for SMASH 2022



Looking at Table 1, it can be seen the breakdown of the SWOT analysis for SMASH 2022. When looking at the strengths area of this chart it can understood how the budget can be larger as well as a higher revenue intake due to the event being online and not having to pay for a venue as in past years; this also allows for a large attendance due to there not being an attendee capacity of the space. The event being hosted online also positively affects the labor costs and allows for lower risk of exposure to COVID.

The weaknesses stated in Table 1 indicate the struggle with keeping guests engaged in a virtual event. The hospitality industry is full of individuals who love socializing and spending



time with others. This could create some barriers with the event being virtual. Another weakness to consider is that since this event is virtual, it could experience delays and technical difficulties delaying or interrupting the event.

Opportunities for this event include Hospitality students do have the chance to be innovative and create something new and exciting for guest through the virtual event. Though it is online it can serve as an advantages to easily connect with people immediately through links and even chats boxes.

Having this event lowers threats but does not exclude them completely. Getting guests involved and creating a memorable event through online platforms has many challenges but is not impossible. Being a virtual event we can experience a lack of control on who is entering the event and possibly gaining controls. Since the whole event is held together by depending on the streaming platform, a system crash could cause the event to end early or have trouble starting.

Since SMASH has been canceled the past two seasons we can also worry about the lack of excitement for this event because it has been so long since we have held one. The time between events can cause an overall decrease in the brand loyalty tied to SMASH.

### **COVID virtual events**

Planning events in a global pandemic requires extra steps to increase attendance and keep guests engaged. As virtual events are becoming more and more popular, it is hard to create one that is unique. Many individuals are not interested in sitting in on virtual events after 2020, they are “zoomed out” and exhausted of being online. SMASH’s marketing plan is designed to get individuals excited about the upcoming event and showcase the unique features it will have and how the event can utilize social media to ensure that outcome.

## **Strategies**

The SMASH event plan is to utilize four main social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Each platform offers to reach potential guests at multiple levels. Instagram provides a behind the scenes look at the event while appealing to the younger generations. Facebook is marketed more towards boomers and millennials and allows quick links and a look into the activity on the SMASH page. Twitter serves as another outlet for the SMASH event by providing quick updates to followers and a more real time experience. Lastly YouTube is used to boost excitement of future guest by showing “trailers” for that year’s event showcasing the theme and highlighted moments. Each of these social media platforms are important in their own way and all together provide a well-rounded execution of social media marketing. Social media provides an advantage to our event. By using more than just traditional means of marketing one is able to reach a larger audience.

In Table 2 different marketing platforms are laid out to show the effectiveness of each none discovered in a 2019 study.

Table 2. Marketing tools effectiveness



\*Aventri. (2021). The 2021 marketing guide. <https://www.aventri.com/strategy/event-marketing-strategy>

Table 3. Marketing Timeline for SMASH 2020

MARKETING TIMELINE		
1/23/22	Gain access to social media accounts	Facebook, Instagram
1/23/22	Begin brainstorming content to post	Instagram: highlights in class of what we've been working on. Facebook: thanking sponsors, encouraging other companies to get involved, etc.
1/26/22	Archive previous social media posts	Clear the previous post from past SMASH events
1/27/22	Create graphics	Facebook cover, profile pictures, Instagram highlight icons, save the date print out and social media post
1/27/22	Establish a hashtag	Needs to be something approved by Bumpers College Media team, should be something unique to the Hospitality program
1/30/22	Save the dates sent out on social media	
1/30/22	Create SMASH event on Facebook	Post with general information ie date, time, place
1/30/22	Post on Facebook	General information about the event with a graphic to catch people's attention
2/1/22	Create letterhead	To be sent out for sponsors (finance team will structure working)
2/5/22	Establish a list of graduating seniors	Bios, after college plans, headshots. Due March 10th
2/6/22	Post an update on Facebook	
2/10/22	Signage	Color scheme, design, dimensions, quantity, and where they will be placed. Parking, "No Alcohol Beyond This Point", etc. Check with Logistics
2/28/22	Post CVENT link on social	
2/29/2022	Instagram: giveaway	Grubs gift card (\$50)
3/1/22	Begin selling tickets	No in person sales, should only be through the CVENT link
3/2/22	Instagram post	Old Main
3/2/22	Flyers for pineapples printed	Will be pinned on the pineapples to give to the Deans
3/3/22	Hand out pineapples to Deans on campus	Some will be off-campus! Dress up like Pina (take photos and videos)
3/3/22	Instagram: post	Calendar inspiration
3/3/22	Instagram: post	Pina giving Dean's the pineapples
3/4/22	Instagram: post	Mid week motivation: build the instagram feed
3/4/22	Instagram: senior spotlight	Anna Olander
3/5/22	Instagram: promote Instagram giveaway	Repost to stories, follow the account, tag friends
3/5/22	Instagram: promote getting tickets	Include Instagrams promotion shot with Pina walking around campus handing out invitations to other departments
3/5/22	Change Facebook header picture	New picture should contain the CVENT website
3/10/22	Senior Spotlight	Include information and picture senior previously provided in Teams
3/10/22	Senior submissions due	This is a HARD CUTOFF! No senior slides will be accepted after this
3/10/22	Instagram: post	Food lab
3/11/22	Reach out to speakers	These should be the people that are on stage during the event (Dr. Way, _____)
3/11/22	Instagram: post	Posting about our hospitality students
3/16/22	Get invitation list from Dr. Wav	Who we would send the Save the Date's to! People that we want to make sure are present at this event
3/20/22	Snapchat filter made for the event	Graphics team, should be zoned for the Union when Snapchat asks for an area. Should be specific to the event, not the U of A
4/11/22	Social media countdown	Week leading up to the event! Giveaways, sneak peeks of the venue, decor, etc.
4/18/22	"Day of" advertising!	Day of the event! Live story posts, sneak peeks, etc. Builds excitement! Every student should also post on their own social media accounts
4/18/22	Instagram: SMASH cancellation update	More serious post about how we've stepped back, reevaluated, and ready to continue sharing what we're working on
4/21/22	Send out thank you letters	Attendees, sponsors, etc.
4/23/22	Create a list of possible themes for next year	How can we set future students up for success?
20-Feb	Begin making signage	Partner with logistics to see how many signs are needed for inside, garage, and on the roads. Also what direction they need to be pointing to.
2/2/22	Establish t-shirt design	Should be done early enough to do giveaways on Instagram
2/3/22	Establish sticker design	Should be done early enough to do giveaways on Instagram
2/3/22	Establish button design	Should be done early enough to do giveaways on Instagram
2/3/22	Create banners for the event	Design? What size? How many?
2/3/22	Establish a list of graduating seniors	Bios, after college plans, headshots
2/5/22	Reach out to speakers	These should be the people that are on stage during the event (Dr. Way, _____)
2/5/22	Get invitation list from Dr. Way	Who we would send the Save the Date's to! People that we want to make sure are present at this event
3/3/22	Promote Instagram Giveaway	Post on stories
3/5/22	Promote getting tickets	Include Instagrams promotion shot with Pina walking around campus handing out invitations to other departments
3/5/22	Change Facebook Header picture	New picture should contain the CVENT website
3/10/22	Senior Spotlight	Include information and picture senior previously provided in Teams
10-Mar	Have all directional signage done	Inside the building, parking garage, and on the road for guest to know how to get to the parking garage
3/ /22	Send out invitations	Invitations to people on invite list
3/ /22	SELL TICKETS!	Are we selling any of them in person? What is the online program to buy tickets? Be sure to post the link all over our social media
3/ /22	Logistics signs for the event	Parking, "No Alcohol Beyond This Point", etc. Check with Logistics to see what other signs they need
3/ /22	Deadline for submitting senior information	This is a HARD CUTOFF! No senior slides will be accepted after this
3/ /22	Establish a Snapchat filter	Create a filter specific for the SMASH event
4/ /22	Social media countdown	Week leading up to the event! Giveaways, sneak peeks of the venue, decor, etc.
4/ /22	Day of advertising	Day of the event! Builds excitement! Every student should also post on their own social media accounts
4/18/22	SMASH Update	Post talks about the cancellation of SMASH and how sad we are about the event being cancelled
4/ /22	Send thank you letters	
4/ /22	Create list of possible themes for next year	

Table 3 displays the marketing plan timeline from the original 2020 SMASH event. It can be seen that even with the event being designed for in-person it still heavily focused on gathering a social media following. Based on a new virtual marketing plan this is even more crucial and requires a larger social media and web presence. This could be achieved by adding in live-streams, having guests send in videos of their favorite SMASH memory to share on social media sites, trivia questions, contests, and continuing to post fun memories through the years.

The list can go on and on, the point is to make the guests feel even more engaged in this year's event even with it being through a computer or TV screen. Making the event feel personal and keeping guests excited is key.

## **Marketing Plan SMASH 2022**

For this section a marketing plan has been created for the SMASH event in 2022. This marketing plan will represent a virtual event that uses social media marketing and brand loyalty to increase attendance and the success of the event.

### **Step 1: Create a brand and theme**

SMASH has a new theme and color scheme each year. Before sending out invitations and creating content a theme needs to be decided upon with a color scheme.

### **Step 2: Build a website**

First thing to create for SMASH is a website. In past years SMASH has failed to have a central location that is easily accessible to guest with all links and information provided. Having a website could also increase brand loyalty and excitement for the event.

### **Step 3: Send direct invitations**

Sending direct invitations to potential guest at SMASH lets them know the event is coming up and provide links for socials for them to follow along the journey.

### **Step 4: Sponsorship packages**

Create the sponsorship packages with each level and promote them through the website as well as list them on the back of invitations to get guest thinking about becoming sponsors for SMASH.

### **Step 5: SMASH email**

Create an email account for SMASH as a central location for all information with vendors and easy contact with guests.

### **Step 6: Content Marketing**

Create graphics and behind the scene photos as the planning and set up for the event goes on. Keeping potential guest engaged in the planning process and making them feel a part of the event from start to finish creates excitement and brand loyalty. Planning social media posts each week to promote available sponsor packages, highlighting points of the event, teasers, and showcase how the virtual event is still providing an exciting and innovative feel to everyone involved. As part of the 2022 plan the students can reach out to past guests of SMASH and have them create video highlights of their favorite memories and moments at SMASH. Socials can feature a new star guest each week, posting their videos for students and other guests to see. Creating a # for the event can also help keep everything connected and allow us to see the event from other guest's perspective.

### **Step 8: Getting the word out on campus and to local industry leaders**

For SMASH 2020 the students chose to have the hospitality mascot hand out save the dates attached to a pineapple. This was both effective and memorable to those receiving these pineapples. For SMASH 2022 handing out save the dates like this or in another memorable fashion is key to drumming up involvement with your guests prior to the event. SMASH is a fun and unique event and it needs to be showcased as such each step of the way.

### **Step 9: Create co-marketing initiatives with sponsors**

Having sponsors for the event creates opportunities for students to create co-marketing plans with sponsors to allow for a further outreach in the industry and once again drum up more

excitement and attendance. Communicating through email with sponsors on using their social medias for a day, or sharing posts about SMASH could just be another way to get the word out there.

**Step 10: Measure the success of the event**

After the event has taken place it is important that the success of the marketing plan is measured to see if what was planned above truly made our social media presence larger, and created more brand loyalty and attendance.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### *Summary of Research*

This study has taken a look into the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty, generational impact, and looking at its application to events. The researchers' goal was to analyze the effectiveness of social media marketing compared to traditional methods such as newspaper, commercials, radio, etc.

In order to do this the researcher conducted a study over the hospitality department's SMASH event where a survey was developed to be given out to attendees. This survey consisted of several questions covering the attendees' age, social media usage, brand loyalty, university involvement, past attendance, and more.

The research above gathered in the literature review showed that by utilizing social media marketing brands can grow their following and connect deeper with their target audience. The survey was developed: however, due to the impact of COVID-19 the researcher had to adjust the study by developing a full media marketing plan for SMASH 2022. Through the use of this marketing plan SMASH would be able to create more of a media presence and drive more engagement and hopefully a greater attendance. The Marketing plan included building a central location for all SMASH information through a website, creating a greater online presence, engaging the following they have, co creating content with sponsors, and analyzing the response.

This study has greater significance now more than previously when it was started. The impact of COVID-19 has forced companies to have to connect with clients and customers remotely while still driving engagement and sales. Through the researcher's findings on how social media marketing can build a brand or company and the execution of a successful



marketing plan; companies and events such as SMASH can continue to expand and grow brand loyalty as well as engagement.

*Recommendations of further research*

In this study the researchers main focus was to demonstrate the effectiveness of social media marketing to events such as SMASH. Although the researcher's intention was to study the attendees of SMASH, a larger sample size would have provided a more in depth look at one's target audience.

Further the Marketing plan created would have a more effective outcome if executed in future studies as part of the research. The information gathered from both the survey and the marketing plan could be extremely useful and compared to previous years' SMASH events. This would provide a clearer understanding and example of the effects social media marketing has on both small and large scale events.

## References

- Calderwood, K. A., & Wellington, W. J. (2013). Social marketing strategies for stigmatized target populations: A case example for problem gamblers and family members of problem gamblers. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(49), 1.
- Dearing, James W (1996). Social marketing and diffusion-based strategies for communicating with unique populations: HIV prevention in San Francisco. *Journal of Health Communication, 1*(4), 343-364.
- Fu, F. Q., Phillips, J. J., & Phillips, P. P. (2018). Roi marketing: Measuring, Demonstrating, and improving value. *performance improvement, 57*(2), 6–13. <https://doi-org.proxy1.ncu.edu/10.1002/pfi.21771>
- Hanssens, D. M., & Pauwels, K. H. (2016). Demonstrating the value of marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 80*(6), 173-190.
- Helme-Guizon, A., & Magnoni, F. (2019). Consumer brand engagement and its social side on brand-hosted social media: How do they contribute to brand loyalty? *Journal of Marketing Management, 35*(7/8), 716.
- Ismail, A. R. (2017). The influence of perceived social media marketing activities on brand loyalty. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*.
- Kesharwani, A. (2020). Do (how) digital natives adopt a new technology differently than digital immigrants? A longitudinal study. *Information & Management, 57*(2). <https://doi-org.proxy1.ncu.edu/10.1016/j.im.2019.103170>
- Ketter, E. (2020). Millennial travel: Tourism micro-trends of European Generation Y. *Journal of Tourism Futures*.

- Kowtowskey, K. (2019, June 13). 2018 global economic significance of business events. Retrieved from <https://insights.eventscouncil.org/Full-Article/ArtMID/398/ArticleID/1445/2018-Global-Economic-Significance-of-Business-Events>
- Kumar, A., Bezawada, R., Rishika, R., Janakiraman, R., & Kannan, P. K. (2016). From social to sale: The effects of firm-generated content in social media on customer behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(1), 7-25.
- Pietikäinen, E. (2016). Generation Y as marketing target for events: Case: SaariHelveti.
- Preston, C. (2012) *Event Marketing: How to Successfully Promote Events, Festivals, Conventions, and Expositions*, 2nd Edition, no. 320.
- Sherman. (2019, October 6). Digital marketing vs. traditional marketing: Which produces greater ROI? Retrieved from <https://www.lyfemarketing.com/blog/digital-marketing-vs-traditional-marketing/>
- Spotts, H. E., Weinberger, M. G., & Weinberger, M. F. (2019). Advertising and promotional effects on consumer service firm sales: Media ad spend and quality matter for driving restaurant sales. *Journal of Advertising Research*.
- Stone, G.W. (2020). The pros and cons of “Starting from Scratch” marketing research as a tool for teaching the marketing research process: questions related to developing team cohesion and maximum participation members. *Journal of marketing Education* 1438
- Thompson, A.A., Strickland, A.J., & Gamble, J.E. (2007). *Crafting and Executing Strategy- Concepts and Cases*, (15<sup>th</sup> ed.), USA: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

## Appendix A: Survey Model

### **Social Media Marketing**

How often are you on social media each day?

- A. Never
- B. 1 hour or less
- C. 1 hours to 4 hours
- D. 4 hours to 6 hours
- E. More than 6 hours

Have you ever donated or purchased an item because of an ad on social media? Yes or No

Of the following events which have you attended due to social media posts?

- Sports event
- Trade show
- Conference
- Workshop
- Festival/Party
- Restaurant due to promotional activity
- Bar due to promotional activity

If so through what media source?

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Tiktok
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

What makes you stop and look at a social media post? (Choose all that apply)

- Aesthetic images
- Videos
- Public figures involved
- Charity cause
- Humor
- Instructional video
- Curiosity
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

### **Brand Loyalty**

Preferred social media networking site

- A. Facebook
- B. Instagram

- C. Pinterest
- D. Twitter
- E. YouTube
- F. TikTok
- G. Other\_\_\_\_\_
- H. I do not use social media

Does social Media influence your brand loyalty to University events?  
 - If so sporting or academia?

Do you feel more involved with a brand through the use of social media? yes or no

**SMASH**

Have you viewed any social media postings related to SMASH over the past year?

IF YES, how did this impact your impression of SMASH?

Highly Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Highly Positive
1	2	3	4	5

To what extent did the social media for SMASH impact your desire to attend?

Highly Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Highly Positive
1	2	3	4	5

To what extent did the social media impact your desire to donate to SMASH?

Highly Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Highly Positive
1	2	3	4	5

Do you think the frequency of Social Media postings made by the organizers of SMASH are

Highly Lacking	Lacking	Adequate	Abundant	Excessive
1	2	3	4	5

How many years have you attended SMASH?

Where did you hear about SMASH this year?

How much to you typically donate to SMASH per year?

How much do you intend to donate this year?

Have you attended the Class Act in Eureka Springs before SMASH?

How many people do you usually bring to SMASH?

**Demographics**

What year were you born?

What is your gender?

Highest Educational level completed

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Some College
- Undergraduate Degree
- Post Graduate Degree
- Doctoral Degree

Household Income Level

- \$0 - \$25,000
- \$25,001 – \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$75,000
- \$75,001 - \$ 100,000
- \$100,001 - \$125,000
- \$125,001 - Above

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Separated

Are you an alumni from the University of Arkansas? yes or no

- If so were you in the hospitality program? yes or no