
Strategies of Drinking Beer from Traditional to Experiential Marketing - Bergenbier Case Study

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This paper aims to discuss interesting experiential strategies of a specific European beer brand (Bergenbier) that maintained the balance between traditional and experiential marketing.

My hypothesis is that the relationship between both types of marketing should be analysed from two angles: either commercials no longer focus on product features, but rather on events; or the experiential market is very well mirrored in ads. Additionally, this paper points out the levels of brand development that succeeded in engaging consumers so much that they found a new way to spend more time together, thus building a community. The aim is to make a comparative analysis between traditional marketing promoted by 50 TV campaigns (broadcast between 2004 and 2012) and experiential marketing events during the same interval. Basically, this paper seeks to analyze the relationship between traditional and experiential marketing, relying on the examples provided by Bergenbier campaigns, and to improve experiential strategic modules (according to Bernd Schmitt, shortened to SEM) by explaining their cultural dimension.

Keywords: experiential marketing; strategy; brand; beer; advertising

Theoretical framework

Traditional marketing is strongly based on product features and benefits and the assumption that customers are rational decision-makers, being driven by objectivity. Experiential marketing completely changed this perspective, encouraging customer experience and emotion-based choice of brands which relies very much on subjectivity. Given these circumstances, brands should reconsider their images, and appeal to consumers at least from two perspectives: by engaging them more in every campaign and by developing other experiential marketing strategies to enrich advertisers' work. The simplest definition of this term belongs to Bernd Schmitt, who made the following statement: "Experiential marketing is everywhere" [1, p. 54]. His perspective represents the starting point of this research applied on the Romanian beer market and precisely on a brand that has developed experiential strategies to become more likeable and sold – Bergengbier. There are many models of beer demand in scientific literature, which are related to consumer theory. Stigler and Becker [2] believe that tastes are influenced by consumers' consumption capital, "which is formed by consumer experience in the marketplace" [3, p.703]. For this reason, beer is a very good choice to develop the concept of experiential marketing upon.

All these theories started from analyzing brand identity, given that the role of experiential marketing is tightly connected to promoting a product in a dynamic manner. Basically, we can discuss a logical equation or marketing strategy: raising consumers experience increases brand experience and credibility in order to reach higher brand loyalty. Experience is easily associated with both consumers and brands, but it has different meanings which are either emotional, or economic. From the advertising and brand management viewpoint, "an experience is a takeaway impression" as Carbone and Haeckel stated in 1994, [apud 4, p. 571] and this is formed in the consumers' mind in a holistic way. Every brand should be able to create such an experience to achieve long-term consumer loyalty. The category the product belongs to does not matter at all, because this subjective experience relates to the way the consumer integrates the brand into his or her life.

There are few keywords that make the concept of experiential marketing more powerful and easier to be memorized: consumer, engagement, market and mentality. According to Srinivasan and Srivastava, "experiential marketing necessarily involves consumer participation and

goes beyond the consumer's stated needs (addressed by the consumption categories), taking into account the socio-cultural context" [5, p. 194]. This definition adds to the previous keywords another one, namely the context, which refers, in our opinion, to the process of adaptation to the local market. Buying a product implies consuming it in a specific context, which is completely influenced by mentality, cultural aspects, lifestyles, and even by politics. For example, a communist society greatly limited consumer experience, while a democratic one invites consumers to get involved in the communication process.

Searching for the theoretical framework of experiential marketing, it is inevitable to think about the idea of experience that can often be psychologically and emotionally understood. How can a brand get the consumer involved in an event? How can an experience change or consolidate brand positioning? How can a good positioning strategy enhance brand loyalty? All these questions and many others highlight the relevance of a correct understanding of the concept "experience". Hirschman and Holbrook [6] created a model of consumption experience called TEAV (Thought-Emotion-Activity-Value). According to Goode et al., this model proposes "that the thoughts, emotions, activities, and evaluations that occur during an experience are deeply interconnected and feed into one another as a good experience can make a consumer understand and live brand's identity." [7, p. 6] A classification of consumers according to their experience belongs to Zarantonello and Schmitt [8], being based on the way experience is interiorized and applied in advertising. They strongly believe that: "There are holistic consumers, who seem to be interested in all aspects of experience; on the other extreme, there are utilitarian consumers, who do not attach much importance to brand experience. In-between, we find 'hybrid' consumers; hedonistic consumers, who attach importance to sensorial gratification, and emotions" [8, pp.538-539].

Coming back to the beginning of this theoretical approach, Bernd Schmitt's theory is the one that synthesizes opinions regarding marketing and experience. The previous classification makes a connection between brand loyalty and hybrid consumption, creating a special hedonistic figure. Schmitt [1] made a comparison between traditional and experiential marketing. The following table explicitly compares these types of marketing:

Table 1: Traditional vs. experiential marketing

No. crt.	Traditional marketing	Experiential marketing
1.	Focuses on functional features and benefits;	Focuses on customer experiences;
2.	Product category and competition;	Focuses on Consumption as a Holistic Experience;
3.	Customers are viewed as rational decision-makers;	Customers are rational and emotional animals;
4.	Methods and tools are analytical, quantitative and verbal;	Methods and tools are eclectic;

The next step of his research was to elaborate the strategic experiential modules, briefly called SEMs, that includes sensory experience (SENSE), affective experience (FEEL), creative-cognitive experience (THINK), physical experience, behaviour and lifestyles (ACT), and social-identity experience (RELATE). The present research was driven by these modules which were applied to Bergenbier advertising campaigns in order to see which one was the most successful and which could further be developed.

What is Bergenbier on the Romanian market?

The best presentation belongs to the brand itself and it is published on the online brand platform in a subjective yet persuasive manner: “I have one of the clearest and most listened to voices in Romania and I am the symbol of masculinity. I am Bergenbier, the beer of Romanian men.” [9]. In terms of brand capital, this beer went through many stages, because it was born as a Romanian brand and was then repeatedly taken over by different companies: Interbrew, InBev, StartBev Group, and Molson Coors Brewing Company. The main capital is Belgian, but it is exclusively produced for the Romanian market. Moreover, this beer is placed among the top 3 beer producers on the local market, considering it is the first beer born in freedom, and its history confirmed this argument in spite of foreign involvement. This short introduction cannot be fulfilled without specifying

several details regarding the brand platform, such as positioning, brand naming, brand architecture and brand identity. All this information is definitely connected with the verbal and visual identity of this beer that emphasizes brand cohesion.

Positioning this brand in consumers' minds takes into consideration Trout and Ries' opinion related to the complicated process of developing good insight: "What matters are the perceptions that exist in the mind. The essence is to make the thinking mind accept perceptions as reality and then restructure these perceptions to create the position you desire. We later called this process 'outside-in' thinking" [10 p.10]. Bergembier positioning completely relies on consumers because of its slogan ("Friends know why") and association with masculinity. The positioning keywords are masculinity, friendship and freedom, as communication campaigns always point out.

The naming process reflects the beginning of Romanian advertising after Communism, when it was deeply influenced by other industries and tried to integrate global models. Therefore, the brand name reminds consumers of German beer producers who are highly admired by beer drinkers that nevertheless lack this much information about Belgian or British brands with that name. To offer a simple translation, the noun "Bergen" means mountains while "bier" is, obviously, the synonym for beer. Moreover, the logotype design displays mountains to connect the identity visually and verbally. Using a German name does not mean the Romanian brand ignored its roots and heritage, but that the beer aimed to achieve the market authority of German beers. Over the years, Bergembier did not create any sub-brands, but simply types of beer such as alcoholic, non-alcoholic and flavoured.

Bergembier's brand identity is very well established especially on the verbal level, since the visual one went through many changes. In 2009, the beer was visually rebranded, changing brand colour from yellow to red and since then, has renewed its packaging design five times, but not always successfully. Besides, the logo changed in 2006 and 2009, being adapted to the new bottle label, which consumers didn't very much appreciate, because it was difficult to re-position the brand in their minds. In 2012, Bergembier drinkers voiced a revolutionary attitude demanding modern packaging based on the comparison between this brand and others included in the same category. In terms of verbal identity, the slogan has always been the same and the message focused on similar keywords: masculinity, friendship,

happiness (“Be a real man! Drink Bergerbier!; A man who is offered beer and football is a happy man”).

Methodology

The present research consists of two sections: on the one hand, the content analysis applied to the research sample and, on the other hand, the presentation of experiential marketing events. The main purpose of both methods is: to explain the relationship and the transition from traditional to experiential marketing in the most effective way.

In fact, the approach of this paper is based on qualitative research, considering that the ads were discussed on the basis of content analysis and that experiential events rely on participative observation.

The research sample

Applying content analysis implied properly selecting the commercials the current research relied on. Our sample is made of all TV ads created for Bergerbier between 2004 and March 2012, i.e. 50 commercials. We researched them according to several criteria in order to receive relevant input for the transition from traditional to experiential marketing. The criteria are the following issues: the context in which commercials were shot, their format, the features of traditional and experiential marketing, commercials axes, topic and branding strategies.

As for experiential marketing, we chose to take a look at the events organized for the brand in the last few years, and to identify the way Bernd Schmitt’s modules could be applied. For this reason, we selected the most important activities that emphasized Bergerbier’s identity by further involving consumers: creating and celebrating Man’s Day, promoting the first live commercial, organizing online confrontations between consumers, and encouraging gender equality.

Research objectives and hypotheses

Our objectives are directly connected with the title of this research, namely to reveal the relationship between traditional and experiential marketing for a brand born on a young market and very much liked by consumers.

According to this purpose, hypotheses easily highlight the directions of this research, which may synthetically be presented as the following:

- Bergembier TV ads often prepared the target to move on to experiential marketing;
- Some campaigns were delivered not for the product, but to let consumers know about the events that they should attend.
- Campaigns did not focus so much on product features, but on consumers who became a real community.
- Beer-drinkers are emotionally driven to buy the product; thus, consumers relate to each other.
- The Bergembier drinker creates the special identity of the free Romanian man “as specimen”.

Actually, these hypotheses should demonstrate the way traditional marketing weaves into the experiential one, to get more credibility for consumers and further involve them in maintaining and developing brand identity.

Content analysis findings

This part of our research focuses on the TV ads broadcast on the Romanian market since Bergembier has attracted beer drinkers’ attention. The best way to present the relevant output is to ask questions regarding the relationship between consumer insight, market and ad heroes.

Question 1: What is the visual context in which commercials were shot?

Most commercials are visualized in common spaces, such as pubs, stadiums, streets, and all of which important places to share friendship and masculinity.

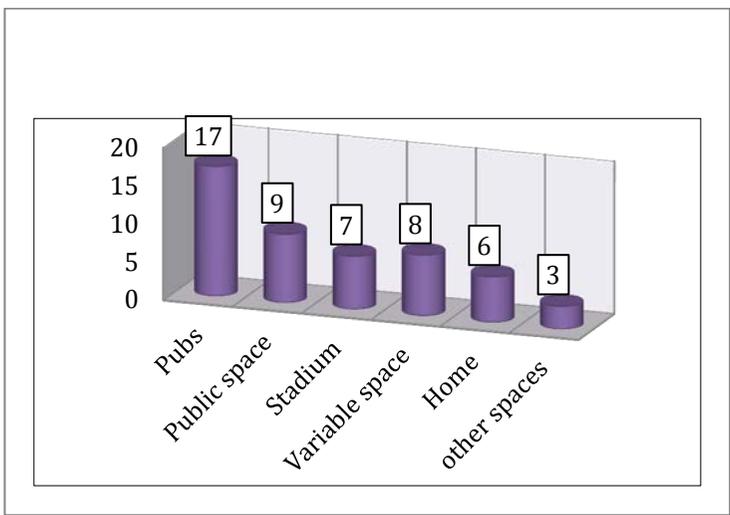


Figure 1: Ads content

It is no wonder that pubs top the chart above, considering the product category beer belongs to. In the table above ‘public space’ refers to open areas where Bergengier drinkers may be seen, such as streets, parks, the seaside, or sometimes even supermarkets. The difference between public space and variable space is that in the latter case scenes were shot in various areas for the same commercial, presenting a mixture of at least two different spaces. In our opinion, this simple statistic does not reveal brand specificity, but for many other beer brands point out product features.

Question 2: What are the formats for Bergengier TV ads?

Answering this question aims to explain a connection between ad context and the way the product and consumers relate to other. The hypothesis is quite simple: the place where a TV ad was shot involves a specific format that demonstrates a stronger cohesion of brand identity, and, certainly, some clues regarding the necessity of experiential marketing.

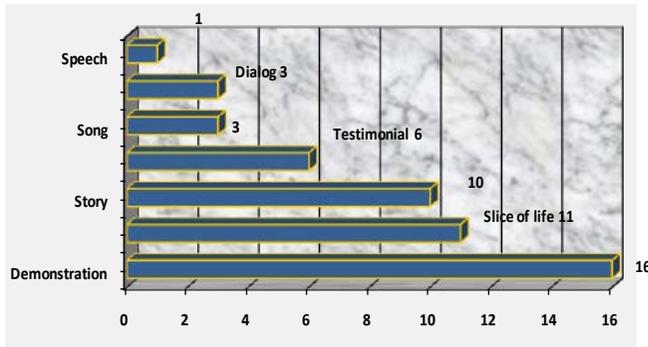


Figure 2: Ad format

The demonstration is best represented in the chart above, because this format not only displays the ritual of drinking Bergenbier, but also the process of creating the best product for local consumers. In fact, one of the commercials conveys exactly this message, so as to describe the product: “A beer perfected by a Belgian master and inspired by the Romanian men.” Slice-of-life points out variable spaces where the main characters of TV ads enjoy drinking a glass of beer, either after a long day at work, or when they celebrate an event related to their hobbies or activities. When it comes to story, plot happens in many scenes and different spaces because its sequentiality involves a conflict as well, but its solution involves many attempts. For example, a very funny spot presents a man drinking his last beer with friends on a cold evening that seems to be Christmas-Eve. When he finishes his drink, he realizes it is too late to find any open stores and buy a present for his girlfriend who invited him to dinner. Therefore, he makes a compromise, finds a stray dog and rings the doorbell with his creative gift, which, obviously, surprises the woman not in a very pleasant way. The entire commercial is based on the dynamic transition from the pub to the street and finally to the front of his girlfriend’s house. In terms of the last items provided by the chart above, the appropriate space for consumers is either home (for testimonial ads), or the Bergenbier factory. Additionally, ‘song’ and ‘speech’ are connected with collective and male events, such as playing and watching football, or celebrating Man’s Day.

Question 3: Who are the main characters of Bergerbier commercials?

At first sight, this question seems unnecessary, given that brand positioning focused exclusively on men. This research discusses the main heroes involved in resolving conflicts and organizing events dedicated to beer drinkers. According to quantitative results, 31 of 50 characters are, as expected, men, while 17 are men and women. This means that women either accompany their husbands or boyfriends when they go out, or that they started to drink beer as well when participating in social events. In our opinion, these results perfectly match the brand creative strategy of “Helping men feel part of the male world by understanding them and fuelling their needs and desires” [11], as stated by Bergerbier’s strategic planner. Women, football and beer are the most important dimensions of masculinity and Bergerbier campaigns successfully developed this idea. In a successful Bergerbier commercial created to celebrate masculinity, three beautiful women prepare a private unspecialized pitch for a football game between friends, bring beer and invite their men to enjoy the big surprise. This is the best example that illustrates how gender discrimination has changed due to a better understanding of masculinity promoted by beer.

The other 2 ads included in our sample are not so relevant for this research, because their heroes are not human but animation characters and because they are irrelevant from a gender viewpoint.

Question 4: What are the most frequent topics of Bergerbier ads?

On analysis of this aspect, our sample provides a variety of situations involving beer drinkers, some of which are quite unexpected and revolving around the main characters of commercials. The next table reveals some disagreements with previous research concerning, for example, the comparison between gender relations and masculinity.

Table 2: Bergenbier TV ad topics

No.	Topics	Ads number
1.	Gender relationship	12
2.	Responsibility	9
3.	Masculinity	8
4.	Friendship	6
5.	Humour and confusion	5
6.	Patriotism	3
7.	Freshness	3
8.	Innovation	2
9.	Quality and the art of drinking	2

Most themes focus on gender, which is perceived from two perspectives: as either misogynistic and contradictory, or collaborative. In the beginning of Bergenbier TV brand promotion, men's attitude toward women was misogynistic. In one commercial spot (Bergenbier - the car-driver lady), a man encourages his wife to get a license despite her lack of skill, only to make sure he can drink beer in peace, since she would be driving. Later on, women became authoritarian controlling their men, and going out for a beer became a drop of freedom. Finally, the last phase can be metaphorically called "the armistice," because women and men spend peaceful time together.

The second topic has a double meaning: drinking responsibly while managing brand identity and consumer satisfaction are the most important facts for current research. Creating a beer specifically for the Romanian men is another responsibility conveyed by Bergenbier TV campaigns. In terms of masculinity and friendship, commercials emphasize consumer behaviour and the way they organize themselves in a powerful community. Patriotism highlights the local roots of the product, since Bergenbier is a Romanian beer for Romanian men.

Question 5: How were SEM modules applied in Bergenbier TV ads?

A theoretical approach should always be checked by a practical one, in order to make any kind of research robust. This is relevant here as well, as

we identified the 5 modules described by Bernd Schmitt in the following chart:

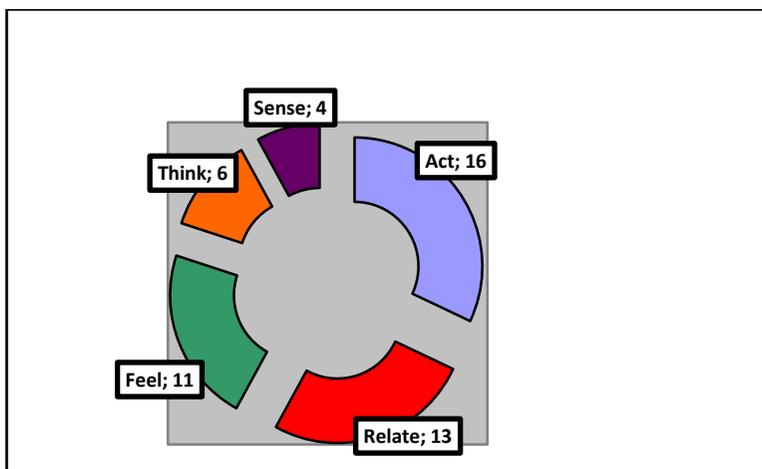


Figure 3: Experiential marketing modules

To get quantitative results, we searched ads for representative indices regarding act, relate, feel, think, sense, especially focusing on the main character. The “act” module predominates in 37 of 50 commercials and implies storytelling adapted to various formats (see Figure 2). To sum up the explanation, Schmitt’s modules could be explained as follows:

- ” Act” means doing something connected to: masculinity (watching football, going to the pub, celebrating victories on the street). This module brings TV viewers very close to experiential marketing;
- ” Relate” means belonging to social groups, often consisting of friends, which is echoed by Bergengbier’s longtime slogan, “Friends know why”. Such groups usually meet in pubs, parks and stadiums.
- “Feel” leads consumers to a range of emotions, either positive (pride, happiness, satisfaction) or negative (frustration and gender conflict).
- ”Think” involves being rational and using real strategies to solve problems. The ad characters are dynamic and get involved in different situations which they solve creatively.

- “Sense” emphasizes product features (cool taste, acid, foam). Only a few commercials explain the production process and beer quality, emphasizing brand values.

Until now, this study presented the content analysis results provided by the commercial sample to explain how Bergenbier conveyed its message in a traditional manner. The research output underlined the creative strategy in promoting brand identity, which consists of creating “the Bergenbier man” as a specimen, someone who expresses new features of masculinity, which are more important than anatomical ones. This specimen is a synthesis of the most important mythological and anthropological heroes, such as the lamentable Don Juan, a bit of Hermes, a bit of Zeus, and so on. Humour and irony present him as a current innovation given Bergenbier campaigns and its positioning on masculinity.

Experiential marketing

Further, this paper aims to present Bergenbier promoting itself in a non-conformist way, i.e. by using experiential marketing and further involving the consumers. Therefore, we searched for the most relevant events created by this brand to build and develop related customer experience. The presentation is chronologically structured to offer a better image of brand evolution and the inter-connection between traditional and experiential marketing:

- ✓ **2007 Man’s Day celebration** [12], when the Romanian Parliament voted to hold this celebration on May 5th based on the demand of Bergenbier consumers. This is a significant change given that only Mother’s Day is considered important in Romania and is celebrated on May 8th; no father’s or man’s day has ever been taken into consideration. A brand beer succeeded in gaining the respect for masculinity and creating big events dedicated to consumer loyalty. The president of Bergenbier S.A., Mihai Ghyka, stated at that time: “Launched in 2007 by Bergenbier, the Man’s Day event became a brand in itself. This is why on Man’s Day we re-find the specific brand values (masculinity, yellow, and friends) that naturally come up in a special edition.”[11] We may actually say that this event reached out to consumers beyond branding thanks to their very

enthusiastic reaction. This day was associated with changing the brand identity, which was not a very effective idea, because the target did not recognize the beer on shelves. The two-liter bottle changed its label and colours as well. The shape of the bottle echoed masculinity, due to the analogy with man's shoulders, and the fact it looked like a trapeze. Man's Day was simultaneously celebrated by 25 000 people in 10 important Romanian cities. Participants enjoyed beer and "mici" (traditional Romanian grilled sausages made of minced beef and pork). This event raised brand popularity because many live concerts at the initiative of Bergengbier was organized, which fans of Romanian artists very much appreciated.

- ✓ **Organization of Romanian Men (OBR)** –in 2009 Bergengbier founded OBR which was promoted through many channels, such as TV advertisements, Facebook, and on the Bergengbier site [13]. In April 2012 OBR already had 100 000 members and its main activity was "fighting beer in hand for masculinity, friendship, competition and entertainment". OBR is both a real and virtual community with a national identity strongly developed around the idea of masculinity. All actions dedicated to this men's celebration became more powerful under the generous OBR patronage which is not just a fictional association, but a real one with legal recognition.
- ✓ **The Men's Hymn** [14] was the second strategic experiential idea, being the confirmation of the Bergengbier community and the loyalty of its members. The hymn was launched on Men's Day as a symbol of masculinity, and was perceived as a brand business-card perfectly synchronized with the TV campaigns. Men found out about it by watching commercials.
- ✓ **"The Yellow Book"**- OBR promoted men's rights very creatively , by inventing "the yellow book" which includes the most important decisions proposed by men. The book was published by OBR and distributed on May 5th in the park where Bergengbier celebrated the anniversary of Romanian men. Fans can receive the pocket book which respects the brand colour, while regular-sized book will be published next year. This "masculinity Charta" was previously announced by TV and online campaigns and it will be expanded in future campaigns to get credibility. Book chapters are good subjects

not only for discourse analysis, but also for traditional topics, as can be seen – “Man’s Day, Men about themselves, Men and Football, Men and women, Men going out for a beer.” We selected a law for each of them to better understand the book’s aim:

Table 3: “The Yellow Book”

<i>Man’s Day</i>	On May 6 th men are allowed to be late at work.
<i>Men about themselves</i>	Salad cannot be taken for a meal.
<i>Men and Football</i>	Watching a football game without a beer is like a wedding with no music.
<i>Men and women</i>	If a woman is on a diet, her man doesn’t have to.
<i>Men going out for a beer</i>	Beer is a drink that matches any kind of meal.

- ✓ **The first live commercial-** In 2011, Bergenbier broadcast the first live commercial in Romania, simultaneous with the inauguration of a recently renovated local stadium (Ilie Oana placed in a small town (Ploiești). Two well-known artists (Vlad Miriță and Irina Iordăchescu) held a glass of Bergenbier while singing “Libiamo” (“Traviata” by Verdi). The commercial spot was broadcast on an important TV channel (PROTV), on the internet and on huge digital screens. This event linked Bergenbier not only to football, but also to the modernization of advertising in Romania, through a new idea of performing the ad directly in front of the consumers, in order to achieve more credibility. Bergenbier showed again how unconventional it is, because it takes pride in building its brand very creatively.
- ✓ **The online confrontation**
Furthermore, in 2011 the brand organized an online confrontation between “Mr. Unfiltered” and “Mr. Summerboy”, which was, in fact, a musical battle between two stars. Both characters sang the advertising message in different styles and supporters were invited to vote this confrontation on Facebook. Drinkers borrow product features and become

the “unfiltered Men” who can survive in the jungle, dislike the snobbery of the young generation, and prefer to be natural. The other team drinks lemon beer, is younger, uses colloquial language and does not have any life experience.

All these experiential events outlined how dynamic the brand is and its various strategies to appeal to consumers, either by invading their world or by inviting them to discover a new one, created by the authority of OBR.

Conclusion

To sum up, the entire demonstration of this article emphasizes the strong relationship between brand ads and experiential events, in which commercials anticipated and announced the latter. Subsequently, the consumer is more important than products or brands, as TV ads often emphasized. The most important aspect, which results from this research, is the fact that experiential marketing events engage any type of beer drinker or non-drinker celebrating Men’s Day. Commercial topics always invited Bergengier drinkers to enjoy football, OBR and different men’s celebrations. Moreover, every celebration had a story behind it and a specific strategy, not always consisting of gathering people together and drinking beer. Beer-drinking strategies actually look both at the context and the community consumers. It is not an individual action, but a public and collective one. This kind of strategy consists of: first, creating a consumer community, officially recognized by everyone; second, celebrating the consumer; third, launching a new style of message communication (the live commercial); fourth, involving many people in experiential events from different fields (music, sport, culture); fifth, weaving online and offline communication to enhance credibility, and sixth, making the consumer part of any kind of action regarding both traditional and experiential marketing;

In conclusion, Bergengier is a case study that highlights the way a beer has become much more than a simple successful brand on a local market, thanks to its unconventional means. Finally, we can say Bergengier is not just a beer, but the best example of living brand experience by engaging consumers at a very high level.

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