EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF EVENT DESIGN AND THEMING ON ENHANCING ATTENDEES EXPERIENCE USING BOOMTOWN FAIR AS A CASE STUDY

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“Immerse yourself in a new world, become your inner character, be part of the story”

(Boomtown Fair, 2017 online).
DECLARATION

“I declare that this dissertation has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. It is the result of my own independent research except where otherwise stated.”

Signed………………………………………….
Name:…………………………………………

April 2017
ABSTRACT

This purpose of this study was to explore the importance of event design and theming on enhancing attendees’ experience and was based around the case study of Boomtown Fair. The research project contains an introduction, literature review, methodology, results analysis and discussion and a summary, conclusions and recommendations.

The introduction provides background to the research project, a rationale on the study and includes the aims and objectives set by the researcher. The literature review provides critical analysis on the existing and relevant literature on event design, theme design and experience illustrated in a conceptual framework. The methodology chapter provides justification for the qualitative research method chosen and the use of secondary research. The results, analysis and discussion chapter will display the themes and patterns within the data collected and compare them to the relevant literature that already exists. The summary, conclusion and recommendations chapter reviews the key findings, limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research and the industry.

Primary data was collected by a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews; participants were selected by purposive and convenience sampling. Secondary data was collected by analysing Boomtown Fair’s website and books, the thematic analysis was then conducted to identify patterns and themes that arose within the data followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings relating to the relevant literature and conceptual framework. The research project revealed that the attendees’ experience was enhanced by theme design and other design elements that matched it, along with incorporation the four realms of experience. All these influenced the attendees’ to approach the overall environment and actively participate and co-create. It further highlighted the importance of event design and how it could gain competitive advantage; however the research questions the catering design element. From these results the researcher adapted the conceptual framework to Boomtown Fair to illustrate how event design and theming enhanced attendees’ experience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BF: Boomtown Fair
P1-6: Participant 1-6
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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

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1.0 Introduction

This research project will investigate whether event design, most importantly theme design, enhances attendees' experiences. The researcher chose a case study approach and used Boomtown Fair (BF), a festival in Winchester, because of its extreme use of theming and creative event design (Robinson, 2016). This approach will investigate how BF’s extreme use of theme and event design enhances attendees’ experience and if theme design is the dominant element for enhancing it. With this in mind, the research project will benefit event managers and organisers as it will provide ideas on how to effectively design their overall event, specifically festivals, which will be beneficial knowledge as the events industry is a competitive market and individuals are looking for more than just ‘simple entertainment’ (O'Sullivan and Spangler 1999 Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Yeoman 2013 Getz and Page 2016).

1.1 Background

The events industry, especially the festival sector is rapidly growing, so it is essential to learn how to create and manage a festival effectively and provide a memorable experience. The use of effective event design is vital, as it’s where the experience rises from (Brown, 2005 Berridge, 2007 Silvers, 2007a Goldblatt, 2010 Bowdin et al., 2011 Bladen et al., 2012 Page and Connell, 2012 Yeoman, 2013 Kitchen and Ferdinand, 2015 Getz and Page, 2016).

Getz (2010:2) argues that festivals are

“Themed, public celebrations...and a theme is a unifying idea or concept which gives meaning to the event or the object of celebration, therefore theme is assigned with a view to being a dictating influence over all aspects of subsequent event design.”

According to Robinson et al (2010) McKay (2015) and Robinson (2016) themed festivals within the UK have become phenomenally popular due to the experience it provides its attendees. Moore (2017 online), and Trenchard (cited in Pearce 2017 online) argue that theming is what makes the experience and creates a bond between the festival and the
attendees. Trenchard further argues how “it’s not enough to just put a stage in a field anymore, audiences are looking for more than that now; they’re looking for a full experience, which theming provides.” Pearce (2017 online) highlights that a third of UK festivals have a theme in place to “help bring the party to life” with elements such as fancy dress and creating a festival site that provides, fantasy, escapism, engagement and interaction. Event designers have become interested in how they can manipulate the event design to affect the attendees experience positively. Festival design is seen as an art and a science and also a specialist field within the industry because of the experience is provides (Getz, 2010).

However, there is not much literature on experience as it is personal to individuals and cannot be fully studied. Various scholars argue that event design is a vital tool as it’s what builds the experience. Although event design has been studied and explored by scholars it is still confusing and misunderstood as to what it is, if theming is the dominant element and how it enhances the experience. This presents an opportunity to explore the effects of event design and theming on enhancing attendees’ experience.

1.2 Boomtown Fair

This research project will look at BF, which is a festival located in South Downs National Park, Winchester UK. It was established in 2009 growing to a capacity of 60,000 attendees within the last five years (Boomtown Fair, 2017 online). According to Robinson (2016:5)

“Boomtown Fair had quickly grown to prominence, with an extreme approach to theming, narrative, visual display and mixed programming...it has become the fastest growing festival within the UK.”

This suggests that BF’s attendance growth was due to the experience the extreme approach to theme and event design provided. BF uses theme as the dominant design factor, aiming to make the event design fit within the overall theme and make the design creative and interactive as possible (Boomtown Fair, 2017 online). BF is therefore a suitable case study to investigate whether event design and theming enhances attendees’ experience. The
researcher analysed BF’s website to explore its use of theme and event design in detail, which will be discussed within chapter five: secondary research findings.

1.3 Reasons for this study

The researcher has chosen to explore this topic because of their level of interest of creative event design and theming within the events industry, especially festivals, and how it affects attendees’ experience. Their interest was stimulated throughout their time at university, through university modules, conversations with lecturers and personal experiences, such as attending various events and being the creative director when hosting an event in first year and second year with their group. The researcher understands how competitive the industry is and has realised that a new take on festivals, being themed festivals, has emerged and become popular, especially with festivalgoers; for example Boomtown Fair. The researcher believes they could have become so popular because of the experience they provide and wants to investigate if event design and theming enhances attendees’ experience.

1.4 Dissertation Aims and Objectives

1.4.1 Dissertation Aim

To explore the effects of event design and theming on enhancing attendees experience using Boomtown Fair as a case study.

1.4.2 Dissertation Objectives

- To critically analyse the literature of event experience, event design and theming and summarise the established hypothesis with a conceptual framework.
- To investigate Boomtown Fair’s use of theming and event design through secondary research.
- To conduct six semi-structured interviews with festivalgoers about the impact of theming and event design within Boomtown Fair and how it enhanced their experience.
• To analyse the primary data collected to identify themes and patterns that have emerged, using thematic analysis.
• To compare and contrast the analysed data to the theory uncovered and discussed within the literature review; in order to adapt the conceptual framework to BF’s use of event design and theming on enhancing attendees’ experience.

1.5 Research Project Structure

The structure of this research project will consist of several chapters, Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Results, Analysis and Discussion and Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Research Project Structure
Chapter One: Introduction

This Chapter will provide a background to the research project, introduce the case study: Boomtown Fair, identify the research aims and objectives and outline the overall structure of the research project.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This Chapter provides a critical analysis and discussion of the literature relevant to the research project. The topics discussed and examined are: Experience, Event Design and Theming.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides the appropriate research methods chosen for this project and a rationalisation. As the researcher conducted Primary research within the research topic, evidence of ethical approval is provided and ethical considerations discussed.

Chapter Four: Results, Analysis and Discussion

This chapter provides the analysis and discussion of the results, which is then compared to the existing information and knowledge deliberated within the literature review in Chapter Two. This chapter aims to explore the ideas and information outlined within the conceptual framework and uncover if event design and theming enhances attendees’ experiences.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The final chapter will conclude the overall study by providing a summary of the key findings and recommendations for future research and for the industry. It will also outline the limitations, revisit the aims and objectives and provide an overall reflection of the research project.
1.6 Summary

This chapter provides: background to the research topic, reasons for the study, the structure of the research project, outlines the aims and objectives and identifies how it will be beneficial to event organisers and the events industry. The next chapter will critically analyse and discuss the literature relevant to the research topic, which are experience, event design and theming.
CHAPTER TWO
Literature Review

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1.0 Introduction

According to Adams (2009:271)

“Literature reviews are an important starting point for all kinds of research projects.”

Roberts (2010) supports Adams (2009) and argues that having a comprehensive and current literature review is a vital part of the research process as it improves the researcher’s probability of obtaining significant results. Therefore literature on event design, theme design and experience will be critically analysed within this chapter so the researcher can explore and understand what experience and event design is, the dominance of the theme design element and how or if the use of event design and theming enhances attendees’ experiences.

2.1 Special Events and Festivals

‘Special events’ have various definitions within literature but also common characteristics being unique, non-routine occasions, a form of celebration, festivity, tradition and opportunities for an experience outside of everyday life whether: political, social, cultural or religious. (Yeoman et al 2003, Getz and Page 2016, Goldblatt 2010, Matthews 2015). Getz and Page (2016) argue that the ‘specialness’ of an event can depend on the viewpoint of the attendees or the producer of the event. Bowdin et al (2010:45) argue that ‘special events’ are spreading geographically becoming a growing industry making it nearly impossible to provide one definition that will include all diversities and “shades of events”.

Festivals are known as the distinct sub-field, within special events and have various definitions. They are commonly known to celebrate identities, express beliefs amongst communities and as the “ultimate, most intense manifestation of the collective being….a polar opposite to conventional social life, a time out of time” (Ekman, 1999 Quinn, 2013:47 Getz and Page, 2010).
Getz and Page (2010) Goldblatt (2010) believe Festival experiences are personal and social so knowing how to manipulate the festival setting by sensory stimulations, human interactions, themes, programmes and other elements of event design, to affect the attendees experience has become of interest within the industry. Festivals always have a theme and are known to be diverse with a distinctive style; thus fostering a specific kind of experience.

2.2 Experience

“The core phenomenon of event studies is the event experience and meanings attached to it”

(Getz, 2010:40).

Jackson (2005) argues experience, like event design is given little consideration in event management, as is the relationship between them, so the meaning of experience is not studied significantly to enable it to be defined. Berridge (2012); McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) Bladen et al (2012) and Getz, (2016) agree with Jackson and suggest that defining experience is difficult because people interpret it differently. To understand experience we need to know not only how experiences are created, but also how those providing them and those participating give them meaning. McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) argue people construct their own unique experiences based on their perceptions and experience is normally heavily influenced by factors such as personal needs, past experiences and selective sensory focusing the event design provides.

Berridge (2007) Silvers (2004) and Allen et al. (2011) argue events can be created to achieve a certain purpose and outcome; known as designed event experience. A clear vision for the events experience should be formulated, and elements identified and designed to realise the event experience This suggests that to enhance attendees’ experiences, the role of event design is not just innovation sets and costumes but involves decisions and choices such as layout, flow, programming, decoration, all contribute to the overall environment and atmosphere. Buswell (2004) agrees that experience is as a result of a carefully designed environment where all matters have been planned. Andersson et al (2014) argue that as
experiences are personal, subjective and differ with individual attendees they cannot be completely designed; event design elements can only deliver a contribution towards events that the attendees use and respond to, which then invents their personal experience.


“If we don’t design, we leave the experience to chance, if we do design, we increase the predictability of the event outcome. It can be further suggested that if we inadequately design, we adversely affect the experience outcome.”

2.2.1 The Experience Economy

Getz and Page (2016:24) argue that the experience economy is “the next stage in the evolution in society from a service economy.” O’Sullivan and Spangler (1999) Pine and Gilmore (2012) argue that events need to create memorable experiences, by engaging attendees rather than simply entertaining them. Experiences can become individualised by engagement by the event connecting with an attendee in a deeper, memorable way.

“Festival goers will likely continue to crave nuanced, unique and refreshed experiences which help them to achieve new levels of personal accomplishment and enrichment...They will want something personal, bespoke and unique”

(Yeoman, 2013:254).

2.2.2 The Four Realms of Experience

Pine and Gilmore (2012) suggest that there are different realms of experiences for engaging attendees: entertainment, educational, aesthetic and escapism. These are compatible elements that interlink to create a memorable, unique and personal experience (see figure 2). They should be considered when creating the event and its design, to help event managers decide how to design the event to enhance the experience.
Pine and Gilmore created these realms believing experience within an event engage attendees on multiple levels. The model also includes the type of participation (active or passive) and the type of environmental relationship or connection (Weiermair, et al., 2006). Passive participation means that the attendee doesn’t do anything to influence or affect the type of experience, but engages as an observer. (Weiermair, et al., 2006).
The entertainment realm, also known as the core activity (Andersson et al., 2014), is the oldest most developed form of experience where attendees will passively absorb the experience through their senses (Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Weiermair, et al., 2006). Pine and Gilmore express experiences need to more memorable and unusual so the other three realms need to come into the mix effectively to provide an opportunity to enhance the overall experience.

The educational realm, also known as the secondary activities (Andersson et al., 2014), is where the attendees absorb the event similar to the entertainment realm but they need to actively participate, and engage their mind to enhance their knowledge or increase their skills.

The escapist realm is where the attendee needs to be completely immersed but actively involved.

The Aesthetic realm is where the attendee is completely immersed within the physical environment of the event where the content, theme and production of different elements play a huge part in the event design to make attendees want to explore, yet stay within the festival whilst being completely immersed. (Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Getz and Page, 2016). Pine and Gilmore (2012:54) state that the aesthetic aspects of an experience can be completely natural or man-made by the event design elements but argues “there no such thing as an artificial experience; every experience created within an individual is real, whether the stimuli is natural or artificial.” Event design plays a role connecting the attendees to the realness within the created environment, thus stimulating the experience. However, Getz (2016) suggests there is so much more to events than its aesthetic.

Event managers can enhance experiences by integrating the four realms to create and design a rich memorable experience and the right balance between these realms creates ‘the sweet spot’ which indicates the success of the event. Within event design, the elements can be designed to target each realm effectively, thus enhancing the experience overall (Turley and Milliman, 2000 Pine and Gilmore, 2011 Weiermair, et al., 2006).
Getz and Page (2016) argue that an event needs the combination of its tangible setting (the site and venues), the atmosphere (Sensory stimulations) and the overall programming to be designed to incorporate both the goals of the organiser and the event and the attendees’ needs, desires and preferences. Events must be designed with elements to suggest what experiences could happen when using them, such as theme, programing, entertainment, environment, catering, and production. Each element of event design that incorporates the four realms effectively will then encourage the attendees to approach and accept the overall environments atmosphere positively (Turley and Milliman, 2000 Pine and Gilmore, 2011 Weiermair, et al., 2006).

2.2. 3 Co-creation

Getz and Page (2016:226) state the Experience Realms need to be expanded and the idea of co-creation needs to be considered.

“Co-creation means that an organisation (event) and customer (attendee or potential attendee) share in the creation of value by allowing customers to shape experiences to suit their needs and desires.”

Co-creation and the idea of attendees becoming actors and a part of the action develops Goffman’s (1975) theory of theatregoers and onlookers. Matthews (2015) supports, Goffman (1975) Getz and Page (2016), and suggests that action amongst attendees increases engagement, participation, excitement, which stimulates co-creation. Attendees are more likely to become active festival participants as opposed to passive if they actively participate, interact and engage with the different activities and experiences presented at a festival. Active participants tend to feel empowered and enjoy the event more than the passive participants (observers) thus creating a personal and memorable experience (Schoenmakers 2007 Pine and Gilmore 2012 Matthews 2015). It is arguable that using people as décor stimulates participation, engagement, excitement and leads to people co-creating their experiences (Matthews, 2015). According to Matthews (2015) there are three categories: functional, interactive and decorative.
Functional is where bar staff, technical personnel, and attendees participate and dress within the festivals’ theme to transform the environment into a “sea of moving decorations” (Matthews, 2015:83). Costumed festivalgoers become a part of the fantasy, escapism and immerse themselves completely within the festivals’ theme or story and overall environment co-creating their experience and actively participating (Robinson, 2016).

“Costumes and fancy dress lend themselves to the co-production of spectacle and like carnival inversion; the event becomes a stage on which festival goers perform”

(Robinson, 2016:94).

Interactive is purely entertainment and the unusual forms that can interact with attendees in themed costumes such as robots, magicians, fortunetellers, circus acts, table acts and actors; they can all be in character but interact from a fixed position.

Decorative is entertainment but not interactive; it’s passive and supposed to be visual such as performance art (Matthews 2015).

### 2.3 Event Design

“If the core phenomenon of an event is the experience, then event design effectively becomes the platform upon which it is built”


This statement supports Brown (2005) Silvers (2007a) who suggested that the event process must start with event design; if not designed correctly the event cannot be saved by good management or risk assessments. Getz and Page (2016) stress the importance of event design and highlight that within 30 years of event design and experience along with 15 years of research, they’re convinced that well researched and effectively applied event design is the significant factor in the success and sustainability of any event and is a key factor to rich experiences.
Bladen et al. (2012) and Richards et al. (2014) suggest that like experience, event design is said to be overlooked and hard to understand because a proper definition doesn’t exist as people interpret it differently. They also believe that there is a misunderstanding amongst the industry, managers, and students, as to what event design is; some view event design in what is considered the traditional way, where events are produced through all the staged elements of event design and that collectively guarantees success. This view has been questioned with suggestions that planning is the main function as without it the elements are randomly present and event managers often “hope for the best” that they work together effectively and compliment each other.

The lack of a clear definition for Event design, leads to misunderstanding and authors tend to disagree, contradict one another or build upon each other’s view.

O’Toole (2011:183) argues that:

“Event design is a purposeful arrangement of elements of an event to maximize the positive impression on the attendees and other stakeholders.”

This supports Andersson et al. (2014); event design elements deliver a contribution towards the event experience which attendees respond to so maximizing the “positive impression” is needed for attendees to deliver a positive response, as it ‘invents their personal experience’.

Bladen et al. (2012) argue that event design is the vision of an intended experience, delivered through event production; thus suggesting planning is the main function. This supports Buswell (2004), Silvers (2004), Berridge (2007), Allen et al. (2011) and suggesting events are designed experiences also this supports Silvers (2004b) theory in that event managers should view themselves ‘experiential engineers’ and should piece together the general and overall picture of an event, imagine all features and details of the experience package, and manage it from start to finish. Bladen et al. (2012) supports Pine and Gilmore’s (2012) Four Realms of Experience, of designing and planning the certain elements in each realm to create the
intended experience, but disagrees with Pine and Gilmore’s (2012) statement that each experience is personal and individual and cannot necessarily be fully designed.

Ferdinand and Kitchen (2012:52) suggest that:

“Event design as a stimulus activates the five senses... embedded within the experience, the design of an event is both an experience maker and enhancer.”

McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) agree suggesting that individuals create their own personal experience, heavily influenced by ‘selective sensory focusing’. Ferdinand and Kitchen (2012) argue that event design provides an opportunity for the individuals “to engage in sensory and emotional interaction with the event”. Matthews (2015:53), also suggests festivals are “emotional and sensory experiences”; the more the event can appeal to the attendees’ five senses and emotions, the more unforgettable and thriving it will be.

Although Ferdinand and Kitchen (2012:52) agree that production is an important element within event design, they argue it isn't the only one; participation is key in creating the experience,

“Thus event design is not simply a matter of production but participation to create memorable and unique happenings.”

Richards et al (2014) Matthews (2015) Getz and Page (2016) agree participation and co-creation is key to create the unique and memorable experience, and if festivals want differentiation within the industry, then attendees need to be connected as well as entertained. This supports the experience economy and the four realms of experience.

Upon reviewing the literature of event design it is clear that event design elements are an important factor when it comes to experience and that they are interlinked. However, there are so many views and definitions as to what experience and event design is and how they relate; which is why it is still misunderstood today. The main divide between the various views is that some believe experiences can be designed, whereas others argue event design
elements only provide a contribution and influence, as every experience is personal and individual.

### 2.3.1 Elements of Event Design

Berridge (2007:30) suggests that event design is a significant instrument as it connects directly to “development of the event concept and experience and enables the event manager to envision and implement the event.” Event design consists of: theme design, catering design, entertainment design, production design, programme design and environment design. The focus of research for this topic will be the element of theming because the researcher wants to uncover if theme design is a dominant element towards experiences.

Each element is said to be important and all the elements must be unified and not considered separately. They need to be planned with complete attention to detail and combined to create the eventscape and shape the overall event and its environment from which the experience arises (Sharples et al., 2014 Getz and Page, 2016). Turley and Milliman (2000) Sharples et al (2014) argue that the overall environment influences the responses and experiences of the attendees who respond in two different ways ‘approach’ or ‘avoid’.

Approach is where attendees respond positively and engage within the event, explore and participate thus enhancing their experience. Avoid is where they do not connect with the event design’s environment; an atmosphere isn’t created so experience isn’t enhanced and can potentially cause attendees to ‘withdraw into themselves’. This creates a challenge for the event managers, as every attendee perceives the intended event design atmosphere differently (Turley and Milliman, 2000) (Shone and Parry, 2010).

> “Attendees create their own experience of an event based on their own perceptions of different touch points and interactions provided and facilitated. Event managers cannot control the individual experience but can design and combine the various elements of the eventscape to facilitate desired outcomes”

(Sharples et al., 2011:154).
### 2.3.2 Theme Design Overview

Allen *et al* (2011:422) argue that the main creative and artistic decision when staging an event is *“that of determining the theme.”* Festivals utilise theming and event design to make attendees feel as if they are in an imaginary world; which relates to Pine and Gilmore’s (2012) escapism realm. Themed festivals are a significant part of the events industry because of the way the elements are staged and combined. The emphasis of the elements at the festival reflects the personal style of the event and enhances the experience according to Allen *et al* (2011). According to Berridge (2007) and Bladen *et al* (2012) theming is vital to effectively organise and fulfil an event as it improves every aspect of the event. Theming and event design endeavours to convert nostalgia and forgetfulness into a constructed fantasy world (Archer, 1997). Stories and spectacles promote a fantasy by creating an entertaining atmosphere and its strategy is to respond to the attendees expected fantasy (Clavé *et al*., 2007).

*Themes should alter the guests sense of time, place and reality*  
(Getz and Page, 2016:70).

Theming is used to create an experience that impresses individuals long-term. The theme can dictate the overall character, audio visual sounds, décor, colours, props and atmosphere, which is vital for a unique event experience (Allen and Harris, 2002). Nicholson and Pearce (2001) propose that dominant reasons for attending festivals are directly related to the theme. To Sonder (2004), theming should be considered an essential element of the entire event process because event design is the incorporation of a themed message. Monroe (2006) Clavé *et al.* (2007) Allen *et al* (2011), agree and further argue that that theming is the dominant element because attendees remember themes more than information. Attendees want meaningful and memorable experiences as opposed to simple entertainment (Getz and Page, 2016).
Theming is supposedly the structure of the psychical and sensory environment, which influences attendees’ responses. Implementing the theme is vital as a festival is trying to create an impulsive and lively atmosphere; theming can influence attendees to move around the festival site. Every detail of the theme including other elements of event design are instruments of moods to be manipulated. Poor use of theming, décor, noise, lighting, space, staging, colours and so on can make or break an event. Once the establishment of the theme is complete the festival must incorporate the other elements to fit the theme making it easy to determine the entertainment, catering, programming, environment design and overall production. The elements help create the environment; attendees cognitively, emotionally and physiologically respond to a pleasant environment which dictates how they feel about the event and controls how they will interrelate (Monroe, 2006 Clavé et al., 2007 Berridge, 2006 Shone and Parry, 2010 Bowdin et al., 2010 Allen et al., 2011).

2.3.3 Theme design: Story Telling

Lukas (2007) argues that theming provides a story motivating attendees to move around the festival site engaging with the storyline and experiencing it. Mossberg et al (2010) supports this by arguing that story telling is a major aspect of many experiences and is becoming progressively interconnected to event experiences. Lukas (2016) states having backstory or storyline provides attendees with the ultimate experience and escapism as they feel they’re in a different world and become fully immersed. This is why festivals need effective theming and a story line to stimulate the senses, engage the mind and emotions, to capture the escapism aspect. Theming is placed to ensure an experience occurs.

2.3.4 Décor

Within the literature there is a general misunderstanding as to which design element décor belongs; it can be theme, environment, and entertainment or production design; ‘décor is a must as it is an ambience maker; contributing to the overall environment of the event. Décor provides the ‘wow’ factor as it transforms ordinary spaces into an imaginative setting to provide an escapist experience; it brings the theme to life. Décor needs to use the space effectively, use complimentary colours, lights, visuals, themed sets, props and work with the environment’s strengths. The function of theming and décor is to provide an escapist and
imaginary element to the atmosphere. The context of the décor is to ensure that attendees are entering a world of make-believe (Glodblatt, 2010 Matthews, 2015).

“People attend events to be transported into an environment that is different from their everyday life”

(Matthews, 2015:53).

Décor can include: props, backdrops, floral displays, elements of nature, banners, signs, themed sets, and actors, interactive and decorative entertainment. All forms of theming and décor can create an element of surprise, and staging the unexpected correctly to achieve this provides customer satisfaction and makes the experience or festival unique and memorable (Goldblatt, 2010 Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Matthews, 2015 Ferdinand and Kitchen, 2016).
2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of attendees experience enhanced by theming

- **Theme design**
  - Influences
  - Compliments
  - Influences

- **Experience realms**
  - Entertainment, educational, aesthetic, escapism
  - Influences
  - Compliments
  - Influences

- **Other event design elements**
  - Entertainment, catering, content, programming, production, environment
  - Influences
  - Compliments
  - Influences

- **Attendees response**
  - Approach or avoid
  - Influences
  - Influences

- **Participation and Co-creation**
  - Actively participate or passively participate
  - Influences
  - Influences

- **Experience**
The researcher created and developed a conceptual framework based upon the literature examined. Overall the literature suggests that theming is the dominant design element and should incorporate the four experience realms. Theme design and the four realms should then influence the other design elements to create the sweet spot, this then supposedly influences attendees’ response to the environment which influences participation and co-creation (active participation or passive participation) and their experience. The researcher believes that the literature suggests these factors are what enhance an attendees experience at a festival.

2.5 Summary

The chapter critically analysed the literature relevant to the research topic and identified that theme event design and experience has a lack of academic knowledge due to differing interpretations among authors presenting a gap within the literature highlighting the need for the researcher to address it within the research project. After studying and reviewing the main topics: event design, event experience and theming the researcher created a conceptual framework to clarify understanding of the literature and help determine appropriate methodologies to take the research further, which can be found within the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Primary and Secondary Research
3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research
  3.2.1 Qualitative Research
  3.2.2 Quantitative Research
  3.2.3 Inductive and Deductive
3.3 Methodology
3.4 A Case Study Approach
3.5 Research Methods: Interviews
3.6 Sampling Strategy
  3.6.1 Sample Size
3.7 Reliability and Validity
3.8 Data Analysis
3.9 Ethical Issues
3.10 Limitations and Constraints
3.11 Summary
3.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss various research approaches, methods and their appropriateness. A rationalisation will be provided for the use of qualitative design, a case study approach and semi-structured interviews. This chapter includes the methods of data analysis, ethical considerations, limitations and the reliability and validity of the research.

3.1 Primary and Secondary Research

The researcher has conducted primary and secondary research methods. Primary research involves personally obtaining information through observation and investigation of a subject; this could be done through qualitative or quantitative research (Dawson, 2009). Secondary research refers to information and data that has been gathered and published by others (Pawar, 2004).

Secondary research methods such as: textbooks, journals and e-books were used alongside Primary data to gain a wider interpretation and an in-depth understanding of the research topic; and to underpin the reliability of the research. The researcher also conducted secondary research to investigate BF’s use of theme and event design by analysing their website and textbooks that have used BF as a case study. The Secondary research helped identify the gaps within the literature, which helped the researcher collect relevant Primary data to their study (Kumar, 2014).

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

“Qualitative enquiry examines data which are narrative”

(Hyde, 2000:82).

Qualitative research is detailed and descriptive information that can develop knowledge in a variety of areas. The chosen area for the research project is the insight and understanding of people’s individual experiences involving festivals, theming and event design. This type of
research enables examination of participant’s behaviours, attitudes, values, opinions and perceptions of the chosen research topic (Grbich, 2012). The process of qualitative research is naturalistic and includes developing questions and procedures; it is used to uncover trends and implement insights into the issues or help develop a topic/idea (Thomas, 2003, Creswell, 2013). Methods used to collect qualitative data include: interviews, focus groups, participant observations, case studies and questionnaires (Lashley and Best 2001).

3.2.2 Quantitative research

“Quantitative enquiry examines data which are numbers”

(Hyde, 2000:82).

Quantitative research is considered as hypothesis-testing research (Kerlingger, 1964) and a statistical study, which has been a dominant method of researching social science (Newman and Benz, 1998). It is an approach used to quantify the topic/problem and is based on numerical measurements and often tests casual hypothesis. Quantitative methods include: surveys, online polls, systematic observations and longitudinal studies (Thomas and Thomas, 2003) (Creswell, 2013).

3.2.3 Inductive and Deductive Research

Although it is shown that qualitative and quantitative are quite distinct, Hyde (2000) argues that both practice induction and deduction. An inductive logic is where a theory is created through first-hand observation and deductive logic starts with hypothesis and theory, which is then tested and adapted as necessary depending upon the findings (Hyde, 2000). Deductive procedures might be applied in finding qualitative research through an approach of theory testing by ‘pattern matching’ (thematic analysis).
3.3 Methodology

The researcher used the qualitative approach when conducting Primary research because of the nature of the project and the type of in-depth data required. This approach was considered suitable, as the aim of the project was to investigate participants’ perceptions, knowledge and opinions on how event design and theming enhances their experience, using BF as a case study. A deductive process was adopted using the theories, observations, hypothesis and a conceptual framework identified in the literature review to strengthen and support the Primary research.

3.4 Case Study Approach

“A case study method is to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena…it allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events”

(Yin, 2013:4).

The researcher chose a single holistic case study approach using BF because it provided an in-depth understanding of the research topic unlike multiple case studies (Thomas 2004). Using a case study provided the researcher with opportunities for having a deeper understanding of participants’ thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences of the research topic (Polit and Beck, 2007).

The researcher chose this case study as BF is known to be the most heavily themed festival within the UK and one of a few who use a story line. BF has grown significantly over the past years and the researcher believes this could be relative to experiences attendees are having, which could be influenced or enhanced by their extreme use of theming and event design.
3.5 Research Method: Interviews

The research method best suited for the research project was qualitative research in the form of individual in-depth semi-structured interviews because according to Punch (2013) a practical way to retrieve participant’s perceptions, experiences and ideas is using interviews, the most recurrent tool used in qualitative research.

Referring to Wengraf ‘s (2001:61) spectrum from unstructured to fully structured interviewing and possible relationship to phases in the development of a theory model (see figure 4), the researcher chose the method of semi-structured interviews. Fully structured interviews were considered unsuitable and inflexible, as they require pre-established questions to be asked so this style wouldn’t provide in-depth data required. Unstructured interviews were considered unsuitable, as there would be a risk of going off the research topic and having no theoretical direction (Punch, 2013, Zhand and Wildemuth, 2009).

Figure 4: Spectrum from unstructured to fully structured interviewing and possible relationship to phases in the development of a theory.

(Source: Adapted from Wengraf, 2001:61)
Semi-structured interviews can be flexible when themes related to the project occur but stay on topic. They were chosen as the researcher tested relevant theory from the literature but also built and uncovered new theory related to the research project (Wengraf, 2001). The semi-structured interviews contained a combination of pre-established theory-driven, hypothesis-directed and open questions, which were used to “reconstruct the interviewees subjective theory about the issue under study” (Flick, 2014:51) (see appendix A: Approved Ethics Application Form for interview questions). This method allowed the interviewees to give open responses, express their feelings, experiences and opinions; but also stay on topic (Kumar, 2014); A transcription of an interview can be found in Appendix D. This presented the interviewer with the chance to explore the topic or issue in depth (Wengraf, 2001).

Focus groups were considered unsuitable, as the researcher has no experience conducting them and wanted to ensure that others did not influence the participants. The researcher wanted a more in-depth discussion about the topic and felt focus groups wouldn’t provide this. Focus groups are where the researcher would collect data relevant to the project, which will find a range of opinions of participants across groups, and then a conclusion would be made at the end of the discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2014).

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Sampling strategies used were purposive, also known as purposeful, and convenience sampling. Purposive/purposeful sampling is a non-profitability sampling process where participants are selected based upon of their fit with the intention of the study and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Daniel, 2011) (Patton, 2014). Convenience sampling is where the participants were selected “on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond” by the researcher (Gravetter and Forzano, 2011:151).
3.6.1 Sample Size

Sampling is important, as it is not practical to study the entire population of attendees in such depth (Vanderstoep and Johnson, 2008). The researcher decided to conduct six in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect enough relevant in-depth data for analysis. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with personal contacts and lasted around 30-40 minutes. This allowed the participants enough time to express their perceptions, experiences and views on the chosen research topic and discuss any other relevant topics. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Accepting qualitative research as being reliable is difficult especially arising from semi-structured interviews because of the lack of standardisation and possible bias. There are two types of bias, interviewer and interviewee but the researcher ensured that to gain the right type of data, and information open interview questions were designed to answer the research topic and avoided leading questions.

According to Bryman (2015:41)

“Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable”

It is questionable whether the interview results are repeatable and therefore reliable because interviewees’ perceptions are personal to them. However Saunders et al (2016:398) argue that

“Interviews are not necessarily intended to be repeatable since they reflect reality at the time they were collected.”
Validity relies upon “the appropriateness of the methods used, accuracy of the analysis of the results and generalizability of the findings” (Saunders et al., 2016:202). As the interviews were face-to-face the researcher could personally interpret the results making them more valid and less likely to misinterpretation which is more of a possibility if the interviews were more distant, for example, by telephone or online.

3.8 Data Analysis

To analyse the raw data collected from the Primary research, the researcher implemented a substantive approach of thematic analysis. This is a procedure for encoding qualitative data, used to pinpoint, examine and to identify regular patterns and themes within the data, concentrating on interview transcripts for this research topic. It is one of the most popular methods of analysing qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998 Ritchie et al., 2013).

By applying this method the researcher could identify key themes and patterns and compare them with theories in the literature. The researcher used colour-coding to obtain information and highlighted the patterns and themes that occurred. The highlighted data was then analysed, compared, and contrasted with the information discovered and discussed from the literature review, which tested the theory and hypothesis.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

When conducting a research project the researcher needs to be aware of ethical considerations and understand ethical principles. The research project should go under ethics review to ensure it meets the requirements and regulations (Farrimond, 2012). The researcher ensured that ethical approval was gained by Cardiff Metropolitan University before conducting any Primary research and collecting any data (see appendix A: Approved Ethics Application Form). This ensured the researcher and participants weren’t at risk whilst undergoing the research and that any data collected was ethical and followed the University regulations.
Ethical considerations during the research were the participants’ confidentiality and anonymity. Anonymity is where participants will remain anonymous and will ensure confidentiality, as the collected data will be unidentifiable (Farrimond, 2012). Confidentiality is important as it allowed the participants to speak freely, without worry of identification; the researcher did not share the collected data outside agreed limits.

The researcher provided consent forms for participants to state whether they’d like to remain anonymous. The researcher also provided an information sheet about the research project (see appendix B: Consent Form and Appendix C: Participation Information Sheet).

Payne and Payne (2004:68) state that participants can “terminate their involvement for any reason, at any time”. The researcher acknowledged this and stated it on all consent forms and information sheets, so if participants wished to withdraw from the research project they could. Once the data was collected the researcher kept the data in a secure file on a password protected private computer. After the research project is complete the data will be destroyed.

3.10 Limitations and Constraints

It took the researcher two months to complete the primary research; longer than anticipated due to time constraints such as other deadlines and participants’ availability and unreliability, which resulted in the researcher rescheduling interviews. These constraints and the small sample size created a limitation of the results to be generalised, but this is not significant because of the in-depth interviews conducted and the researchers aim is to not “generalise to a population but to gain an understanding about the experiences of groups of individuals or of a particular phenomenon” (Daymon and Holloway, 2011:213). Overall most of the data obtained was very descriptive and in-depth, which made it useful to analyse the results, find common themes and compare and contrast it to the literature.
3.11 Summary

This chapter has highlighted and justified the appropriate Primary and Secondary research methods conducted by the researcher, by identifying the sample size and strategy, design and analysis of the six semi-structured interviews. The researcher also discussed the reliability and validity of the research they conducted and ethical considerations as well as identifying the overall limitations. The next chapter will provide a discussion and analysis of the results.
CHAPTER FOUR
Results, Analysis and Discussion

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Secondary Research Findings: Boomtown Fair
4.2 Experience
   4.2.1 Importance of memorable unique experiences as festivals
   4.2.2 Active Participation
      4.2.2.1 Education
      4.2.2.2 Escapism
         4.2.2.2.1 Secondary activities
         4.2.2.2.2 Dressing up
   4.2.3 Aesthetic
4.3 Event design
   4.3.1 Entertainment
   4.3.2 Districts
   4.3.3 Storyline
   4.3.4 Sensory Stimulation
      4.3.5 Lack of Effective theme and Event Design
4.4 Summary of Findings
4.5 Summary
4.0 Introduction

This Chapter will discuss and analyse the results of the qualitative data extracted from the six semi-structured interviews. As the research is qualitative the researcher has intentionally decided to combine the results and discussion to allow fusion of ideas, which ideally will contribute and enhance existing academic literature. The researcher’s results will be gathered and categorised into common themes that arose within the interviews, however the researcher found this difficult as the results are interwoven, so overlapping and repetition may occur. Furthermore within the discussion some participants were more forthcoming than others, which resulted in their views dominating the analysis.

4.1 Secondary Research Findings: Boomtown Fair

The researcher analysed BF’s website and an academic book that discussed BF. They uncovered its extreme use of creative event design, most importantly theme design. BF is known for its extreme take on theming, with a huge emphasis on narrative, differentiating itself from competitors. BF’s story is about corruption, politics, brainwashing and division between the rich and the poor. It is supposedly an exaggerated version of reality, according to Boomtown Fair (2016 online).

“This city has a story, but Boomtown isn’t every city. Its history is as complex as the labyrinth of streets and corridors it contains...immerse yourself in a new world, become your inner character, be part of the story...Explore our world”

(Boomtown Fair, 2017 online).

This quote shows the extreme approach to theming and a storyline; it further highlights how BF tries to encourage engagement, exploration, participation, co-creation and interaction using theming; BF even call themselves “The UK’s Maddest City” which shows how committed and immersed they are as an organisation within their festival. BF is known for its audience shaping the festival story with festivalgoers being residents of the city and co-producers by participating within the festival and dressing up to become their ‘inner
character.’ Boomtown Fair (2017, online) highlighted how theatre and co-creation is a huge part of BF and is a “magical city full of characters.” The website has various promotional videos about the festival’s story and news updates that are distributed all throughout the year to update the attendees, which keeps them completely immersed within the festival narrative and festival all year round (Boomtown Fair, 2017 online).

BF’s event design is focused on the narrative with eleven ‘districts’ where festivalgoers become a resident for the duration of the festival. Each district has actors, circus acts and performance art to interact with attendees along with the various themed sets, stages, streets and extreme décor. Each annual festival is a chapter of the storyline and annually bases the theme of the entire event design around that chapter; they create new stages and remove old stages. For example in Chapter Four an ‘alien presence’ happened with a “spider like machine watching over the residents.” This was the new stage called Arcadia, which was shaped as a spider with fireworks, lights and circus acts. In Chapter Seven The Banghi Palace was commissioned for Mayor Comrade Jose to watch over all the districts. However, in Chapter Eight it was torn down due to the rebels taking back the freedom of the people; thus a new stage is being built for 2017. BF build new districts for expansion, changes the overall layout and brings in more actors, art and creatures as the story and BF evolves (Boomtown Fair, 2017 online).

BF has secondary and core activities, the core activity being the line-up of artists who perform over the eleven districts, 25 main stages and 80 street venues, depending on the genre of music and what district theme they accompany. Every stage, venue and district has its own unique style and theme that reinforces the festival’s narrative and each other. The secondary activities vary across the eleven districts, some are: secret missions, workshops, debates, dance classes and secret sets (Robinson, 2016 Boomtown Fair, 2017 online). Videos on the website BF stress the importance of theme design, theatre and narrative and continually describe the festival as “immersive” “escapist” “wonderment” “theatre” and “engaging.” They express how they design the festival to be as interactive, engaging and immersive as possible, with their use of theming, production, entertainment, programming and environment design. BF state in their videos that they “create a world, within a world” with their use of event design and express their design goal is to encourage exploration and
participation (Boomtown Fair, 2017 online).

According to Robinson (2016:65)

“Boomtown Fair offers, exoticism, wonder, mystery and most importantly offer a greater sense of hedonistic escape, visual aids for the inebriate journey away from the everyday 9-5.”


4.2 Experience

4.2.1 Importance of Memorable Unique Experiences at Festivals

All six participants stressed the importance of experiences, especially at festivals. They highlighted that one of the main reasons they attend festivals is for the experience it provides them, whether it’s the need for celebration, expressing themselves, escapism, adventure, to see, learn or feel something new.

This supports, Ekman (1999), Yeoman et al (2003), Goldblatt (2010), Quinn (2013) Matthews (2015) and Getz and Page (2016) about special events, such as festivals, being a form of celebration, expression of identities and an experience out of everyday life. It further supports the ‘Experience Economy’ and Yeoman et al (2013:54) about attendees wanting a
more unique, memorable, personal experience and will forever crave them to help them 
"achieve new levels of personal accomplishment and enrichment."

For example, P1 stated that,

“A memorable experience is a prime need and has become a huge importance when attending festival... You go to a festival you identify with, festivals are for celebrating with other people, escaping reality, going on an adventure, learning new things about yourself and creating an amazing personal memory.”

P5 echoed this by stating

“Providing an experience is the most important thing when it comes to a festival in my opinion, people go for an escape, a new adventure, to learn and feel something new.”

P2, P3 P6 and P4 reinforced these statements by stating that festivals are supposed to provide an out of reality experience, and that is why people attend. P4 argued,

“If a festival doesn’t provide a memorable experience then it hasn’t done its job correctly and is in need of new ideas.”

The researcher has uncovered why experiences are important within special events, especially festivals. However, the literature about experience only provides different perspectives about the definition, what they believe enhances or creates it but not why experiences are of importance at festivals to individuals.

4.2.2 Active Participation

who argue that participation is vital for a memorable experience and Ferdinand and Kitchen’s (2012:52) argument that “event design is not simply a matter of production but participation to create memorable and unique happenings.”

4.2.2 Education

As stated in the secondary research BF offer secondary activities at the festival and the participants stressed they enhanced their overall experience because of the educational aspects. For example, P1 stated

“I participated in loads of activities. In the debates, you learn so much about topics outside of the magical city of Boom. The dance classes were enjoyable and educational too because you learn new things about yourself and it also gives you confidence and enjoyment... The first time I actively participated in something was at Boomtown and I will forever actively participate as it made the experience and the festival extraordinary.”

P4 echoed this by stating

“The way they have debates is so interesting. The secret missions are wicked, you learn more in detail about the story line of the festival, different districts opinions and their side of the story. I find it so enjoyable that Boomtown Fair put these things into place as it shows they care about certain causes and provide educational aspects instead of just a stage and a performer. I was so engaged; it’s defiantly something different and unique.”

P2 and P5, P3 reinforced these statements stating how much they’ve learnt about themselves as people and the festival’s story through the secondary activities. This shows the importance of secondary activities and creative programme design. Andersson et al (2014) stress the importance of effective programming and the use of core and secondary activities, because it is believed it enhances the overall event experience as they’re actively participating as well as passively absorbing the entertainment, theme and sensory stimulators delivered through production design. Although P6 didn’t participate in the
secondary activities, they stated they wish they did as they feel they missed out on the amazing experience people highlighted.

“I didn’t actually participate within anything. I only saw the live performances of the artists so I feel I missed out on the experience because everyone raves how amazing it is to be a part of the army, or doing a dance class or craft workshops. Next time I’m at the festival I’m going to try join in as much as possible to gain the full experience!”

4.2.2 Escapism

Throughout the literature the recurring theme for memorable experiences is the concept of escapism (Archer, 1997 Clavé et al., 2007 Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Matthews, 2015 Getz and Page, 2016 Robinson, 2016). The participants highlighted how actively participating in fancy dress or secondary activities provided escapism, which will be discussed in detail below.

4.2.2.1 Secondary activities

Although secondary activities provided educational aspects, the participants expressed how some created an escapism aspect fitting within the theme of the district and overall storyline of the festival, thus showing that the attendees not only absorbed the educational aspects provided but also became completely immersed (Pine and Gilmore, 2012). This highlights the importance of secondary activities matching the overall theme, thus supporting that theme design is the main element that influences the other design elements. It further supports how the programme and theme design manipulated the attendees’ moods positively and created a memorable experience (Monroe, 2006 Clavé et al., 2007 Berridge, 2006 Shone and Parry, 2010 Bowdin et al., 2010 Allen et al., 2011). P4 expressed when he/she was actively participating in a secret mission with the BF army, not only did they learn more about the festival’s story but became completely immersed within the festival and stated they felt like they were in a “land of adventure”; they further highlighted that it was their favourite memory of the festival.
“My favourite memory is when I got recruited to join the Boomtown army. I did loads of secret missions around the festival all weekend, learnt so much about the history of Boomtown and the army’s side of the story; it was amazing and felt like I was a part of Boomtowns world. The activities make it a land of adventure that you want to explore and escape to. I believe more festivals should offer things like this; it makes it more memorable and personal.”

P5 reinforces this by stating

“The activities are amazing it’s like little stories of the story. Each activity you do is within the theme and story of the festival. They even have secret stages and performers that aren’t on the line-up, which are only on for a certain time, so it in a way forces you to explore and actively participate. It is so much fun, made the festival mysterious and intriguing. It just makes you feel completely immersed and in a different world.”

P1, P2 and P3 reinforced these statements by continually stating that the activities in BF were completely interwoven with the theme and story, which provided escapism and encouraged them to explore the story and the overall festival. These statements appear to support Allen et al (2011), Clavé et al (2007) Monroe (2006) who argued attendees remember themes more than information, thus the reason it’s a dominant element. This is because although the participants highlighted the educational aspects, they are clearly drawn to the fact it matched the overall theme and that the theme was a clear experience enhancer.

4.2.2.2 Dressing up

The majority of the participants expressed how they all loved dressing up, which is known as functional décor (Matthews, 2015), to be a part of the festivals story and theme because it provided escapism and created a great atmosphere. For example, P2 stated

“Boomtown’s great because of the theme. You can dress up to become your own Boomtown character and a wacky resident in the city of Boomtown. It makes you become completely immersed within the whole wackiness, magical, mystical energy Boomtown provides.”
This is echoed by P1 who stated

“I love dressing up and role playing it’s so fun. I plan my costumes way before the festival, I’m completely immersed within the little world; I cannot wait to escape to it. It lets me escape reality and become the fun character inside of me, it’s weird how dressing up creates such a difference but that’s why so many people get involved... The fact that I could dress up to fit in with the theme of the chapter and festival it made it very engaging and fun... It is so good I turn off my phone as I’m so immersed within the theme.”

These are reinforced by P4, P3 and P5 who continually said dressing up provided escapism and made them become immersed. This supports co-creation, the development of Goffman's (1975) theory and the theory of functional décor (Matthews, 2015).

P3 took part in both secondary activities and fancy dress because they wanted to gain a new memorable experience, they stated

“I just wanted to have an experience that’s different. I’m bored of just seeing acts at festivals now, I wanted to try something new and be more involved. The activities and fancy dress provided that because they matched the overall theme.”

The statements about active participation show how BF have educational and escapism aspects but also stimulate co-creation using fancy dress and secondary activities; which supports Getz and Page’s (2016) argument of co-creation. The participants’ views support, Schoenmakers (2007) Pine and Gilmore (2012) and Matthews (2015) who argued that when participants actively participate, interact and engage with the different activities they enjoy the festival more than passive participants. The participants’ views on fancy dress support Matthews (2015) argument, ‘people as décor’ and Robinson’s (2016) argument of fancy dress and costumes leading to co-production and that the festival site being a stage the festivalgoers perform on. It is clearly highlighted that fancy dress leads to participation, engagement, immersion and to people co-creating their experiences.
4.2.3 Aesthetic

All participants described BF as being aesthetic, the common themes being: decor, props, lighting, special effects, themed sets (Districts) and stages and the overall environment, its design and how it matched the theme. This highlighted the importance of environment, production and theme design. They expressed how the festival was inviting, beautiful and completely immersive and created a positive atmosphere, which enhanced their experience. For example, P2 stated

“Boomtown is so beautiful and inviting making you want to explore. It’s so colourful with fancy dress, exaggerated décor, props, lights, visual effects, heavily themed districts, sets, and stages, all in keeping with the overall theme. It was a real surprise and made people so happy, created such a bright and positive atmosphere. Boomtown is my first camping festival. I hate camping; being cold and dirty but the experience it gave me with the overall aesthetic lifted my mood. The nature surrounding it is also beautiful; it was like a hidden away world. Boomtown incorporated the nature well, for example the forest parties and the hidden woods stage.”

P1 echoed this by stating

“One of my favourite experiences was when I stayed up all night and came across the sunrise hill where you can look across the whole town and see the sunrise. You see the whole festival, the colours, lights, visuals, décor, props, wacky themes, the districts and the whole environment; it was surprisingly beautiful. Everything is fully themed and compliments each other. You even get to see the beauty of the nature surrounding the site like all the forests and hills. They used the nature so well. I was completely immersed and keen to explore the festival.”

P3 P2, P4 and P6 reinforced this by describing BF as “beautiful,” “attractive” and “immersive” and further stated they loved how BF use the nature of the environment. P5 said, “Boomtown Fair was very aesthetic because it was so heavily themed and incorporated all the nature. It really grabbed my attention, I was completely immersed in the wacky city; who wouldn’t be?”
All participants mentioned theming to be a dominant enhancer as the elements such as production and environment design matched it, which created the aesthetic and atmosphere of BF; this further supports theme designs dominance within the literature. The different types of décor, such as production, environment and theme design, were also a clear enhancer, which supports Matthews (2015) who argued that décor is vital as it’s an ambience maker that contributes to the overall environment. The participants highlighted how BF works with the environment’s strengths to provide escapism. This supports Matthews (2015) and Goldblatt (2010) who argued the function of theming is providing an escapist feeling, using complimentary elements and working with the environments strengths, which BF clearly achieved.

However the participants’ views question the experience realms created by Pine and Gilmore (2012) because they argued attendees must be actively participating to feel escapism, where as it has been highlighted if the festival is aesthetic by theme, environment and production design, it can still provide a sense of escapism even though its passive participation. The participants’ views of BF incorporating the environment gave them a sense of surprise, and clearly highlights that it enhanced their experience, which is what decor is supposed to do to (Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Goldblatt, 2010 Matthews, 2015 Ferdinand and Kitchen, 2016).

The participants reinforce Lukas (2007) and Pine and Gilmore (2012) who argued when a festival is aesthetic and heavily themed individuals become completely immersed with the physical environment; it influences their responses and encourages individuals to explore. The participants’ statements highlighted how their experience was stimulated by natural and man-made stimuli and that it was ‘real’ experience and that the overall, production, environment and theme design clearly provided a positive impression (Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Andersson et al., 2014).
4.3 Event Design

4.3.1 Entertainment

The main entertainment, also known as the core activity (Andersson et al., 2014), is the line-up of music artists who perform at the festival across the eleven districts, depending on the genre of music and what district theme it compliments and matches. This identifies theme design still being the dominant element of design and that the entertainment is incorporated to fit within it (Sonder, 2004 Monroe, 2006 Berridge, 2007 Clavé et al., 2007 Shone and Parry 2010 Bowdin et al., 2010 Allen et al., 2011).

The majority of participants stated the music line-up is the main form of entertainment. However, they highlighted that within BF there were other elements that provided entertainment and enhanced their experience such as: actors, circus acts and performance art (interactive and decorative décor) (Matthews, 2015). For example, P5 stated

“The line-up was obviously the big feature but they also had the storyline, the actors across the site performing stunts and shows. The actors and circus acts even try to interact with you when you’re passing by in the districts. They even have amazing performance art, like the one in China Town; it’s a huge massive mechanical dragon that breathes fire! All the other elements of entertainment match the storyline and whatever themed district it’s in. It’s ridiculously weird but amazing and entertaining, there’s always something that catches your eye.”

P3 reinforced this by stating

“There is so much entertainment at Boomtown. Although the line-up is the main feature there’s the storyline too. Actors are everywhere always performing and constantly trying to engage with you; it’s so weird in a good way. They even have cool performance art that moves; it’s so crazy. There is so much entertainment along with the line-up. It really enhances your experience because even if you’re just walking somewhere there’s always something entertaining and the fact the actors and performance art matches the overall storyline and themes within its district makes it even better.”
These statements appear to support Pine and Gilmore (2012) that the entertainment realm was the ‘most’ developed; but question the idea that entertainment is only passive. The participants clearly stated that some of the ‘people as décor’, which appears to be a form of entertainment, was interactive. This creates an interesting suggestion that décor can be a form of entertainment design, which supports Matthews (2015) who suggests that ‘people as décor’ are a form of entertainment. The participants highlighted how each form of entertainment matched the overall theme and themes within whatever district they’re a part of, which further supports theme designs dominance. According to Matthews (2015) entertainment has evolved and now has four genres: music, storytelling and theatre, dance and athletics. BF falls into the music genre and the storytelling and theatre genre, with their effective use of theming.

Although most participants highlighted the importance of the core entertainment, P1 expressed how the core entertainment isn’t a dominant factor that enhances their experience and is loyal to the festival because of the experience the theme design provides.

“I brought a ticket this year and the line-up isn’t even announced yet. This is because I had such an amazing experience, which was enhanced by all the other elements of the theming, actors, art, story, activities, fancy dress, décor, themed stages and districts. Everything brought me to life, wherever I was, I was happy, engaged and completely immersed with the festival. I love that it isn’t a mainstream festival with just stage and headliners. They are quirky and make the little things fun. The tickets sell out so fast because it is different, offers various elements that are all part of this wacky story and theme; it’s far from mediocre.”

This statement strengthens the argument of theme design and its dominance. P1’s statement appears to support Nicholson and Pearces’s (2001) argument that theme design is the dominant reason individuals attend festivals. It further backs the point that attendees crave memorable experiences instead of just simple entertainment (O’Sullivan and Spangler 1999 Pine and Gilmore, 2012 Yeoman 2013 Getz and Page 2016).
4.3.2 Districts

All participants discussed the eleven different districts, expressed how they enjoyed the idea and thought it was an intelligent way to design the site as it “created the urge to explore” (P6). They expressed that it enhanced their overall experience because it matched the overall storyline; each district was heavily themed and had its own story to tell. For example, P3 stated

“Having different themed districts is the best idea or it would be the same every year, predictable and boring. Each district is so heavily themed and tells its own part of the story. Each district is like a different world you want to explore, participate and become a part of. It’s so clever and really impressed me.”

P2 reinforced this by stating

“I love the districts, they are very cool and clever. The theming within them is well thought out and very heavily designed. It was crazy…. everything was just so dramatic and outstanding. Every district fits with the overall story and makes it feel like many different little worlds within one big one, it really makes you want to explore and become involved in the festival.”

P1, P4, P5 and P6 agreed by stating that the districts were heavily themed, matched the storyline and encouraged them to explore and participate. This also appears to support the theory of designed experiences, (Silvers, 2004 Busswell, 2004 Berridge, 2007 Allen et al., 2011 Bladen et al., 2012), as BF purposely designed the districts to encourage engagement, participation and exploration, as stated within the secondary research findings and supports that theming can be influential, encourage attendees to explore, contribute to the overall environment and provide escapism (Lukas, 2007 Goldblatt, 2010 Matthews, 2015).
4.3.3 Theme Design: Storyline

Throughout the discussion, it has become apparent that the storyline influences elements of event design such as, entertainment, programming, production and other types of themed areas as they all contribute, compliment or are designed around the story. This suggests that the story is a dominant factor of the festival, thus supporting theme design being the dominant element of design. Participants expressed that without the storyline the festival’s event design wouldn’t be as effective, provide a sense of escapism, be as engaging, immersive and the experience wouldn’t be as memorable; thus highlighting the importance of its role when enhancing attendees’ experiences. The participants expressed the importance of theme design and highlighted how they believe BF planned every element effectively to match the theme and to try and provide the best experience possible. For example, P1 stated

“Personally, when I go to a festival I want to see a different world, I look for escapism and the event design, and theme provides that.... The whole story line is just an exaggeration of everyday life... but an escape from reality. You can tell how they develop it each year with amazing new ideas and plan to make the festival better each time...It’s important to theme as it’s sustainable growth, you don’t want the festival to burn out, music isn’t everything anymore people want more...People need memorable experiences and for me good use of theming is a huge part of that, it makes you feel like you’re in the city of Boomtown not the festival. Every year you go back to a new chapter of the storybook, it’s not a copy and paste of last year’s festival like most festivals do...They’ve gone beyond the norm of festivals; each year gets better. The theming is always amazing they even take down stages and build new ones because it’s part of the story.... Without the storyline, Boomtown wouldn’t be as unique, quirky, immersive, engaging as it is. It definitely creates a better experience; it’s the town that booms.”

P5 reinforced this, stating that

“I love the fact there is a story line, it makes it interesting, engaging and I want to find out more as I become completely immersed. It sounds silly but I get annoyed sometimes, as I must wait a whole year to find out what happens next in Boomtown Fair. The fact there’s always new stages, characters and activities just make the experience
you get desirable and you become addicted to the whole world of Boomtown. You can tell they plan everything and give such amazing attention to detail. I really appreciate their hard work and creativity because they 100% know how to go that extra mile and create an unforgettable weekend.”

These statements are further reinforced by P2, P4, P3 and P6 as they highlighted how they appreciated the attention to detail in the planning of the storyline and event design; it created escapism, uniqueness, participation and engagement, which enhanced their experience.

This supports Allen et al’s (2011) argument about the major artistic and creative decision is the theme when staging an event. These statements also support the theory of designed experiences, as BF appears to plan in detail the event design around the storyline to create the experience (Buswell, 2004 Silvers, 2004 Berriage, 2007 Allen et al., 2011 Bladen et al., 2012).

Although these views support, Archer’s (1997) argument of theming and event design converting nostalgia and forgetfulness into a constructed fantasy world, Clavé et al (2007) who argued stories and spectacles promote a fantasy by creating an entertaining atmosphere and its strategy is to respond to the attendees expected fantasy, Mossberg et al’s (2010) argument that story telling being a huge aspect to enhance experiences and Sonder’s (2004) argument on theming being the incorporation of a themed message and that it’s an essential element in the event process, there is still very little literature about themed festivals and storylines. However it is clear the storyline motivated festivalgoers movements around the site, provided the ‘ultimate’ experience, escapism and improved every aspect of the festival (Berridge, 2007 Bladen et al., 2012 Lukas 2016).
4.3.4 Sensory Stimulation

Throughout the discussion, the participants have identified BF’s use of effective theme, environment, entertainment, programme and production design, and highlight these elements as experience enhancers. It has become apparent that the participants’ sight, hearing and touch ‘senses’ have been stimulated through these design elements. Although this may appear to support, McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) Lukas (2007) Ferdinand and Kitchen (2012) Yeoman et al (2013) Matthews (2015) Getz and Page (2016), about event design being a sensory stimulant, it can be argued it doesn’t because although the three senses were stimulated by the effective use of design elements, smell and taste were absent. The researcher questioned the participants on the catering element but the participants didn’t stress its importance and stated that it wasn’t a huge experience enhancer or de-enhancer. This brings up an interesting argument as it questions the event design elements within the literature and could propose the idea of further research for event design within the festival sector.

This supports McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998), suggesting that individuals create their own personal experience, which is heavily influenced by ‘selective sensory focusing’. Ferdinand and Kitchen (2012) also argue that event design provides an opportunity for the individuals “to engage in sensory and emotional interaction with the event.”

4.3.5 Lack of Effective Theme and Event Design

All participants expressed the importance of creative and effective theme design within the festival sector. They expressed how their experience changed dramatically once they attended BF and stated that extreme use of theme design created a huge impact and made a positive difference to their experience. They highlighted how they believe the festival sector lacks creative and effective theme and event design compared to BF and argued how most festivals are just a stage, camping and a few “bits and bobs, here and there” (P6).
P1 stated that

“All other festivals focus on the line-up but Boomtown provides more than that. Festivals should not copy but realise how important theming and the event design is. People can go for a few years but then stop as it’s the same. Boomtown is a different chapter and festival each year, which festivals need to do. I feel they need to be more innovative; everything is very samey. Boomtown is completely different; you can tell they care about providing the best possible experience.”

P4 reinforces this by arguing that

“Anyone can put on a line-up of artists with camping but creating an experience with elements that compliment the theme and each other is an art; they need to care about their attendees and their experience. After going to Boomtown I’ve realised it’s more than a line-up and there’s a lot more to be offered at festivals. Other festivals need to plan more and stop being so lazy otherwise people won’t have a memorable experience.”

These views support theme design and its dominance within the literature and appear to support the argument of Allen et al (2011) about how the emphasis of the elements at a festival reflects its personal style and enhances the overall experience. BF’s emphasis on the theme element has appeared to create its own personal style of the festival, which has been highlighted by the participants throughout the discussion, and it is clear that the emphasis on theme design has enhanced their overall experience. Robinson (2016) argues that festivals have a lack of immersion, interaction, escapism and a memorable experience when it is mainly focused on the line-up, which has appeared to become of truth as stated by the participants.

4.4 Summary of findings

After collecting the primary data, the researcher adapted the conceptual framework to BF to how BF’s extreme take on event design and theming enhanced attendees’ experience (see Figure 5).
Figure 5: Attendees Experience Enhanced by Theming: adapted to BF

Theme design: Storyline

Sub themes: Districts

Influences

Other event design elements
Entertainment, programming, production, environment

Experience realms
Entertainment, educational, aesthetic, escapism

Entertainment Realm
- Core activity: Line up
- Interactive/Decorative décor
  (Entertainment/theme/programming element)

Educational realm
- Secondary activities, storyline
  (Programming/theme element)

Aesthetic realm
- Décor, Lighting, nature, props, themed sets and stages
  (Production/theme/environment element)

Escapism realm
- Secondary activities, Dressing up, Storyline, Districts, Aesthetic
  (Programming/environment/production/theme element)

Influences

Attendees’ response to Approach

Active Participation and Co-creation

Enhances

Experience
Firstly, the researcher changed theme design to theme design: storyline to highlight the importance of narrative within BF and the festival sector. The researcher changed the placement and size of the arrows from theme design: storyline to experience realms and other event design elements to provide emphasis on how much it influenced these factors. The researcher added sub themes (districts) as they were an enhancer of the overall experience and influenced the realms and event design elements to fit within the sub theme and theme. The researcher left the ‘compliments’ arrows from these factors to theme design but changed their size as it’s highlighted throughout the discussion that complimenting the overall theme is vital for the design to work effectively and to create an impact. The researcher chose to take out catering design, as the participants didn’t highlight it being influential on their experience.

The researcher changed the arrow from experience realms to event design elements and instead put two arrows joining and pointing to the four experience realms with the event design elements incorporated into them, which illustrates the ‘sweet spot’. The researcher created arrows from the ‘sweet spot’ attendees’ response as it influenced it. The researcher changed attendees’ response approach or avoid to attendees’ response approach as it is clearly highlighted that a festival’s event design influenced heavily by theme design influenced attendees’ response to approach the environment.

The researcher changed ‘Participation and co-creation’ to ‘Active participation and co-creation’ as it has become apparent that if the realms and other design elements are influenced by theme design, it influenced the attendees to ‘approach’ the environment, which then influenced the participants to become active participants and co-create their experience. Lastly the researcher changed the last two arrows pointing down from influences to enhances as it has been identified that heavy use of theme design, which influenced the experience realms, other design elements, attendees’ response to ‘approach’ and to actively participate and co-create, enhanced attendees overall experience.
In summary, the framework clearly identifies how BF’s theme design (the storyline) and sub themes (districts) was the dominant element and incorporated the four realms of experience and other design elements to match it, these then unified and created the ‘sweet spot’ which encouraged all participants to ‘approach’ the overall environment created and influenced the majority to actively participate and co-create, which enhanced their experience.

This supports, Sharples *et al* (2014) Getz and Page (2016), about the event design supposedly creating the overall environment and ‘eventscape’, and suggesting it’s where the experience ‘arises’ from, the argument about the environment supposedly influencing responses and experiences of the attendees and the ‘avoid’ or ‘approach’ theory (Turley and Milliman, 2000 Sharples *et al.*, 2014). It also supports Pine and Gilmore’s (2012) argument that incorporating the experience realms within event design provides opportunities for creating a memorable experience and the argument of co-creation (Getz and Page, 2016). It supports the importance of theming and Page and Connell (2012:278) who argued event design being the platform, which experiences are built upon and that experiences are the “*core phenomenon of an event.*”

4.5 Summary

This Chapter presented, discussed and analysed the results of the qualitative research being the six semi-structured interviews. The Primary data collected from the interviews corroborates the academic literature and justifies the Conceptual Framework. The Final Chapter will: conclude the overall research findings, re-visit the aims and objectives to see whether they have been accomplished, identify limitations of the study, the researchers’ contribution to theory practice and method and state recommendations for future research.
Chapter Five:
Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Aims and Objectives Revisited
5.2 Summary of Research Findings
5.3 Limitations
5.4 Reflection
5.5 Recommendations for Future Research
5.6 Industry Recommendations
5.7 Summary
5.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a conclusion to the research project, summarising the key findings and revisit the aims and objectives to establish whether they were accomplished. It will include the researcher’s contribution to theory, practice and method, outline the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research.

5.1 Aims and Objectives Revisited

The researcher achieved their overall aim to explore the effects of event design and theming on enhancing attendees experience using Boomtown Fair as a case study.

The researcher successfully achieved the overall research aim by accomplishing the objectives originally set by the researcher. The following objectives were attained:

- The literature on event experience, event design and theming was critically analysed, and a hypothesis was established, which was further summarised by a conceptual framework; which can be found in Chapter two.
- Boomtown Fair’s use of theming and event design was investigated through secondary research, via Boomtown Fair’s website and case study books, and established their creative use of event and theme design, which is presented within Chapter 4 (see secondary research findings).
- The researcher conducted six semi-structured in-depth interviews regarding the use of event design and theming within Boomtown Fair and how it enhanced the participants’ experience.
- The researcher identified emerging patterns and themes from the primary research using thematic analysis. Furthermore compared and contrasted the data to the existing theory, presented the occurring themes, which can be found in chapter four, and as a result adapted the conceptual framework to BF’s use of event design and theme and how it enhanced attendees experience, which can be found in Chapter four.
5.2 Summary of Research Findings

The research project has provided valuable contributions to academic literature on event and theme design and event experience by identifying emerging patterns and themes within the academic literature and the primary data, which has highlighted how event design and theming enhances attendees’ experience. The key findings are:

- Theme design, especially storytelling is a significant experience enhancer but however lacks academic literature.
- Active participation and co-creation enhances attendees’ experiences.
- Using theming as the dominant element of the event design then combining the four realms of experience and other design elements encourages attendees to approach the overall environment and actively participate and co-create, which resulted in the experience being enhanced.
- The importance of catering design has been questioned, as well as event design stimulating the five senses.
- All factors of event design should be interwoven and be considered as a whole, as it has been highlighted that if they function and work together it enhances the experience.
- The effective and extreme use of theming can provide a competitive advantage, as it is highlighted it enhances the experience.
- Having sub themes within a theme encourages exploration and provides escapism.
5.3 Limitations

During the research project a few limitations arose, one limitation being the interviews, because some interviewees were unreliable and the researcher had to reschedule at least three interviews; which took up valuable research time for the project. Another limitation was the researchers interview questions and technique, due to lack of experience not helped by the inconsistent views and interrelationships of the academic literature. This made it difficult to examine and pin point certain themes for questions and recognised that the topic could be further explored.

5.4 Reflection

This research project enabled the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of event design, how it enhances experience and the importance of theming, active participation and co-creation. This will help their future career as their aim is to work within the festival sector and be a part of the creative side. It has also developed their attention to detail, analytical skills, research skills, and their critical thinking, as well as their time management and organisational skills as they balanced this ongoing project with other deadlines. Overall the researcher found this research project beneficial and enjoyed exploring their interest within the events sector.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

- Conduct an interview with the organisers of BF about their opinions on theming, event design and experience and as to why they have an extreme take on it as it could provide the researcher with a firsthand professional insight. Furthermore could help gain a wider understanding and strengthen the argument of the research project.
- As participants expressed their opinions about a lack of effective event design within the industry, comparing BF to a non-themed festival could strengthen the reliability of the data collected and analysed and the overall argument that effective event design and theming enhances attendees’ experience.
• Although the literature in general agrees that event design enhances the experience, the academics cannot agree on a definition for event design and experience or how they’re linked. The researcher therefore proposes that more research should be undertaken to create a consensus.

5.6 Industry Recommendations

• Consider theming the festival, whilst incorporating the other elements to match it as it’s proved to enhance the overall experience.
• Create opportunities for attendees to actively participate and co-create their experience, such as secondary activities and fancy dress, instead of just providing a line up of artists.
• Consider the idea of sub themes in different areas of the festival to create more of an escapist feeling and to encourage exploration.
• Consider using interactive décor along with, decorative and functional, as it creates the overall environment and enhances the experience.
• Design to the strengths of the overall environments and festival site.
• When designing the event consider utilising the four realms of experience, as having the ‘sweet spot’ is shown to create a memorable experience.
• Every event design element is vital, although some can be more dominant than others depending on the festival; they still contribute to the overall environment and experience.

5.7 Summary

The research project has explored the effects of event design and theming on enhancing attendees’ experience and successfully used the case study Boomtown Fair to illustrate the findings through the adapted framework. The chapter illustrates how the researcher archived theirs aims and objectives, identified the key findings and limitations and provided recommendations for future research and to the industry.


Malouf, L. (1999). *Behind the scenes at special events: flowers, props and design.* Wiley


