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BRAND COMMUNITY RITUAL EVENTS AS A TOOL OF CUSTOM CULTURE REPRODUCTION AND MARKETING

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Abstract:

The original concept of internal marketing focused on providing internal products (jobs) to meet the needs of vital internal markets (employees) as well as meeting organizational needs. The marketing field still lacks knowledge on how to create and sustain internal marketing missions and goals, such as the formation of a collective mind, the alignment between employees and organizational goals, and the emergence of a positive place culture; the purpose of this study is to explore how brand community activities and internal marketing are ideally executed as a form of playing out marketing activities in expressing custom cultural reproduction. This study conducts a qualitative study of the annual routine birthday celebrations of a custom cultural community. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, supplemented by community documents and field observations. The findings of this study reveal that the success of the event is well managed to reproduce voluntary custom culture by emphasizing local wisdom norms, values and beliefs based on community event objectives. The implication for managing brand community events with the aim of building a custom community culture is more emphasis is placed on the symbolism of the sales promotion aspect of an event and providing custom community activists experience in managing a brand community event. This study shows that external marketing in managing events can create internal marketing strengths in carrying out marketing practices with local wisdom nuances.

Keywords: Community Events, Internal Marketing, Organizational Rituals

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INTRODUCTION

The original concept of internal marketing focused on providing internal products (jobs) to meet the needs of vital internal markets (employees) as well as meeting organizational needs. Subsequent concept developments were used to build customer orientation and motivate employees, establish and implement internal policies and procedures supporting marketing programs, and many other functions. Despite this, marketing must still learn how to create and sustain internal marketing missions and goals, such as forming a collective mind, aligning employees and organizational goals, and creating a positive place culture.

To narrow this knowledge gap, this research applies an organizational ritual perspective. It conducts a qualitative study of the House of Customland's birthday celebration as one of the custom culture brand community activists. Custom cultural events periodically become promotional media to

introduce the custom of driving art. Forms of creativity are held to be used as distribution to build brand communities, as a place for education, entertainment, and competition as an effort to market the custom culture movement in Indonesia (Latif et al., 2021). The pattern of creativity from various derivatives of the art of driving generates attractive business opportunities in creating market niches not cultivated by the creative industry on a massive scale. The custom nature of the art of driving makes the targeted market segmentation have its specifics, considering that custom products are made based on the wishes and uniqueness of potential customers. Given the vital role brand community activists play in effective services and events, the questions the research raises concern:

1. RQ1. How is the enabling impact that internal marketing should achieve to achieve external marketing success posed in the context of the event?
2. RQ2. What is the long-term impact and dynamics of the sustainability of the event's performance?
3. RQ3. What is the influence of the implementation of this organizational ritual event?

So that the description of the important events studied and the procedures for data collection and analysis needs to be explained as a basis for interpreting the dynamics of reality presented. To that end, this study section describes internal marketing before an organizational ritual perspective is introduced in establishing a theoretical framework that reveals analytical information. Finally, this study outlines the study's contribution and suggests some practical implications for event managers.

Event management has focused on strategy development, management, delivery of event operations and the customer experience but has not considered how event knowledge, ideas and best practices can be shared and developed (Brown & Stokes, 2021). The context of event management shows that knowledge management and knowledge transfer are necessary to develop advanced practices, concepts, knowledge, and theory.

Event management practices as an effort to design events and marketing communication strategies. Event marketing is relationship marketing, which has significant implications for communication strategies (Capriello, 2018). The event experience that the customer feels involves the emotion of the brand being introduced. Significance is built by engaging customers and stakeholders broadly, creating an emotional connection and positively affecting customer loyalty.

At the organizational level, ideally, marketing internally tries to create an internal environment (Qureshi & Mehraj, 2022) by displaying the power of cultural service and as a culture-positive atmosphere environment Work (De Bruin et al., 2021). Internal marketing focuses on demonstrating corporate integrity and consistency through actions rather than words. This approach, which emphasizes the value of good communication, helps to support employee self-motivation and their commitment to the business and its customers (Hoang et al., 2018).

Smith and Stewart (2011) suggest a spectrum of rituals to distinguish between rituals and activity organization. This spectrum ranges from the entire ritual organization on one end to everyday practices on the other, with ritual-like activities in between. Furthermore, Smith & Stewart (2011) proposed a typology of four features (certainty, formality, symbology, and performance expectations) for the classification of organizational rituals and presupposes that the difference between a fully developed ritual and a ritual-like activity is a matter of degree, i.e., how many features define rather than organizational rituals expressed as a behavioral focus and so far where does it come into play?



Is that a ritual tight or only practice with a color ritualistic, organizational activity in the form of repetitive behavior and pattern, a powerful instrument capable of serving multiple functions important? Rituals use established and stylized actions, scripts, materials, and cultural norms to distinguish between big and small. Rituals can give the correct meaning, exemplify value, show social order, and build coherence. To quote (Yang et al., 2022), rituals organization "creates a "framework," a shared definition of the situation in which participants are expected to express and confirm approved ways of experiencing social reality." Effect or efficacy rituals in general and organizational rituals are due to their nature as performative and communicative events (Jouxtel, 2019).

When participants reach the point of mutual respect, content, and intent of the ritual performed, they become able to share meaning in various repetition activity similar (Jouxtel, 2019). To capture similar ideas for organizational rituals, namely social drama planned with which role defined and trained with it is clear where Smith & Stewart (2011) claim that ritual is "system communication and learning, draw attention on the important one and help. For channel thoughts, feelings, And organizational member behavior (Tutukansa, 2024).

Important events as elements of organizational rituals. The main event in this research is the House of Customland (HOC) birthday. The HOC held the custom culture event with the theme Nala Wahana Trusing Hyang (NWTN) at Buro Beer Garden Surabaya on 24-27 November 2021. The complete ritual does not describe the HOC event perfectly. However, four standards for strict rituals, such as statutes, formalities, symbology, and other expectations, can be represented in the various ways events are constructed, making organizational activities such as rituals (Smith & Stewart, 2011) for internal participants. This event shows that the relatively stable macrostructure limits its performance to focus more on the marketed theme. It is characterized by focusing on standard performance patterns, such as setting the theme of events and paying close attention to a conducive and cheerful working atmosphere, shown by the formality of behavior in an ecosystem rich in decorations and with meaningful Indonesian symbols.

METHODS

This study used in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method due to the subjective experience of rituals (Sandhu, 2012). This study recruited 10 informants for in-depth interviews, consisting of 2 community managers and 8 HOC community employees. HOC employees have been with the custom culture brand community for at least 10 years. The questions asked during the interview included, first, the informant's role in event activities; second, the experiences and feelings of the informants during the activity; and third, the informant's reasons for giving maximum results and the continuation of the event. Records were taken of these incidents for reference for data collection and analysis. Each interview was recorded and fully transcribed, producing 225 pages of MS Word documents in Indonesian. In addition to the interview data, we collected and reviewed relevant organizational documents such as the community website, community-related news clippings, and the annual HOC agenda bulletin. Data from these sources allows the construction of a comprehensive picture of the HOC, thereby contextualizing informants' voices. It helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The first and second authors had meetings and trips to the actual event.



Source: Author, 2023

Figure 1. Structure of the data analysis



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first and second authors manually encoded the data by reviewing the comments and descriptions of NWTH aspects to develop first-order code. Second, they cross-read the transcript multiple times and combine the multiple codes into higher-level coding in developing first-order categories. Third, connections among the first-order categories are identified to build more conceptual and theoretical second-order themes. Finally, second-order themes can be organized into three overall dimensions from a theoretical perspective to explain the focus of the phenomenon. Figure 1 illustrates the final structure of the data analysis used.

First, the way the HOC is carried out is the performance of an organizational ritual in which members come to see and feel through their own experience how people who are engaged in a custom culture are expected to live their work lives and how to carry out their respective roles. Second, HOC establishes a collectively recognized path where the distinctiveness and legitimacy of a custom cultural event (NWTH) business philosophy and work ethic are reasserted through collective achievement. Two crucial components of the NWTH event are the onstage sales to the custom cultural event activists and observers (customers) and the backstage required to produce the event. Third, regarding the personal and organizational future, HOCs facilitate the reproduction of a group belief system in which optimism is inextricably linked with being part of a collective that has faced challenges, explored possibilities, and gained strength under friendly leadership and strong-minded management.

Birthday Celebration as Performance. First, this study examines and analyzes how HOC activities are carried out periodically every year. The analysis shows that the HOC is a carefully executed ritual with well-established symbols, structure, activities, and atmosphere. Through participation, HOC employees assimilate into certain tendencies and behaviors. The enactment of this ritual has three central elements.

Social Drama. HOC is a carefully planned way of marketing. Employees collectively live up to the promise of rewarding customers, setting up special arrangements, and maintaining a "transaction/shopping festival" atmosphere by providing cutting-edge merchandise at competitive prices to meet the demands of trend-conscious shoppers. The front gate of the shop building is decorated with colorful lights and billboards bearing the HOC slogan and anniversary symbol. The atmosphere starts with entering the store by inviting buyers to an amusement park environment (Li et al., 2011). In a bustling business area, as the custom cultural event surveillance cameras show, crowds attend all four days a year. Many elements are deployed to match the settings to handle the hefty workloads. The custom cultural event employees create a festive atmosphere for customers with their enthusiastic stage setting and interactions. For employees – the actors on stage – the social drama that unfolds is about coming together to achieve challenging goals. The HOC employee confessed, "We were cautious like we were about to step on an egg. We want the HOC to run safely and smoothly." Thus, various artifacts in each setting serve as props aligning custom cultural event employees to make a concerted effort to run a seamless celebration. For employees, the festive spirit staged for the client ultimately builds a "magnetic field." An employee named Jo said, "We feel a magical atmosphere. The atmosphere feels special. We save energy (before). Moreover, circumstances can make the mood heartwarming when the time comes [...]. We are trying hard for everyone [...] even community activists are just realizing it to the existing environmental rhythms."



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Roles and boundaries. Regarding where they work, there are three main groups of participants in the HOC ritual: line employees, employees temporarily stationed on the front line, and employees placed backstage as usual. Line employees include sales staff, cashiers, and the management team on each floor. This group's role during the HOC was similar to their usual responsibilities, except customer interactions became swifter and transaction-oriented. Temporary line employees consist of two groups, one works in fixed posts such as "temporary cashiers" set up to accommodate quick transactions and to assist in parking lots packed with customer cars. At the same time, the other is a mobile task force that welcomes customers. This last group hangs around in pre-defined sections of the business area, ready to consult customers and solve problems that arise to ensure order, safety, and a good shopping experience. Temporary workers are staff members and managers of various offices. The backstage group mainly consisted of dining room staff, logistics people working in the parking lot, and a few company office staff staying at their regular posts to respond to circumstances requiring immediate action.

It should be noted that most custom cultural Events line salespeople are not formally members but are supplier employees who manage the counter or open floor shop at custom cultural events. They work on custom cultural events, but not for that. Nonetheless, as our data show, how they are treated makes these people more like quasi-workers. The three groups of HOC participants played two different roles. Those directly involved in the sales process were seen as playing a central role well, while others were seen as supporting. Various symbols stimulate the boundary between these two roles, strengthening the advantages and disadvantages of the sides.

Control. The main goal of HOC is customer satisfaction; as such, it is very demanding to coordinate to keep visitors happy. Therefore, compatibility must be ensured to maintain service quality and shopping experience. The data obtained indicated that the HOC participants somehow played their roles naturally and instinctively due to the accumulation of past experiences and the effects of the atmosphere during the HOC. They are likely to behave consistently with the customer's approval. The enactment of rituals relies on formal mechanisms that instruct participants and informal mechanisms that create peer pressure and respect. The desire to remain part of the ritual and to present themselves and the group, be it a unit or company, in a good way encourages participants to exhibit behavior consistent with their role, supports the ritual, and avoids deviation from the ritual. In other words, formal and informal monitoring mechanisms guarantee the realization of cooperation and dedication. Script.

Monitoring customized cultural events is a straightforward and discreet process. When planning the next event, looking back and addressing any issues from the previous year is essential. It is done retrospectively. Second, monitoring occurs when the company evaluates HOC events. An employee named Tyok told the interviewer, "After the HOC is over, I will spend the day off producing the documentary. It contains pictures and video clips that I took on the spot during the event. Our employees need to watch it to see what is (good) service and what is (good) management. We broadcast this documentary live on the second day after the HOC activity."

HOC management controls its members informally by arousing respect. An employee named Abel commented on the self-monitoring of office staff temporarily placed as line workers, "During the HOC, we are all at the forefront [...], this is part of our culture - during the few days of the HOC, a kind of "order" that office staff must show a good image [...] For office staff, the HOC seems the only chance to let your line employees and customers truly see our quality."



Collective reaffirmation. As an internal resource for the HOC, the month-long planning, implementation, and evaluation stages are considered grueling, profoundly affecting the identification of HOC members with the company. Because of the reflective dimension that characterizes the event experience, both organizational and individual perspectives show the organizational environment of custom cultural events to be a stimulus, and even a necessity to ponder, to answer the vital question of why custom cultural events do business the way they do and why their members play their part in it, and how they do it. The process stages, emphasizing a better understanding of the distinctive character of custom cultural events, are achieved so that, over time, employees become admirers, adherents, and implementers of the core values that the HOC repeatedly articulated. The analysis reveals that the HOC is an opportunity for collective reaffirmation.

Group identity. Several informants told the interviewers, "HOC has turned into a brand itself." However, in their narrative, they derive a sense of pride from the passionate team and business philosophy that have helped HOC maintain its momentum over the years rather than HOC's reputation. As the results of the analysis show, consciously exploring processes and activities, both on the frontline and backstage at the HOC, highlights and reinforces what is different or the same about "multiple assumptions" (Pratt, 1998) at custom culture events.

Another theme raised in the informant's narrative is a deep appreciation of the business philosophy of custom cultural events. The employees said, "The heart of a custom cultural event is its management model. HOC is just one manifestation of the power of this essence."

The informants often use words to describe "the essence" with genuine admiration and pride and are customer-centric and sincere in their work. The custom cultural event launches this great promotion only once yearly to "balance Western and Indonesian culture." Feedback from managers confirmed that HOC went beyond exercising supervisory authority and "dealing with their (our) sales quotas" constructively with the supplier's sales force on its floor. HOC Manager Dwi Pras commented, "You can feel how it feels. Benefits to customers and staff assistance is a reality to be experienced. It is unlike in other communities – all talk, all illusion, even deception during the promotion way."

Group picture. The image concept used in this study refers to people's perceptions of how others see them. The analysis reveals that the HOC exemplifies a group image of the collective "we" at custom culture events. In this case, the informant indicated a high level of awareness between two audiences, shopping clients and suppliers – what kind of retailer is the HOC in the eyes of buyers? What kind of business partner for the supplier? HOC participants better understand these two issues when they see how clients and suppliers respond. Company documents show that about 60 percent of HOC's customers are repeat customers. Some informants say customer retention is high because "customers can find what they want in the HOC." Most notably, informants' accounts usually mention that the appeal of the HOC even offsets the inconvenient transportation for many shoppers. Informants also shared many anecdotes with interviewers about how suppliers treated HOC as a high-risk campaign for their brand.

Localization of belief systems. As a leading organizational activity that has been repeatedly experienced, praised, and reflected on for more than 10 years, HOC means much more than the anniversary celebration of a custom cultural event. The informant's narrative indicated that for his employees, the HOC was a marker of the custom cultural event's status as a successful entrepreneurial underdog. The more profound effects of the HOC on organizational life have thus fostered and perpetuated belief systems in which assurances about the positive aspects of an uncertain future are



localized within the confines of custom cultural events. Going forward, members of custom cultural events appear to place more trust in a collective “us” and “patriarch” than they do themselves, believing that being one of the collective “us” and behaving accordingly will make things happen. Talking about HOC's prospects for maintaining record performance, several informants expressed their optimism for quoting an employee named Wawan, “They (competitors) can easily imitate our programs and activities. There is no secret to that. However, they cannot imitate people on the show's cultural customs, morals, and mentality. They cannot imitate us.”

Group potential. HOC functions to strive to realize control over socio-political capital as an essential factor in the retail world. As an effort to gain a competitive advantage during a real business war. Openly, informants talked about how suppliers enthusiastically supported HOC with their best salespeople and merchandise. However, supplier cooperation reflects more than good relations with HOC; it can also be interpreted because of HOC's substantial control. Discussing merchandizing for the HOC, employee Abel bluntly stated:

Saying "no" (to HOC requests for new collection products) means they (suppliers) do not support it. If they are not there for us at events like the HOC, they do not even have to bother next time.

The strength that HOC has in its supplier relationships is mainly due to HOC's strong sales record. Regarding the supply chain, Abel's employees observe that the costs of collaboration with suppliers are getting lower because the economic and social benefits HOC has provided to business partners are increasing in growth.

Paternalistic charisma. The HOC balances and romanticizes management at the HOC with a paternalistic approach so far as it brings charisma to its senior team, and its employees usually have unquestioning faith in the efficacy of their leaders. Despite the respectful tone in their narrative about employee dedication and loyalty, there are thoughts about how the prospects of HOC ultimately pay tribute to the top leaders: the founders and their successors. In the interviews, the informants expressed joy, satisfaction, and awe as they discussed how the Founder brought the custom cultural event to its place. They admire and even idolize the leader's "wisdom" in setting the parameters of business operations properly and keeping the company accurate to its "original position" in the face of aggressive competition.

What is a custom culture event? It is a crib. The author believes everyone will be cared for in this cradle. Everyone is offered equal access to a good platform. If you can, you will have the opportunity to show what you can do. Rather than leveling the organizational hierarchy in the minds of members, they observed and experienced the goodness of "management" towards line staff and salespeople, with the HOC being the prime opportunity for such experiences, in a sense, raising their awareness. This difference increases the charisma of the leader.

Reproduction of brand-centric employee culture. So far, the HOC effect has been dismantled in three areas. Over the next 10 years, HOC leads to the reproduction of employee culture centered on custom cultural events. A model is presented (Figure 3) to capture the dynamics in which cultural reproduction occurs. Echoing Geertz (2000), employee culture is defined as the primary way of thinking and doing things at work among organizational employees. Based on its findings, this study proposes that employee culture revolves around three elements: role norms, (corporate) values and (collective) beliefs, performance-matched, collective reaffirmation, and belief system localization – three theoretical dimensions developed to explain the results of HOC. A brand-centered employee



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culture can exist when organizational members support and enforce their organizational norms, values, and beliefs.

The onstage-backstage combination applies to almost any marketing event. However, in the case of the HOC, 10 years down the line, the backstage-onstage relationship in the ritual context of the HOC has resulted in a recursive and self-reinforcing cycle of HOC-centric employee culture, i.e., in everyday work settings, the things one does employees, how they do it, and the thought processes that underlie it, are all centered around the well-being of custom cultural events. Because of the drama of the annual itself and the underdog success that the annual celebrates, the cycle builds itself up to form a stable behavioral and mental core that impacts certain annual rituals and beyond, telling HOC members who they are and how they are must relate to other people, their jobs, and their organizations.

CONCLUSION

The HOC experience shows two lessons for event management of custom cultural rituals in the interest of cultural development. First, the symbolic aspect of the sales promotion event must be emphasized. Among HOC employees, the importance of sincerity at work, hospitality to serve, gratitude to colleagues, and the spirit of sharing with entities have fulfilled the need for entrepreneurial abilities to be highlighted because of their interpretation of NWTH. The notions of care, benevolence, dedication, and solidarity that bind the "we" together are reaffirmed with the repetition of annual quasi-ritualistic events. Event managers must use their creativity and wisdom to build down-to-earth symbolism for their consumer events. Second, mainstream holiday events should be avoided to create a signature event.

While the obligatory aspect of symbols being interpreted is crucial for true uniqueness, the experience of the NWTH event shows that the right timing is also crucial for driving the desired internal effect. HOC management does run specific time consumer promotions along with other custom cultural events on a marathon basis. By hosting major consumer events at different times of the year, HOC management demonstrates its ability to reshape market expectations and adapt them to the rhythm of custom cultural performances. The effect on members' trust in the collectivity is enormous. Note that the actual time of NWTH is the product of many unique circumstances. Proactively, event managers must carefully gauge their organizational strengths and strategically schedule unique consumer events.

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