

The Possibilities are Limitless: A Case Study of the Best  
Practices of User Experience for Apple Inc.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE POSSIBILITIES ARE LIMITLESS: A CASE STUDY OF THE BEST PRACTICES OF USER EXPERIENCE FOR APPLE INC.

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In recent years, society has followed the development of user experience practices in technology companies. User experiences contribute to emotional connections between the company and the consumer, memorable experiences associated with the brand, and the design of products. The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. The research for this study was conducted using a best practice case study guide developed by the researcher that examined the user experience Apple provides. The results of this study indicate there are numerous ways Apple creates user experiences. Apple was recognized as a leading brand of user experience in the technology industry. As competition in the industry increases, it is essential that Apple give consumers innovative and memorable experiences.

Keywords: user experience, Apple, user-centered design, technology industry, user-friendly, customer journey

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of Study

Any organization, to stay competitive, must adhere to the consumers' desires and the user experience. During the last fifteen years, technology has developed, leaving a need for the user experience to be altered as well. The development of technology has created an entirely new industry, which is known as the technology industry. Worth over \$2 trillion, the technology industry is quickly growing and expanding to all parts of life (Lee, 2015). User experience is now one of the most important factors when selling products to consumers (Kaasinen et al., 2015). The experience created for users comprises three different marketing strategies: stores, online shopping, and publicity campaigns. These three types of experience are what motivates individuals to purchase technology products. Technology companies work to create an experience that will sell the product to the consumer. They do this by showcasing new software and products regularly and in a unique way. The goal of user experience is to create a relationship between consumer and product (Michalco et al., 2015). Steve Jobs created the iPhone, a pioneer product, that became a generational trend and fashion statement. He created a following by offering a user experience for every product. The way Jobs developed new products completely altered the way consumers define the user experience. Jobs released the iPod in 2001 saving Apple from bankruptcy (Lee, 2015). This mobile device had the power to alter the user experience (Raptis et al., 2014). Through the release of new products, individuals have developed a trust in certain brands and will remain loyal

customers forever. Further research will explain how technology companies design products and publicity campaigns to connect with their consumers through experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc.

### Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted online at Robert E. Kennedy Library through the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo databases. In addition to books, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, Elsevier Science Direct Journals Complete, and Google Scholar. This review of literature includes the following subsections: user experience basics, integration of technology, and user experience in technology companies.

User experience, also referred to as user-centered design, has grown over the last century. According to Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2011), the user experience is considered critical to the process of service and product design. This experience includes: the initial marketing of the product, learning about the product, observation of the product throughout the world, the encounter when purchasing the product, and the adventure with the physical product. Companies have become aware that simply selling state-of-the-art products or services will not retain their customer satisfaction (Baldwin et al., 2006). Due to this new-found knowledge of customer satisfaction, the user experience design and journey are thriving. Companies across the world are investing significant amounts of money and people into creating user experiences as a strategy for market dominance (Garrett, 2010).

There are numerous methodologies focused on the design of the user experience. Participatory design, for example, “refers to the involvement of actual users in the product design process” (Shin et al., 2017, p. 1219). If companies analyze the participation of consumers with their products, they can develop a better understanding of the emotions of their users. This idea can help companies further understand what their users seek in a product and lead to a better connection with the customer.

For years, most products and advertisements were designed to be eye-catching, but this disregarded the consumers’ desire to encounter an experience. The design of a product has become more about usability than about the decoration, expressed Scott (2016). Designing an advertisement or product “is an intentional, goal-oriented, and systematic activity” that numerous companies use during the product development stages (Alamäki, 2018, p. 670). Companies consist of a unique design team that all work towards one goal: satisfy the user through an experience. The design ideas for a product aim to create a user journey by connecting the consumers and the products.

Companies strive to create a user journey with a product that will benefit an individual’s life forever. Blank (2007) believed that discovering users’ real problems and needs is the most important factor for creating new products. Products and advertisements should not only serve a technical problem, but rather “pay attention to the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social needs of users” (Alamäki, 2018, p. 670). The secret to success for companies when creating a new product: hire a designer to research customer wants, which will lead to the creation of a positive experience for the consumer. This experience created for customers will keep them coming back, which is essentially the entire goal of product development.

No single industry has exemplified user experience design quite like the technology industry. For the longest time, communication among people was not common if one was not face-to-face. Eventually, flip phones, pagers, and MP3 players were found in purses or bags of many individuals. As these devices became more popular, an industry emerged to further create convenient mobile devices, better known as the technology industry. This industry started creating and integrating more devices to this mobile device concept and further realized the importance of connection among people. The technology industry satisfied the needs of consumers and began developing the user experience (Shin et al., 2017).

The first smartphone was not user-friendly; it was very complicated for consumers to navigate and use. In June of 2007, Apple Inc. resolved this dissatisfaction by introducing the iPhone (Shin et al., 2017). This device started as a test for usability but shortly after turned into one of the bestselling devices to this day. In 2017, there were 728 million iPhones in use worldwide (O’Dea, 2020). The iPhone remains a dominant prospect in the mobile device market.

The technology industry has created a device that is not a “simple communication tool” (Kim et al., 2012, p. 1). People all across the world use these devices to play games, conduct business, and stay in contact with loved ones. Ji et al. (2006) state, “It is important to investigate appropriate methods for evaluating [the] usability of mobile phones” (p. 207). It is key for technology companies to conduct analyses on how users interact with new technology. People form expectations about what the experience of use for technology products will be like when purchasing a mobile device and this plays an

important role in user satisfaction (Michalco et al., 2015). Products that are user-friendly while creating an experience will encourage consumer purchases.

Technology companies analyze the reactions and feelings of consumers through emotional motivators (Zorfas et al., 2015). If consumers feel an emotional connection with a product, they will continue to use them in their daily life. Zorfas et al. found the following:

“We consider customers to be emotionally connected with a brand when it aligns with their motivations and helps them fulfill deep, often unconscious, desires.

Important emotional motivators include desires to stand out from the crowd, have confidence in the future, and enjoy a sense of well-being, to name just a few”

(para. 6).

Technology companies now use the “...understanding of emotional connection to attract and retain the most valuable customers” (Zorfas et al., para. 4). To gain a customer for life, technology companies create a meaningful product for individuals. According to Michalco et al. (2015), when customers’ expectations are met with a product, they correlate that brand with a positive experience. The sense of loyalty felt by consumers drives the technology industry.

There are numerous areas of marketing that technology companies need to implement into their business model to increase and impact purchase motivators for their customers. The motivators are divided into three different types of purchase experiences: stores, online, and publicity campaigns (Zorfas et al., 2015). These three types of experience are what encourages consumers to purchase technology products every day across the world.

The retail store of a technology company has numerous benefits when it comes to purchasing a new product or receiving help on an owned product. The location of a technology retail store says a lot about the company itself and while this is functional, consumers feel an emotional attachment to store locations as an impression is made. The store needs to be located in a flourishing and fast-paced environment, usually in the hub of a city. Demonstrations in a store help a customer receive hands-on experience with a product and can even convince them to purchase the item. In-store workshops and a customer service counter can help individuals with the technology products they already own. Based on research conducted by Zorfas et al. (2015), technology companies understand that consumers want sales associates to be easy to find and products easy to locate. If a staff member does not have the answer to a guest's question, customers expect that they collaborate with fellow workers to better serve the guest. The design of having customer service counters in technology retail stores is highly valued by customers as it allows help to be readily available.

The second key motivator, online shopping, is important to those who do not wish to visit a physical store to purchase a technology product. The navigation menu for a technology companies' website should be easily accessible and understandable. There should be a clear description of the technical features, the price, and similar available products. A technology website has the power to take the customer on a journey adding to the experience of purchasing a new product. The "option to purchase online and pick up in-store" is more available now than ever (Zorfas et al., 2015, para. 29). This option gives individuals the freedom to easily purchase their product online and then pick it up at their earliest convenience thus growing the customer's satisfaction. Individuals want an

easy-to-use website to purchase technology products whether they pick it up in-store or the item is shipped to their home (Zorfas et al., 2015). This availability also encourages independence and adds to the overall user experience.

Lastly, publicity campaigns grab the attention of customers and can lead to the purchase of a technology product. Advertisements that contain images attract the attention of viewers and can further the experience for the customer. Customers want to understand the values of a company before purchasing from them. Research shows that direct-marketing campaigns can lead to 210% higher response rates from consumers (Zorfas et al., 2015). These aspects of publicity campaigns used by technology companies create the first experience that a customer will encounter with a technology company.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc.

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc.?
2. What is Apple's approach to emotionally connecting with the consumer?
3. What are the design elements that Apple Inc. uses when creating new products and packaging?
4. How effective is Apple at using best practices to create a user experience?

5. How effective is Apple at accomplishing its goal of emotionally connecting with consumers?
6. How effective is Apple at the design process of its products?

## Chapter 2

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organization, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

#### Description of Organization

A case study was conducted on the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. Founded in Cupertino, CA in 1976, Apple, is now worth \$2 trillion, and is one of the largest job creators in the United States employing 80,000 individuals (Apple, 2020). This number does not include the 1.5 million employed at supply factories and jobs through the App Store environment. Apple employee roles include designers, scientists, manufacturers, customer support, retail, hardware, and software engineers. In 2019, Apple Inc. spent over \$50 billion with United States suppliers and manufacturers creating technology products (Apple). This number, while astonishing, is just the beginning for Apple Inc. as they continue to grow the technology industry.

Apple's motto "think different" describes how they "bring amazing people together to make amazing things happen" (Apple, 2020, para. 1). Their customers are not solely in the U.S. so Apple believes their employees should also be worldwide. Apple employs a diverse and unique team to do extraordinary work. Apple believes that to create products to serve everyone, they must believe in everyone. Working at Apple allows individuals the freedom to create for all types of people. During the last five years,

Apple has made it a point to hire more women and minorities. Apple Inc. strives to develop a diverse future with more opportunities for its employees and customers. Apple Inc. is a carbon-neutral company and by 2030 all of its products will be as well. Apple stores, offices, and data centers are powered by 100% renewable electricity. Millions of people across the world are employed by Apple, an equal opportunity workplace (Apple).

### Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a best practice case study guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The guide was formatted to include three columns titled “type of experience”, “description of experience”, and “details”. The “type of experience” column includes the way technology companies create a user experience. Within the “description of experience” column, the researcher was able to distinguish the type of user experience efforts the brand used. The “details” column allowed the researcher to further analyze the brand experience and include an in-depth description of what was included for each experience.

To begin research, a pilot study was developed by the researcher to analyze Google LLC., a technology company that specializes in Internet-related services and products. For the pilot study, the researcher analyzed the ways Google implements user experience into its design of products. In the initial analysis, the user experience was focused on in-person experiences, but the researcher realized that user experiences include digital and marketing encounters as well. The researcher altered each experience to be more specific in the “type of experience” section.

## Description of Procedures

A case study was conducted on the best practices of Apple Inc. The instrument utilized in this study was a best practice case study guide developed by the researcher. During the two-week research phase, the researcher used the guide to analyze the best practices for Apple's user experience.

The user experience best practices of Apple Inc. were analyzed by accessing the company website and third-party websites. The researcher considered information on Apple's website regarding user experience for consumers. Also, third-party websites including Give Good UX, Econsultancy, Forbes, Future Stores, 9 to 5 Mac, Entrepreneur, Swedbrand Group, and In the Black were visited to further examine the user experiences present for Apple. These websites allowed the researcher to gather evidence to include in the "details" section of the guide.

## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. A case study was conducted on the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. This chapter includes the following sections: stores, online shopping, and publicity campaigns.

#### Stores

With over 500 locations across the world, Apple prides itself on consistency. All stores are easy to navigate to and are in areas of a city that target the residents' high volume of technology use. If a consumer is away from home and their iPhone is damaged, there will be a store located in the heart of the city to provide help on this device. Apple stores are accessible across the world seven days a week.

With locations across the world, Apple maintain the same environment in all of them. Stores are clean, lights are cheerful, and the building design is consistent throughout all locations. Bags and credit card machines are hidden underneath the display tables to further demonstrate the tidiness of Apple stores. The architecture of an Apple store builds on the unique ideas of design and materials found in Apple products. The stores are modern with straight lines, some stores possess indoor gardens, and there is a glass feature throughout every store. Some stores are even found in cultural gems like the Apple Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C.

Located in Apple stores, the Genius Bar is a technology support station providing concierge-style support to customers. Some Apple stores have Genius Bars that are open for 12 hours. If a customer enters a store with a technical problem, for example, not being able to sync their music, staff members are available to help resolve the issue. Apple also regularly offers in-store workshops to explain tips and tricks of using an Apple device. Apple offers three types of in-store workshops: skills, labs, and walks. Skills classes include a basic explanation of specific products, apps, and techniques. Lab workshops offer a more advanced description of products and hands-on training. Lastly, walk workshops are led by an Apple employee outside, showing users product techniques in the real world.

Apple associates are trained to walk customers through five distinct service steps:

A: Approach customers with a personalized, warm welcome

P: Probe politely to understand the customer's needs

P: Present a solution for the customer to take home today

L: Listen for and resolve issues or concerns

E: End with a fond farewell and invitation to return.

The abundance of employees present in an Apple store help reduce wait times. When being assisted at the Genius Bar, if an Apple employee is not sure of the correct answer, they will ask a coworker. Employees will collaborate to find a solution for the customer. Besides sales associates, Apple also employs greeters to welcome and register customers for an appointment when they enter the store.

The many demo units throughout the Apple store make it extremely easy to explore new devices. The sales associates of Apple stores support this sampling strategy

as it helps the customer explore. Customers are able to touch and work with any product in an Apple store.

### Online Shopping

Online shopping has become extremely popular especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Employees and students required to work from home had to adjust to a virtual lifestyle. For some, this was no issue but for others, the need for technology at home became a necessity. Apple's website is easy to navigate quickly and allows visibility of all technology products.

When purchasing a product online, the user will first land on the homepage for Apple Inc. The homepage displays the newest released item from Apple and a button to watch the product release event. As individuals scroll down the page, images of the newest technology product are displayed against a black background. There are few words present that describe the latest features of the product. At the bottom of their website, Apple includes social responsibility links that describe their support for many social values.

Once an individual selects a specific product to view, information is displayed that includes key features, the newest elements to the product, and the price with or without a payment plan. There are numerous large images and videos present as one scrolls down the page. There is a tab to compare models at the bottom of the page and a blue "buy now" button remains at the top of the screen as the page is scrolled down. From this navigation menu, Apple also offers in-store pickup or free shipping to the customer's house.

When a new product is developed and ready for release, Apple creates a virtual event available on their website. This online video event created by Apple includes:

1. The visual design of the new product
2. Explanation of technical information
3. Description of software updates
4. Analysis of the new product by other companies

This event is available to anyone, anywhere in the world. On Apple's website, you also can watch previous video events about released products.

### Publicity Campaigns

Apple has mastered the simplicity of marketing for its technology products. In an Apple advertisement, there are few words and no details on where to purchase the product. Their advertisements do not include any technical information instead they include a photo of the new product with a tagline. Apple does not use its name in advertisements, though one will see the Apple logo represented.

Apple stands with everyone no matter their disability, education, or diversity. Apple is very open about its diverse population of employees and how everyone works together. The advertisements of Apple display their core values by incorporating people from across the world who have different ethnicities, skills, and disabilities. Apple conveys themes throughout its publicity campaigns including community, friendship, peace of mind, and adventure.

Apple creates customer profiles for each of its main audience segments. These profiles help Apple analyze the diversity of its users to create content. Apple does not use

technology industry terms, but rather direct words that the consumer will understand. When serving an older generation, Apple does not force them to use a chat-based system. Instead, Apple gives older generations a phone number to call for customer service questions. From the analysis of customer profiles, Apple is aware of its consumers and develops its products and advertisements accordingly.

People across the world are bombarded with words every day. Apple has designed its publicity campaigns to be image heavy. The Apple team understands that words do not resonate emotionally with people which leads Apple to use fewer than ten words in advertisements. Apple's advertisements include a short tagline and a clear image of the new product.

Apple houses its technology products in minimalist white boxes with a metallic font. The packaging for Apple products is just as visually appealing as the device inside. Every part of Apple's packaging is designed to be simple and clutter-free. Apple employs a designer whose sole responsibility is to test prototype boxes and ensure the packaging of products is user-friendly.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

With the technology industry booming, Apple's dedication to creating a user experience is a focal point that the company was founded on. Apple shows commitment to its customers by creating unique and memorable experiences. This concluding chapter includes the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the future.

#### Discussion

With competition high among brands in the technology industry, it can often be difficult to stand out when creating memorable experiences. However, Apple recognizes the value of experiences for its users, in all facets of its company. Apple's use of best practices grows a customer following that consists of individuals looking to have an experience. Unlike other companies' shops, Apple's in-store environment consists of a clean display of products. The only items consumers will see when inside are the technology products on display. Little clutter helps bring the customer into the experience focused on the technology product. Apple stores are created to resemble town squares presenting a community for all customers. Everyone is welcome and all individuals come together to experience the unique design of Apple in the store (Apple, 2020). Apple's success comes directly from making sure every aspect of its store provides an overall positive user experience.

While Apple's stores are a popular location to purchase products, Apple has a user-friendly website that allows consumers to just as easily purchase products. Apple has created a website that allows users to easily navigate between pages. This convenience to consumers increases customer satisfaction and displays an effective best practice used by Apple. Their website focuses on the journey one will have with a product by displaying photos and important technical information persuading the searcher to purchase the product (Apple, 2020).

The image heavy advertisements of Apple grab the attention of many consumers and lead to a simplified decision-making process for customers. As Zorfas et al. (2015) stated, direct-marketing campaigns can lead to 210% higher response rates from consumers. Along with an image of the product, Apple has chosen to use less than 10 words in the tagline of an advertisement. Apple's use of image heavy advertisements is an effective best practice for the user experience. As the technology industry grows, brands need to keep up with trends and continue using the best practices of user experience. Apple should continue developing its in-store, online, and publicity campaign best practices to generate experiences for all of its users.

Apple does an effective job of creating an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand. The face of Apple, its employees, aid in connecting the user to the Apple experience through personable actions. Employees of Apple are knowledgeable of technology products and pay attention to the emotional needs of their consumers whether they are purchasing a new product or need help at the Genius Bar. The Genius Bar and in-store workshops provide a sense of ease to consumers and ensure the company/customer relationship thrives. According to Zorfas et al. (2015), customer

connections transpire once the emotional needs of the consumer are understood. Apple's effectiveness in creating an emotional attachment with all customers is what makes them successful and creates lifelong customers. While Apple is effective at developing a welcoming environment, they should consider pop-ups and activations to create experiences that customers will not see in every store. This would allow for an even deeper level of connection amongst certain customers.

Apple effectively instills an emotional connection between the consumer and the company by using simple and clear language in publicity campaigns. Apple develops customer profiles to understand the use of language by consumers. These profiles help create advertisements by analyzing the reactions and comments of customers on social media. This best practice to use words the customer will understand is what drives Apple's publicity campaigns as Apple wants consumers to feel connected with the brand. Apple should explain and promote this idea of user-centered design further in its publicity campaigns.

The core values and themes of Apple are publicly displayed to effectively evoke an emotional connection with consumers. Apple's stores, website, and publicity campaigns all implement these core values to further show their commitment to a sustainable and diverse company. As Zorfas et al. (2015) indicate that a connection with a brand fulfills deep desires that lead to customer satisfaction and confidence in the future. Apple successfully uses its core values and themes to emotionally connect with the consumer. Their core values explain the inclusivity elements of the company and the themes describe a community of peace. These elements lead to a consumer's desire to be emotionally connected with this organization. To continue being a leading brand in the

technology industry, companies must emotionally connect with its users. Technology companies should continue creating experiences that lead to an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer. Although Apple is recognized for creating an emotional connection with its customers, the company should continue to explore customer desires to maintain this position.

The design of Apple's technology products has become an icon and even a symbol of popular culture. The etched apple on top of a laptop or the minimalistic white box with metallic font are examples of the details that Apple effectively designs for its products. Apple's design team is devoted to creating the highest quality products that have a distinctive design appearance. Steve Jobs was a perfectionist and inventor who created a product with precision in its design. As mentioned by Hassenzahl and Tractinsky (2011), the user experience is critical to product design. The initial encounter with the product begins an experience for the consumer resulting in a purchase from Apple. As an innovative company, Apple offers new products to the technology industry that are not simply about the decoration but rather the usability. Apple is successful at designing a product that leads consumers to have an experience while using the product. Technology companies strive to offer nothing but the best to their customers. They must ask for input from the customer when designing new products. Apple should display their well-structured product design plan in their advertisements as a demonstration of their commitment to customers.

There are several limitations present in this study that may impact the results. First, as an Apple customer that has always used Apple products, the researcher may have unintentionally influenced the findings of Apple's user experience through a subjective

bias but took steps to avoid this, documenting only what was observed on the website. An additional limitation was that the majority of the research for this case study was restricted to online resources, creating a gap of information. Lastly, the study only analyzes three ways Apple develops their idea of user experience: stores, online, and publicity campaigns. Despite these limitations, the study does provide insight into the user experience, emotional connection, and product design of Apple.

The results from this study provide evidence of the best practices of user experience for Apple Inc. Experiences are created for customers in clean Apple stores, on their user-friendly website, and with the use of image-heavy advertisements. The emotional connection that users experience is developed by the caring employees, use of language, and core values and themes that Apple displays. Lastly, the design of Apple's products creates an experience for consumers. With the technology industry constantly evolving, the most successful companies will be those that create experiences for their customers. The topics covered in this study provide an understanding of user experience and creates a standard for all future research examinations on this topic. The technology industry is continuously expanding, and user experiences should be explored regularly for brands to successfully market to their consumers.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Apple accomplishes its goal to connect with the consumer through an experience.

2. Apple Inc. uses three best practices to develop the user experience: stores, online shopping, and marketing.
3. The design of Apple's products and packaging is simple and clutter-free.
4. Apple Inc. effectively leads the technology industry by emotionally connecting with the user resulting in high customer satisfaction.
5. Apple Inc. effectively uses its stores, online shopping, and publicity campaigns to create a lifelong experience for its consumers.
6. Apple Inc. effectively designs products to be user-friendly and satisfy the consumer.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The technology industry should continue creating an experience for its users, as it is an effective way to reach the target market.
2. Apple Inc. should continue utilizing emotional connections as a leading factor when creating user experiences.
3. Apple Inc. should continue to use face-to-face interaction between employees and customers as a strategy for user experience.
4. Apple Inc. should plan pop-ups/activations to create more personal relationships with their consumers.
5. Apple Inc. should continue to be innovative and create experiences that customers will remember for a lifetime.

6. Future research should explore what the user does not want to experience in order for Apple Inc. to make further improvements.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

### Instrument

Type of Experience	Description of Experience	Details
<b>Stores</b>		
Location		
In-Store Environment		
Genius Bar/In-Store Workshops		
Sales Associates/Staff Collaboration		
Demo Units in Stores		
<b>Online Shopping</b>		
Home Page		
Navigation Menu		
Watch the Event		
<b>Publicity Campaigns</b>		
Simplicity		
Core Values/Themes		
Language		
Use of Visuals		
Packaging		