

# Branding Media with Event Marketing

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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Media branding has been receiving increasing academic attention in recent years. Competition for audiences and advertisers has increased with the fragmentation of the media field into more niche providers. Media branding is recognized as a means to create competitive advantage in this highly competitive field. Event marketing is regarded as an effective way of creating engagement around brands, and some media companies of today have incorporated event marketing into their media sales strategy by selling events as solutions to their advertising clients. Niche media companies in particular face the need to compete with means other than wide coverage. The aim of this thesis is to bring together research on media branding, media engagement and event marketing to shed light on how event marketing helps to create a strong media brand in the market for audiences and advertisers and thus create competitive advantage for a niche media company.</p> <p>Qualitative case study methodology was used in this study. The primary data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with managers of the case company Oy Basso Media Ltd – a Finnish media company and design agency that operates primarily in radio broadcasting – and its event partners. The research design was strengthened with data triangulation. Qualitative content analysis of the transcribed interview narratives was the main analysis method.</p> <p>Based on the theoretical framework together with the empirical findings a final model of media branding with event marketing is constructed to demonstrate how co-creation of events that serve the needs of partners, advertisers and the media company can help to build a strong media brand and create competitive advantage. My findings suggest that audience engagement and a strong brand community are the two main outcomes of event marketing that create competitive advantage in the market for audiences and advertisers. Quality of the advertorial content (the event) and fit between the advertorial content and media brand are central moderating factors in the branding process that managers need to control in these collaborative events. By differentiating their brand with events, a niche media company can build relationships with their audiences, fostering an engaged brand community that advertisers want to reach. This in turn should enhance the media brand's value in the eyes of advertisers and thus lead to more profitable advertiser relationships.</p>		
<b>Keywords</b> Event Marketing; Experiential Marketing; Branding; Media Branding; Media Engagement		

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and motivation

I would like to begin by offering an example from my own experience, that will shed light on some of the issues media managers of today are facing and some of the opportunities available to them. This example also demonstrates the reason behind my motivation for examining this particular subject in my thesis.

I was recently working as marketing manager for a small, independent Finnish sailing culture magazine, handling the marketing, media sales and distribution of the magazine. With a niche product and a twice-yearly edition of only 2000 copies, media selling was challenging. We did not have the numbers to compete with the mainstream sailing and boating magazines on reach. What we had was a unique, artistic media product that evoked very positive feelings among those who read it, not just sailors, but young city-dwellers with a longing to the sea. We knew that our most valuable asset was our brand image. We had to be creative with our sales pitches. Another thing we did to get sales was to package deals creatively. Deals were not always money in return for advertising space. One of our most loyal advertising customers, or more aptly put, partners, was a prestigious local sailing club with a large, however aging, member base. They advertised in all our numbers, and the foremost thing that came up in the conversations with the sailing club was that they wanted to support this kind of young, innovative, good-looking sailing media. It was easy to see why, past the altruistic idea of “supporting” us – besides reaching our audience of quality conscious, young folk interested in sailing, the “rubbing off” of our image on them would make them a more attractive prospect to the local scene of young sailors and sailors-to-be, a big help in bringing some new blood to their ever aging member-base.

For one of our numbers, we made a package deal with the sailing club: they received an advertisement on our pages in exchange for the use of their facilities for our magazine's publishing festivities. The publishing party came and went and as an event, it was a success. Not long after, the sailing club asked us to organize an after-sail event for their biggest sailing event of the summer in exchange for a good sum of money. They wanted us to plan the event, produce it, and possibly get some of "our crowd" to attend the party. They said they wanted to have an event that "looked like us" to present to their guests at the sailing event. As we accepted, suddenly we had gone from being just a magazine to being an event-producing media entity that could sell event marketing as part of advertising packages. Perhaps a mainstream magazine with a nationwide reach would not have gone out of their way and through the trouble of putting together an event for extra revenues. But being the niche operator we were, these kinds of cooperative endeavours were a way to bind ourselves more closely to our advertisers to ensure a lasting relationship, while at the same time earning money for our operations. After all, being a media organization, however tiny, we could reach our audience through our different media platforms to market the event and we were pretty flexible in our operations – we could pull off an event.

This example is from the context of one small media organization consisting of a group of freelance journalists and other professionals publishing a magazine in a specific niche, and it is based on my own reflection and experiences. But it made me wonder about the different motivations behind other media companies' event marketing efforts. This certainly isn't the only example of a media company organizing events. A well-known example of media-organized event is MTV's Video Music Awards, which has been called "the Super Bowl for youth", an annual event that attracts huge audiences both live and behind TV screens and multimillion dollar sponsorship and advertising deals (Elliot 2004).

Media companies, event organizers, commercial sponsors and advertisers partnering around events is a common phenomenon. Sponsorship of events by different commercial entities is a big business that has grown since its birth in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Cunningham et al. 1992). Event organizers recognize the value of publicity

and routinely partner with media companies to gain media coverage of their events (Stevens 2005). A lot of research has been conducted in the field of event sponsorship as a strategic promotion tool, especially in the context of sporting events. In fact, sport has almost reached the status of a medium itself due to the enormous amount of visibility that it generates (Collin & Wilkins 2000). In some classifications, media and events operate in the same 'media and entertainment industry'. Hence, media and events are not always distinguished from each other. According to Collin & Wilkins (2000) the word 'media' has never meant so much. It is no longer merely a vessel for advertising – it now embraces things such as sponsorship and events. However, how media companies use events – *creating* events as part of their media concepts and selling events as part of media selling to advertising clients – is a phenomenon that is surprisingly unexplored academically.

The changing media business is a current and interesting subject. During the last few decades, the industry has experienced significant developments that have shifted the fundamental characteristics of the business environment. Advances in technology have increased the number of content providers drastically and there is more competition than ever for the attention of advertisers and consumers alike (Ots 2008). Traditional media outlets are now not only facing more competition from new media, but also intensifying competition with each other. The number of niche media products and brands catering to smaller audiences is constantly increasing. (Oyedepi 2007) Consumers have also changed – their needs, the kinds of content they desire, and their ways of obtaining information, news and entertainment. These changes have been driven by developments in technology, lifestyle and economics during the past few decades. (Picard 2010) Understandably, media managers have trouble keeping up with this media landscape that is changing more rapidly than ever (Joseph 2011).

Now, media firms have found it necessary to adopt strategic management principles and practices that have traditionally been restricted to the marketing of consumer products – practices, such as branding (Oyedepi 2007). When media companies are competing for advertising revenues in a zero-sum market, media branding is crucial to make the media brand attractive to both audiences and advertisers in order to achieve

competitive advantage. With online and offline presence and the Web 2.0, media companies now have various touch points to engage the consumer with their content (Chan-Olmsted 2011). As the media field is fragmenting into more and more niche providers for smaller audiences, media companies operating in these niches must find other ways to attract advertisers besides the traditional wide coverage. Some media companies take advantage of the various touch points by adopting what seems like a holistic approach, engaging their users in live events organized by the media company and offering advertisers the opportunity to benefit from this engagement. Media selling seems to have changed – innovative media companies are now selling multiplatform, engaging advertising packages to reach their target market on a deeper level. This type of event marketing that is conducted as a key part of a niche media company's operations, media branding and as part of media selling, is a subject that has not sufficiently been addressed by research.

Event marketing and especially sponsorship-based event marketing has received a lot of academic attention over the past couple of decades. Event marketing has become widely recognized as a marketing communications tool that allows marketers to overcome problems such as communication clutter and reach target markets effectively and differentiate their brands from others (e.g. Taylor & Cunningham 1999). Media has played a very small part, if any, in event marketing literature. For example, Cunningham, Hall and Young (2006) examined MTV's Video Music Awards from the advertiser's point of view to find out how audience engagement with the show affected the performance of embedded advertising. Authors have mainly been concerned with how companies can gain the optimal media coverage from events with their event PR strategy, and how event sponsorship can be used to increase the value of sponsoring brands. In other words, media entities have been treated as external operators, journalists that should be lured in to provide coverage about events organized or sponsored by the company.

Traditionally, media and business literature have been somewhat separate. The subject of media has been dealt with in business literature mainly from the viewpoint of the advertiser. In media management literature, branding is a relatively new subject and

has been receiving more scholarly attention only in the past few years (e.g. Malmelin & Moisander 2014, McDowell 2011, McDowell 2006, Nienstedt et al. 2012, Chan-Olmsted & Kim 2001). Brand management theory specific to media brands is still far from fully developed (Chan-Olmsted 2006). A cross-disciplinary approach between communication and business paradigms is needed in order to develop academic knowledge of media branding (McDowell 2006). This research seeks to develop this approach further.

So far, little research has been conducted on events organized by media companies and their role in the content delivery business that caters to the needs of both advertisers and audiences. Hence, it is a subject that requires further academic attention. Experiential marketing strategies such as event marketing have been recognized as effective for branding in business literature, but they have not sufficiently been examined in the context of media branding. The reason why this area is of specific interest is that media companies are in a very distinct position, dual markets where their branding strategies must be projected towards both audiences and advertisers, and this is what makes media branding different from conventional branding (e.g. Ots 2008). Furthermore, the fragmentation of the media field (e.g. McDowell 2006) in recent years makes niche media providers an increasingly relevant subject for research. This research aims to fill this gap and shed light on the role of event marketing in media branding, in other words, how event marketing can create competitive advantage for a niche media company operating in dual markets between audiences and advertisers. To be clear, this thesis does not examine major events such as the Super Bowl or MTV's Video Music Awards, which have traditionally been vehicles for companies' event marketing strategies due to the large audiences and wide media coverage that they attract. Instead, the focus lies in more grass root marketing events organized by niche media companies for their target audiences – event that focus on creating live experiences for event attendees and thereby communicating the desired brand messages. These kinds of events have received substantially less academic attention than major sporting events and music festivals. In this thesis, scattered event marketing, engagement and media branding research are brought together to form a coherent model of event marketing used in niche media branding.



## **1.2 Research objectives and research problem**

In order for a media company to differentiate from competition, branding strategies must be put in place for both audiences and advertisers. My interest lies in how events help to create competitive advantage for a niche media company and increase the media brand's value. This research will contribute to building more comprehensive theoretical knowledge of the use of events in the content delivery business, the role event marketing plays in media companies' branding strategies and how events help to create competitive advantage in the media field. This research employs an exploratory approach to the subject. Exploratory research is called for in this subject field to shed light on emerging issues and topics in the new media landscape in order to formulate more concrete hypotheses in the future.

The research questions are as follows:

***How does event marketing create competitive advantage for a niche media company?***

Sub-question:

***How does event marketing strengthen the media brand?***

This research examines these questions from the viewpoint of the media company. Although that is the primary perspective, I will also be taking into account viewpoints of the advertiser and partners, as the cooperation between the media company and advertiser is the basis for value creation in a revenue model that is based on advertising revenues, and furthermore, key partners in this case play an essential role in the creation of events. This case study examines a media company with a somewhat niche audience. As the media industry is becoming more and more fragmented, niche providers are increasing, and this is what makes the particular case study quite exemplary of the contemporary media company and an interesting subject for research.

The case presented in this thesis provides an example of how events help to create a niche media brand that is attractive to advertisers and audiences. The contributions of this study are new theoretical knowledge in the field of media business literature as well as managerial implications to aid media managers in their decision-making. However, we must bear in mind that the findings are from a single intensive case study, and therefore generalizations must be done with caution.

### **1.3 Research methodology**

Qualitative case study methodology is used to shed light on the abovementioned research problem. The case company is a Finnish media company and design agency that practices event marketing. The core business of this media company is radio broadcasting, but the company operates on multiple platforms both online and offline. The actual case is a series of events organized by the media company in cooperation with its advertising client and other partnering companies in the summer of 2014.

### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. The structure of the thesis is as follows:

In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework for my research. The theoretical framework encompasses literature on branding, media branding, media engagement and event marketing. First, I find it necessary to discuss some of the specific characteristics of the media business and challenges in the media industry today. This I will do in Chapter 2.1. The theoretical framework of this research consists of three main themes: Branding, Media Engagement, and Event Marketing. In Chapter 2.2 I will discuss branding and especially what it means in the media context. In Chapter 2.3 I will discuss media engagement and what significance it has in media selling, in

other words, what kind of value engagement brings to advertisers. In Chapter 2.4 I will discuss the concept of event marketing and its significance as a marketing strategy today, especially as a vehicle for branding. Finally, in Chapter 2.5, I will present a summary of the central theories to demonstrate the existing research gap and the research framework that will be used in the analysis of the empirical data.

Chapter 3 begins the empirical part of the thesis. Here, I present the methodological choices of the empirical research and describe the research design in detail. In this chapter I also introduce the subject of the case study.

In Chapter 4 I will present the main findings from the empirical research following the main themes presented in the research framework.

In Chapter 5 I offer discussion of the findings. Here, the findings from the empirical research are compared to the research framework to build the final model of media branding with event marketing and to form the conclusions of the research. In this chapter I also offer the managerial implications of the findings, the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research in this field.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Media business today**

The media industry is a wide and diverse grouping. This makes it somewhat problematic for investigation since different types of media have their unique characteristics that affect the operations, business models and environments that media firms operate in. Examples of different media as grouped by Picard (2002) are newspapers, books, magazines, radio stations, television stations, cable systems, motion pictures, multimedia, and online media. These different media can differ greatly in their market characteristics, cost characteristics, and operational characteristics. (Picard 2002) Yet, the audiences for different media are not exclusive, and various media operate in the same complex media landscape. Furthermore, media brands themselves operate on various different media platforms simultaneously. Certain developments can be found that affect the media industry overall.

“The media revolution” has been on everyone’s lips in the media industry during the past decade. It has attracted both journalistic and academic attention. A recent newspaper article in Helsingin Sanomat described some of the difficulties that British culture journalism is facing that reflects the broader developments in the media industry overall (HS 18.10.2014). British newspaper giants have downsized their culture departments, yet due to the huge increase in new content providers on the Internet, there is more culture journalism available to readers than ever before. The decrease in the circulation numbers of existing magazines hasn’t stopped new, more niche-targeted print magazines from emerging. However, most print and online magazines, from the new to the most established ones, share the same concern – how to be sustainable financially. Certain developments that can be seen clearly in the media industry: the increase in niche media products and conversation and immediate feedback between content creator and audience. This has been established in academia as well: Goldstein (2004, in Oyedeki 2007) describes that the distinguishing characteristics of the evolving media environment are that specialized content is

delivered to various niche audiences in a variety of formats by multitudes of media channels.

Media companies now operate in a zero-sum market. What this means is that the number of potential customers for a media category has remained the same while the number of brands competing for market share within that category has increased. In this kind of market, a media can increase its audiences only by gaining market share from competitors. (Keller 1993, Porter 1996 in McDowell 2004)

A lot of buzz has been going on in media management about new innovative media business models, and it's no wonder – understanding of the business model is especially important for strategy and innovation when the industry is undergoing fundamental changes (Picard 2002 and 2011). As traditional revenue models are losing their effectiveness, new opportunities for creating value are even more important for profitability and survival. Innovative business models can uncover new ways to serve audiences and advertisers. However, competitors can easily copy business models, neutralizing any competitive advantage brought by them. The sustainable way to create competitive advantage is through media branding. A strong brand name equals competitive advantage, as it cannot be copied. The main motivation for brand management is to differentiate from competition. (McDowell 2011) This is why media branding is a subject more relevant than business models when seeking ways to achieve competitive advantage in the media field.

With considerable increases in content providers both online and offline, competition for both users and advertisers has intensified. This is the main challenge that media branding seeks to address. Several researchers have stated that due to factors such as increasing competition, multichannel media consumption, advances in media technology, and media convergence, having strong brands is more important than ever for the survival of even the most established media companies. (Malmelin & Moisander 2014, Chan-Olmsted 2011, Chan-Olmsted & Cha 2007)

When examining media business literature, branding emerges as a central topic, but it is certainly not the only one worth noting. The changing media landscape has also brought about questions regarding the value of the media offering and the relationships within which the media company operates. In any highly competitive industry, only the brands that offer their customers real value will succeed (Collin & Wilkins 2000). Media guru Robert Picard (2010) has stated that the biggest problem is that media companies are trying to sell 19th and 20th century products, and doing so without changing the value that these products provide or the relationships in which they are provided.

Successful companies create value (Picard 2002). We cannot examine media companies without understanding the value that they provide and who it is provided for. The distinguishing characteristic of media companies is that they typically operate in a two-sided market – serving audiences who want certain content and serving advertisers who want to reach these certain audiences (Peters et al. 2013). Media companies can operate with various forms of revenue models. Some are financed entirely by advertising revenues while others are financed via subscription fees and other audience-sourced revenues. Many media companies operate with mixed-financing systems, where some revenues may come from sales or subscription fees, but a significant source of revenues is the selling of media space for advertisers. (Reca 2006) Ironically, consumers are leaving traditional media outlets for online platforms and are increasingly reluctant to pay for content while at the same time the demand for content has never been higher (McDowell 2011). Many media companies, such as radio stations and many digital content providers, distribute their content for free and revenues come from selling media space to advertisers. In media literature this kind of business model that relies on advertising revenues is generally referred to as the advertiser-supported business model.

Part of understanding value creation is establishing what is the core business of a company. The core business of media companies is, of course, content. According to

Picard (2002), the core business is best understood through the central, common activity and competency of the firm, and in the case of media companies it is the “development of information and its packaging and programming for use” – and these are the activities that provide the real value added. The main value that media companies offer to audiences is the effort they make and the time they take to screen the enormous amount of materials available and the decisions they make in order to bring to the consumer the most important, highest quality content in the most useful or entertaining form. Furthermore, media companies create value by packaging this content and presenting it to the audience in a publication or program that has personality – by creating individual media brands to serve consumers’ needs and desires. Serving the needs and wants of the audience is prerequisite for serving the needs of advertising clients. For the advertisers, media companies provide the contact point to reach consumers with their marketing messages. In commercial media, maximizing audience tends to maximize advertising. (Picard 2002) But, as the audiences are fragmenting between increasing amounts of content providers, media companies have to rethink their old strategies.

Several researchers suggest that the media landscape is developing into more and more content providers for smaller niche audiences (McDowell 2006). The existence of similar niches leads to intense competition, but highly differentiated niches can coexist side to side. To gain market share in terms of audience as well as advertising dollars, niche media operators must know the competitive environment and use marketing to place themselves in the most advantageous niche. The ideal niche is one that minimizes the cost of battling competitors while maximizing revenues. (McDowell 2004) A problem with niche media, however, is that by definition, they cater to smaller audiences. As a niche operator, it is hard to make use of economies of scale that bring advantage to bigger competitors. While a niche may be highly differentiated, it may still be too small to be successful financially. (McDowell 2011)

Commoditization of media space is a problem experienced by media companies big and small today. Both audiences and advertisers may look at media content as a common commodity that is available from various acceptable providers for little cost.

Media companies must somehow find ways to offer superior value to advertising clients as a way to fight commoditization. (McDowell 2011) Niche operators in general may find it impossible to compete for advertisers with audience ratings due to the small size of the niche. Luckily, numbers are not the only way to differentiate in the eyes of advertisers.

Advertisers are facing a problem of their own – the maturing of the advertising industry. In the over-communicated marketing environment, consumers are increasingly selective in what they will pay attention to. Consumers have become hardened and even cynical towards advertising. Especially experienced media users are less responsive to advertising. This means that it is more important than ever for advertisers to understand the quality of the media environment within which they place their brands. If not optimally placed, advertising may fall on deaf ears. (Collin & Wilkins 2000)

Schulz and Barnes (1995, in Ots 2009, 124) argued in 1995 already that whereas traditionally, advertisers have judged the value of an audience by numbers and demographics, concern has moved towards the *effectiveness* of media, in other words, how well the desired effect among the audience is achieved. In other words, advertisers are not only interested in who and how large is the audience and the broad generic content category, but how the consumption occurs and what kind of opportunities it creates for communication impact. This has led some media firms to move toward more collaborative relationships with advertisers. Ots (2009) examined customer value in advertising media buying in a TV industry context. He described collaborative relationships as a promising path. Such relationships would entail offering individual solutions to the advertiser's brand – agreeing on mutual goals and planning the means that will lead to the desired outcomes. The value perimeters for this kind of collaboration would go far beyond mere exposure. Ots predicts that these kinds of relationships between media firm and advertiser are likely to be seen much more in the future. According to him, advertising media buying and selling will focus more on understanding consumers instead of just numbers and demographics.



Media firms have the opportunity of creating highly differentiated offerings to their advertising customers. By promoting what Keller (2003) called "multidimensionality" of brands – in other words, what makes their brand different and valuable to customers – media firms can fight the commoditization of media space. (McDowell 2011) As advertisers pay more attention to the brand context in which they place *their* brands, the strength of the media brand and the "rub-off" of brand effects from media brand to advertiser brand are the key issues rather than audience numbers and ratings alone (Burns 2000).

## **2.2 Branding**

We have now established the importance of branding media in order to create competitive advantage. As media branding is a relatively new subject, the existing body of knowledge on branding comes from the business sciences. When it comes to branding, marketing literature has relied on the conceptualizations of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), and to this day, media brand analyses have relied on the existing brand theory in marketing literature (Malmelin & Moisander 2014). In this chapter, I will first go through some of the main branding theories relevant to this thesis, after which I will describe the special characteristics of branding media concepts.

What branding essentially means is identifying a product or service and distinguishing it from other products and services in the same category. In other words, the intention of branding practices is to differentiate the offerings of a company from those of competitors. (Aaker 1991) Successful branding leads to brand equity. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity can be understood as a construct of the assets and liabilities linked to the brand name. Aaker grouped these assets and liabilities into five categories, which are brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations besides quality, and other proprietary brand assets.

Keller’s classic brand equity conceptualization is from the customer perspective. The definition of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) by Keller (1993, 8) is that it is “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand”, which occurs when a consumer is “familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong and unique associations towards the brand in memory”. According to Keller’s framework, brand knowledge is made up of two components: brand image and brand awareness. In his conceptualization, a brand is considered to possess brand equity if consumers react more favourably toward the branded product and the price, promotion and distribution of that product than they would react if it were an unnamed product in the same category.

Central in Keller’s conceptualization of brand equity are the concepts of brand image and brand awareness. *Brand image* consists of the various associations towards the brand in the consumer’s memory. *Brand awareness* means the consumer is familiar with the brand, and involves both recognition and recall. *Brand knowledge* is the combined effect of the previous two components – image and awareness – in the consumer’s memory. (Keller 1993) The following figure is a simplified version of Keller’s framework that has been presented by Ots and Wolff (2008) in a media branding context:



FIGURE 1: Keller’s Brand Equity Model (Ots & Wolff 2008, 99)

Another conceptualization of branding is that of Kapferer (2012). Kapferer’s definition of a brand is that it is a name with the power to influence the market – a name that evokes trust, respect, passion, and engagement in the consumers. Today, it may even be argued that to be considered a real brand, the brand should foster a community of some sort. Of course, when talking about brands we are not referring to merely a name or logo, but the entire *system* that combines a concept with inherent

value to a product or service that is identified by a name and symbols. The name doesn't exist without the actual products or services it relates to.

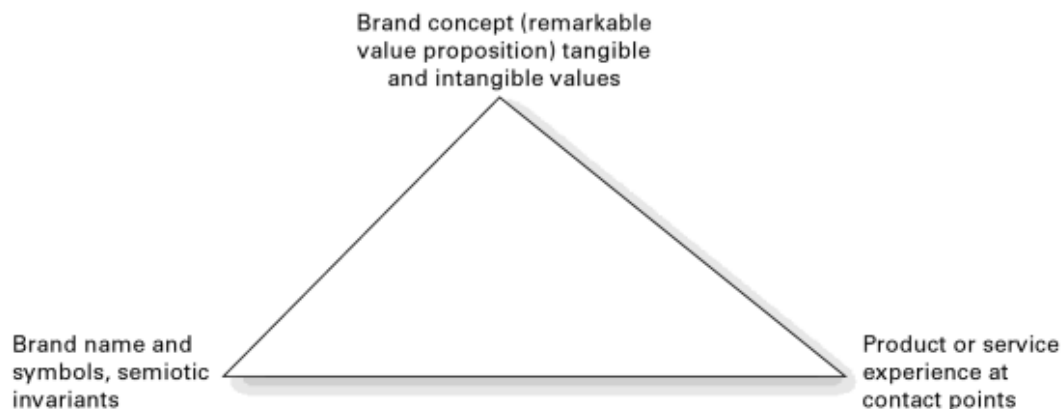


FIGURE 2: *The Brand System (Kapferer 2012, 10)*

A brand is a strategic asset that provides long-term competitive advantage for a company. Today, branding is a strategic issue in all business sectors, organizations and even persons, no longer being applied to just producers and distributors of consumer goods. In the age of Web 2.0, branding focus has shifted towards building communities around brands, the latest definitions of a brand more towards a name that is able to create a community around its values. With the many different aspects to what a brand really means, Kapferer (2012, 12) suggests that all organizations should view the brand as “a name that symbolizes a long-term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services and behaviour which make the organization, person, or product stand apart or stand out”.

There are many terms to describe brands and their strength and ability to create value for the company, and the previously defined concept of brand equity perhaps the most central of them. Brand equity relates to the actual value of a brand, in other words the profit potential that it creates for the company. (Kapferer 2012) Building a strong brand, in other words, having significant brand equity, has many benefits for a company, including more loyal customers, less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions, greater profit margins, increased marketing communications effectiveness, and opportunities for successful co-branding and brand extensions (Keller 2001). It is

widely accepted that successful branding practices should enhance the value of the offering, increase profitability and provide long-lasting competitive advantage for the company (e.g. Keller 2001, Aaker 1991, Hoeffler & Keller 2003, Kapferer 2012).

In Keller's (1993) early framework, brand equity from a customer perspective is a result of brand knowledge, which in turn, is construct of brand image and brand awareness. Another more recent and perhaps more comprehensive model for understanding the various aspects of brand equity is the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model was established by Keller in 2001. This model for building customer-based brand equity consists of four steps: 1. Creating the right brand identity, 2. Creating brand meaning, 3. Creating brand responses, and 4. Creating brand relationships. The first step involves creating *brand salience*, which in effect means establishing *brand awareness*. The second step, creating brand meaning, means establishing a *brand image*. The third step, creating brand responses, refers to how consumers think and feel about the brand, that is their brand judgments and brand feelings. The final step, creating brand relationships, means establishing *brand resonance*.

Kapferer's conceptualization of branding emphasized things such as engagement and community. These terms can be found in Keller's (2001) framework as well. The abovementioned brand resonance is an interesting concept that describes the relationship that consumers feel they share with the brand, which involves both the depth of the psychological bond as well as the level of their activities with the brand, such as purchases. Brand resonance is at the top of the so-called brand pyramid, and reaching this top essentially means achieving brand equity, of course, with all the other pyramid blocks in place. Brand resonance, or in other words, the brand relationship, in Keller's conceptualization, is made up of four categories:

1. Behavioural loyalty – purchasing the brand frequently;
2. Attitudinal attachment – viewing the brand as something special;

3. Sense of community – feeling affiliation with others that are associated with the brand; and
4. Active engagement – investing time, energy, money and other resources into the brand, further than those used during purchase or consumption.

Community and engagement are fashionable terms in today's marketing. Both can be heard frequently when discussing media and events in marketing. Keller especially emphasizes engagement as the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty. As we will come to discuss, engagement is one of the central concepts in event marketing as well as media business theory.

The benefits of strong brands can perhaps best be understood through the behaviours that they engender in the consumers. Aaker (1991) has described the chain that represents the development of a consumer's relationship with a brand. The beginning point of the relationship is when the consumer has no experience or interest in the brand. The consumer then may become aware of the brand and have some satisfying experiences with it. When the satisfaction strengthens, the consumer develops trust towards the brand. Trust in the brand then leads to loyalty, in other words making repurchases of the brand. (Tarkiainen et al. 2008) This chain can be imagined as a tunnel or pyramid, where the final result is a customer who is loyal to the brand. Brand loyalty is understood to occur when a consumer is strongly committed to a brand and considers the brand as more satisfactory than other alternatives, and this view is enforced through repeated use of the branded product or service (Holland & Baker 2001).

Brand knowledge stored in consumers' memory is considered to have a significant effect on consumers' decision-making processes. Brand knowledge helps consumers make quick and easy purchase decisions. Strong brands make the purchase process stress-free for the consumer by reducing the risk of making a poor decision (McDowell 2006). For a stress-free purchase, consumers are willing to pay premium prices (McDowell 2011). Furthermore, the more difficult the choice, the more likely it is that the consumer will resort to relying on a familiar brand (Hoeffler & Keller

2003). Relying on familiar brands for repeat purchases leads to the cultivation of habits. Habitual purchase behaviour, in turn, is considered synonymous to the concept of brand loyalty. (McDowell 2006)

According to Riezebos (2002, in Ots 2008, 2) brand strategies have two important motives: Firstly, to enhance competitive advantage through differentiation, and secondly, to add value to the product or service offering. So how do strong brands create additional value for the customer? Firstly, by reducing perceived risk by creating trust. Secondly, by animating the category, in other words bringing excitement, joy and stimulation to the consumption experience. Thirdly, other consumers are likely to also recognize a strong brand, and so using it can give the consumer using it a sense of social status and prestige associated with the brand. (Kapferer 2012)

For the company, a strong brand presents the opportunity to leverage its equity to new product and service lines in *brand extensions* (Keller 1993). The idea behind brand extensions is to benefit from the established brand's familiarity and comfort level when introducing a new product or service – reducing the consumer's perceived risk of trying that product. A special case of extension is *co-branding*, where two established brands are leveraged to a new product or service line. Both extending brands as well as co-branding have become commonly utilized in the media business. (McDowell 2006) I will discuss this in more detail in the following chapters.

### **2.2.1 Media Branding**

The importance of branding practices has been established in the media business. Media branding is vital for differentiating media companies and their offerings from competitors, maintaining continuous quality when extending product lines, and developing strong relationships with consumers (Ots 2008). As Ots and Wolff (2008, 95) state, not only do strong media brands help consumers in differentiating and choosing between media, but high consumer brand equity also creates more value for

the media firm's advertising clients. Branding is the sustainable way of creating competitive advantage in the media field, as having a strong brand name is something that cannot be copied by competitors. And differentiating from competition is the main motivation for media branding. (McDowell 2011)

Media branding is not entirely similar to conventional branding and thus conventional branding theory cannot in all aspects be applied directly to media brands. Because most media companies operate with advertiser-supported business models, the benefits of branding that apply to conventional consumer brands do not all necessarily apply to media companies. For instance, whereas much of conventional branding theory revolves around pricing, media brands in general are not particularly price-sensitive. When the only real cost for the audience is their time and attention, price may not be a point of differentiation between media brands, especially when the product is completely free for the user. (McDowell 2006)

There are differing views as to whether or not brands have a greater importance in risk reduction when it comes to media products compared to other industries: Chan-Olmsted (2006) suggests that when choices for media products are so plentiful and switching between the different options is easy, in other words risk of making the wrong choice is low, consumers need not rely on the brands they are familiar with. On the other hand, Tungate (2004) argues that the abundance of choices makes it more likely that consumers choose the media brands that they already know and trust, to make the choices less complicated. This is the view that is more along the lines of conventional branding literature – strong brands make consumers' decision-making processes easier by making them less risky, and the more difficult the choice, the more likely it is that the consumer will resort to relying on a familiar brand (Hoeffler & Keller 2003). One could argue that risk is high after all as consumers invest their time and attention into media products, and often time and money are just as valuable – or even more valuable – than money (Ots 2008).

According to Ots (2008), there are two significantly unique features in media branding compared to other consumer industries: Firstly, that media products themselves are mass-marketing tools which can be used for self-branding, whether it be building the existing brand or extending it to new products or launching new brands. Secondly, there is the fact that media companies usually target two different audiences with their branding efforts: the consumers and the advertisers. The fact that media companies operate in these so-called “dual markets” makes it tricky to apply conventional branding theory directly to media brands. Media companies must simultaneously build their brands toward consumers and sell the effects of audience brand loyalty to advertisers.

Ots (2008, 3) states that “media brands offer value propositions about what their customers can expect in terms of type of content, interactivity, and user experience”. What sounds like a customer-centric view, is in fact only half of that. A problem with branding when applied to media companies is that the customer focus in branding theory generally means the focus on consumers. For media companies, there is the other equally important target group that is the media company’s advertising customers. This means that media companies need to have two sets of brand strategies – the audience brand strategy and the business-to-business brand strategy. For instance, the previously stated notion about price not being a point of differentiation for media companies does not apply when talking about advertising customers. In the business-to-business context, branding can play a significant role in the pricing of media space and having a strong brand can indeed justify premium prices. (McDowell 2006)

A slogan that can be commonly heard in the media circles is that “the medium is the message”. As Ots and Wolff (2008) describe, the medium is not a passive vehicle for delivering advertisers’ brand messages. The context of the promotional message has an effect on how it is perceived. When an audience has a unique relationship with the personality of a certain media, effects of this relationship can “rub off” on the brand that is advertising in that medium, making the communication more effective. What this means for media buyers, is that the value of advertising to an audience is affected



by the context within which the audience is reached. The notion that an image transfer effect exists between media and advertising brand has been noted in advertising research quite early on. (Ots & Wolff 2008) In the following chapter on media engagement, I will discuss more closely what this means.

### **2.2.2 Media brand equity in the dual markets**

As noted earlier, literature on media branding has been mostly based on conventional branding literature. In recent years, many researchers have referred to the frameworks of Keller when examining media brand equity (e.g. Chan-Olmsted & Kim 2001, Chan-Olmsted 2006, McDowell 2006), such as Keller's (1993) conceptualization where brand equity is a construct of brand awareness and brand image. A strong media brand is one that has high brand equity. Brand equity is manifested both indirectly as brand image and awareness as well as directly as market behaviour, more specifically, behavioural loyalty. Brand loyalty is essentially the main outcome of brand equity. For media brands, high brand equity should manifest as loyalty in both audiences as well as advertisers. (Ots & Wolff 2008)

A concept that has traditionally served the same purpose in journalism as consumer-based brand equity in media management literature is *media channel credibility*. Both concepts are primarily used to differentiate between products and organizations (branding) and media outlets (media channel credibility). (Oyedeji 2007) Media channel credibility is a concept that according to the definition by Bucy (2003, in Oyedeji 2007) refers to the audience's perceptions of a specific news channel's believability. Oyedeji (2007) explored the relationship between media channel credibility and CBBE. In his research, he examined the relationship of four of Aaker's (1991) brand equity dimensions – perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association, and brand loyalty – with media channel credibility and found that three of the four are in fact significantly related to media channel credibility. The only dimension not significantly related was brand awareness. His research demonstrated

that credibility and CBBE are in fact related and that there is congruence between the two.

Ots and Wolff (2008) have addressed the dual nature of brand equity in the media context. They examined how a media brand's consumer brand equity translates into value for advertisers. What they found was that for advertising customers, the value of a media brand was constructed mainly from (1) the loyalty of the target audience towards the media brand, and (2) the clarity of the audience profile to media buyers. There were differing views of the importance of image transfer from media brand to advertiser brand, which varied according to editorial and consumption content. The implications of this research for media companies are that they can position their brands in the eyes of advertisers in four different ways:

1. By focusing on a superior audience profile, either the quantity of the audience or the difference of segmentation;
2. By focusing on the brand loyalty of the audiences to the media brand;
3. By focusing on the match (i.e. good fit) between media brand image and the advertised brand's image; and
4. By focusing on the responsiveness of their content to particular consumption needs and patterns. (Ots & Wolff 2008, 108)

What these findings indicate according to Ots and Wolff, is that from the perspective of the advertiser, a media brand is deemed to have high brand equity when it has a clear audience segmentation profile, shows strong emotional and behavioural attachment towards the brand in consumers, and a clear response to consumption patterns and needs. The following model demonstrates their conceptualization.

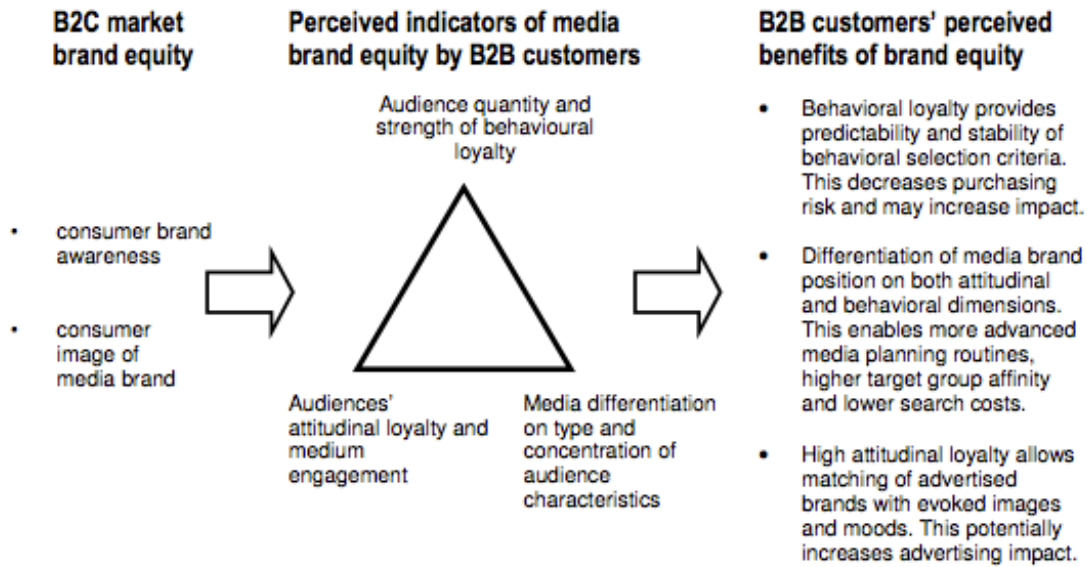


FIGURE 3: Model of Media brand equity (Ots & Wolff 2008, 107)

### 2.2.3 Media brand extensions and co-branding

Co-branding and brand extensions have been addressed by researchers in the media context. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a strong media brand presents opportunities for brand extensions and co-branding. For a media company operating in an advertiser-supported business model, having a strong brand can lead to increased revenues as advertisers aim to benefit from the media brand by creating customized campaigns around the brand and its content (Chan-Olmsted 2011). Brand extensions such as add-on products and services have emerged as an additional source of revenue and profits. Add-ons have become a strategic orientation to combat the decline in advertising sales. In this new strategic orientation, instruments that have previously served as a means for audience retention have been repositioned as an independent source of revenues and profits. (Habann et al. 2008)

Image transfer is the basic aim of all brand extensions, and can be applied also to media brand extension (Habann et al. 2008). The challenge with extending brands and co-branding is how to benefit from the existing brand without compromising its integrity. The term *fit* is used to describe the congruency or consistency of the

extended product/service and the original brand or between the co-branding brands – something that is needed to achieve the full potential benefits of extensions. Fit must be sufficient, so as not to harm the integrity of the original parent brand that already holds strong brand equity. (McDowell 2006) On the other hand, when successful, the extension can also positively affect consumer evaluations the parent brand. It has been suggested that successful brand extensions may have a positive impact on the parent brand image and loyalty. (Tarkiainen et al. 2008)

It is said that in this age of interactivity, that brands, especially e-business brands (Holland & Baker 2001), are no longer created solely by the companies, but co-created together with consumers. The Internet has given consumers more control. What's troubling for media companies is that consumers now have many more choices of what media to use. What's troubling for advertisers is that consumers now can choose whether or not they want to receive commercial content and how they want to receive it, at least to some extent. (Keller 2009) On the other hand, consumers now have the possibility to participate in the marketing process. A study by Holland and Baker (2001) suggested that active customer participation in the marketing process leads to brand loyalty, which as we know, leads to competitive advantage for the company.

Co-creation and co-branding should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. Of course, incorporating co-creation into the brand strategy means that the brand source can no longer have complete control over the brand. But co-creation also leads to more opportunities for branding through consumer experiences rather than just the product. The interactive, multichannel media environment that consumers and firms now operate in gives various touch points for the consumer to get involved and interact with the brand. Media brands now have the opportunity to move focus from mere content to holistic, all-encompassing activities for the consumers to get involved in wherever they are, simultaneously reinforcing the role and value of the brand in the consumers' lives. (Chan-Olmsted 2011) This could also provide more opportunities for community-building and active engagement, the importance of which was touched upon in the previous chapter on branding.

It has been suggested that media managers now have to adapt to an "open brand" environment. Mooney and Rollins (2008, in Chan-Olmsted 2011) claim that the key to successful branding is to undertake branding activities that enable customer participation in a way that is relevant to their lives, thereby engaging the consumers more richly, deeply and meaningfully. To build a brand that's meaningful, consumers need opportunities to co-create content and participate in communities around the brand, forming relationships with other consumers and with the company. Mooney and Rollins argue that an open brand will improve the firm's revenues by allowing it to access various audiences quickly, return on investment by making marketing activities more efficient, as well as customer relationships by turning consumers into the brand's "allies". Consumer engagement with a media brand has been shown to also improve advertising effectiveness, and this will be discussed in the following chapter.

It should be noted, that it is not just consumers co-creating the media brands, but advertisers and partners as well. This has been addressed in the context of media business models. Peters, Van Kleef, Snijders and Van Den Elst (2013) conducted case studies of companies in the media and entertainment industry to examine interrelations between their various business model elements. The results of their study suggested that key business partners are particularly important to the value proposition as they are actually co-creating the media concept. In the case studies, key partners had a central role both as content for the media concept (in these cases, formats, films, productions, and events) and as supporting mechanisms (in these cases, brand image, distribution and sales). The researchers carefully suggested a business model framework where the media is a result of co-creation by partners. Picard (2010) also states, that the range of technologies and platforms available requires that media companies view their business activities more as cooperative processes that require coordination and interdependence with external firms and customers. In his blog post, he writes, "standing isolated and alone – at an arms distance from the customer – is no longer a viable option". I would say, that neither is standing isolated from partners and advertisers an option.

Event marketing, which will be introduced in more detail in chapter 2.4, can be a way to extend a media brand to a new, live platform and allow active consumer participation and engagement with the media brand whilst making them more part of the brand community. Events can be a manifestation of co-branding when they are created in co-operation with advertisers' and partners' brands. The benefits of media engagement will be discussed in the next chapter, after which event marketing will be introduced.

### **2.3 Media engagement – and what's in it for the advertisers?**

According to Woodard (2006), in many ways the concept of 'engagement' is where that of 'brand equity' was 20 or so years ago: lacking in clarity about how it works, what effect it has, and why we need yet another marketing construct. Engagement has become a central concept in advertising and media management literature.

Media companies provide firms with the context where to advertise their products and services to audiences – a context that itself may affect consumer responses to advertising (Calder et al 2009). Media carry powerful experiences that can improve the effectiveness of advertising (Calder & Malthouse 2008). The impact of media choice on advertising effectiveness has received a lot of academic attention (Malthouse et al. 2007), and media engagement and its effects on advertising are an important topic in media organizations (Mersey et al. 2010). Many researchers have suggested that consumers are likely to be more responsive to advertising when they are highly engaged with the advertising media (e.g. Calder et al. 2009, Wang 2006, Cunningham et al. 2006). Yet surprisingly, media buyers do not necessarily always consider media engagement primarily in their media buying decisions, but traditionally rely on circulation, in other words, the number of "eyeballs", advertisement size, etc. to determine the value of the advertisement and thereby, the price they are willing to pay (Calder et al. 2009). When the media industry is fragmenting into more and more niche operators, media companies should realize and

articulate the value of engagement to media buyers. In order to do this, understanding of that engagement is crucial. Understanding the engagement and experiences they provide to audiences should enable a media company differentiate their offering from that of others and retain advertisers. (Mersey et al. 2010)

One of the problems with engagement is that there are differing views in the academic world on what the terms “involvement”, “engagement” and “experiences” actually mean or how they differ from each other. According to Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel (2009), engagement comes as a result of experiencing a media in a certain way. They define an experience (2009, 322) as “a consumer’s beliefs” about how a media “fits into his/her life”. According to them, engagement in the context of media websites is the collection of these experiences that a consumer has with a site. Mersey, Malthouse and Calder (2010) build up on this definition to encompass all media brands, defining engagement as the collective experiences that a consumer has with a media brand.

The Advertising Research Foundation (2006, in Cunningham et al. 2006, 369 and 377-378) defined engagement from the advertising firm’s point of view as “turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context”, predicting that “prospects would be turned on to a brand more strongly when advertising is enhanced by emotional engagement with the surrounding context”. However, this kind of advertiser-based definition is not sufficient for the needs of journalistic organizations and scholars, as it reduces the media brand to merely a “surrounding context” (Mersey et al. 2010). Mersey et al. list other definitions of engagement that have focused on engagement as action, such as participating and socializing, or engagement as community connection. However, defining engagement as a collection of experiences allows for all the various utilitarian, hedonic, and social-psychological motivations that contribute to engagement to be taken into account. This, according to Mersey et al., is essential due to the diverse nature of media brands.

In order for us to comprehend media engagement, we should understand the various experiences that it is made of, in other words, the role that the media plays in the consumers' lives. Experiences can be divided into utilitarian, hedonic, and social-psychological experiences. For example, media brands can provide the consumer with relevant news and other information, helping them keep up with relevant topics (utilitarian), help them relax or unwind (hedonic), make them seem interesting by giving them topics for conversation or reinforce their identities by confirming their membership of a certain community (social-psychological). (Mersey et al. 2010) This grouping of experiences seems to be quite consistent the previously described Kapferer's (2012) conceptualizations of the value of brands for consumers, introduced earlier in the branding chapter – creating trust to ease choices and reduce risk (utilitarian), bringing excitement and joy to the consumption experience (hedonic), and affirming status or identity (social-psychological).

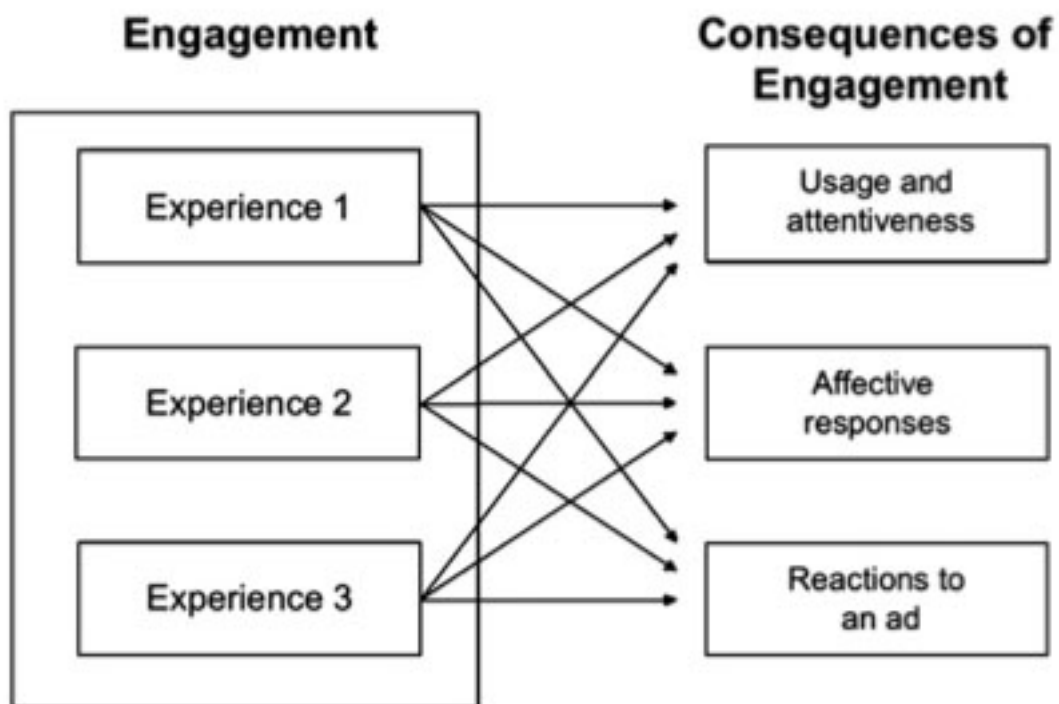


FIGURE 4: Engagement and its consequences (Calder et al. 2009, 322)

Another conceptualization used by mass communications researchers to describe the consumer motivations behind using media is the Uses and Gratifications (U&G)



framework. The most widely cited U&G typology is that by McQuail (1983, in Calder et al. 2009): According to this conceptualization, the reasons why consumers use media can be grouped into Information, Personal Identity, Integration and Social Interaction, and Entertainment. McQuail's assertion was made before the Internet, and when talking about online media, one group that should be added to form the online U&G framework is Interactivity. (Calder et al. 2009, Mersey et al. 2010)

So what is the value of this engagement for a media company's advertising customers? Many researchers have suggested that high engagement with the media context effects advertising effectiveness in that medium, both online and offline (Malthouse et al. 2007, Calder et al. 2009, Wang et al. 2006, Cunningham et al. 2006). Malthouse, Calder and Tamhane (2007) examined how readers' experiences with certain magazines affected their reactions to advertising and found that engaging experiences with a magazine correlated with more positive evaluations of advertisements in that magazine. Therefore, an ad in a magazine that absorbs readers with its stories is worth more than the same ad if it was placed in a magazine that provides lower levels of the same experience. Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel (2009) found that the similar results applied for online media – higher engagement online is also positively associated with advertising effectiveness. They also identified two kinds of engagement that are manifested both online and offline: Personal and Social-interactive engagement. Both types of engagement have a positive impact on advertising effectiveness. Social-interactive engagement is manifested more online, due to the experiences that are unique to the Internet, for example taking part in online discussions. A study by Mersey, Malthouse and Calder (2010) further justified the two types of engagement, and that both of these are associated with readership. Based on this research, they assert that media companies should focus on creating experiences that lead to engagement in order to build and retain readership. In other words, engaging experiences with media brands should lead to more loyal audiences.

Mersey et al. (2010) recommend the following strategic approach by Calder and Malthouse (2008a and b) for creating a media brand through experiences. In this model, the media organization articulates a *concept* that guides its creation of

contacts. *Contacts* are the editorial and advertising content including advertising and events about the media brand, that communicate the concept for the audience by creating *experiences*, in other words the touch points where the experiences are created. The *audience's idea of the concept*, including how they co-create the content, also affects their experiences with it.



FIGURE 5: *A process for creating experiences (Mersey et al. 2010, 53)*

In order to create and position a successful media brand managers first need to understand what kind of experiences the media organization aims to create. This understanding should focus content creation as well as allow the articulation of engagement to potential advertisers. Understanding the kind of engagement the media brand can give to its audience makes the media organization able to create such value for the audience and thereby differentiate their content from that of others. (Mersey et al. 2010) Engagement should increase the value of the media space by making advertising in that space more effective. Thereby, it is a way for media managers to differentiate their brand from those of competitors and retain advertisers. Researchers argue that highly engaged users are more likely to be exposed to advertising, and advertising in a media vehicle with engaged users should hence be more effective. Therefore, a media that has a highly engaged audience should be able to command premium prices for media space as well as have an advantage in retaining advertisers. (Malthouse et al. 2007, Calder et al. 2009, Mersey et al. 2010)

However, it must be noted that media engagement in itself may not be enough to bring the best possible results to the advertiser. Cunningham, Hall and Young (2006) conducted research on MTV Video Music Awards and the effectiveness of the ads shown during the show. They found that strong emotional engagement with the programming magnified engagement with the embedded advertisements, and this magnifying effect was particularly strong in the advertising concepts that were

already most “liked”. According to this study, weak advertising concepts will not benefit as strongly from being associated with an engaging context as do advertising concepts that are already strong on their own. To reach the best results with advertising, the advertising content itself is also of key importance. Cunningham et al. further underline the fact that media managers should adopt a customer-centric viewpoint of engagement, where the advertiser is the customer.

Engagement is unquestionably a central concept in media business literature, as it is in event marketing literature. We now move on to discuss event marketing.

## **2.4 Event marketing**

In today’s marketing environment, reaching the consumer effectively is a challenge faced by companies in various industries. Marketers are always looking for ways to reach consumers through the marketing clutter and make a lasting impression. Much focus has been put towards engaging consumers in experiences that make brands meaningful to their lives. Event marketing is an experiential promotional vehicle that has gained popularity over the past couple of decades.

One of the main problems with marketing communications that has been evident since the 1990s and is still relevant today is the communication clutter that is created due to the multitude of channels and technologies in the contemporary media environment. Reaching the consumer in this over-communicated environment is a challenging task. (Kronvall & Törnroos 1998) Furthermore, consumers are less and less responsive to traditional advertising (Schreiber & Lenson 1994). Schreiber and Lenson recognized in 1994 already that the problem with traditional advertising is that it is a one-way communication, while consumers desire connectedness and interactivity in all areas of their lives. Factors such as these have led to the rise of new marketing communications tools. Event marketing has emerged as a means to beat promotional

clutter, to get target groups involved and to establish emotional ties to those target groups (Cunningham et al. 1992).

Media is traditionally a mass marketing vehicle. The problem with traditional mass marketing vehicles is the lack of consumer engagement with them. This is a problem especially with traditional media advertising. Focus has now shifted towards other, more interactive ways of communicating brand values to audiences. (Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006) When traditional advertising is no longer considered as effective as it used to be, media selling is undoubtedly affected. It is perhaps not surprising that media companies might move to focus on selling other kinds of solutions deemed more engaging, such as events, to advertising clients.

We have discussed the problems that media companies in particular are facing today, the specific characteristics of media branding and the need to create engagement and communities around media brands in order to achieve competitive advantage. We have discussed how brand extensions and co-branding provide prospects for additional revenues and increased profits in the media field. Event marketing can be an effective way to extend the media brand to create experiences and engagement around the brand, increasing the effectiveness and value of advertising. They can be a manifestation of co-branding when they are co-created with advertisers' and partners' brands, building and strengthening the different brands simultaneously. Next, I will discuss event marketing as a marketing strategy, after which I present the research gap more closely and the research framework of event marketing in media branding. As event marketing has not been discussed widely in media business literature, the empirical part of this thesis together with the research framework will give us a deeper insight about the role of event marketing in this particular field of branding.

#### **2.4.1 Definitions and characteristics of event marketing**

Event marketing can be a confusing term, as it is used to describe various activities. Such uses include the marketing *of* events and marketing *with* events. In this thesis,

the term event marketing is used to describe marketing *with* events. Many academics view that this kind of event marketing has its roots in sponsorship. It is used to achieve an organization's objectives through event-related communications and experiences. (Sneath et al. 2005)

Despite its popularity as a marketing tool, the definitions and meanings of event marketing are not yet entirely established and universally accepted in academic literature (Väänänen 2008). Väänänen (2008) states that one of the most universal definitions of event marketing that connects several event marketing theories, is that of Otker (1988). According to Otker, event marketing consists of purposeful activities through which a firm attempts to build and strengthen its brands with self-organized events for a limited target group while utilizing various forms of marketing communication. In its pure form, event marketing makes it possible to plan and tailor the event to cater to the company's specific needs. However, as we will come to see, there are several different meanings attached to event marketing that can differ from each other quite substantially even though they may come close to this early definition by Otker. Therefore, it is good to keep in mind, that event marketing in itself is a diverse marketing tool that offers opportunities for communication impact in various forms.

Many view that event marketing, as stated, has its roots in commercial sponsorship. Commercially motivated sponsorship has existed since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the word "sponsorship" as we understand it today wasn't used until the 1930s (Cunningham et al. 1992). Now companies have for several decades already utilized event sponsorship to differentiate themselves from competitors and give some kind of personality to their brands (Schreiber & Lenson 1994). Some companies may spend tens of millions of dollars on sponsoring major televised events such as the Olympic Games or the Super Bowl (Smolianov & Aiyeku 2009). However, questions have been raised whether this is effective use of marketing dollars. Through the years sponsored events have become just as cluttered as the marketing environment in general. It is hard to differentiate a brand from others with pure sponsorship. Another problem is that with pure sponsorship, sponsoring companies are unable to make most

of the sponsorship deal. (Kronvall & Törnroos 1998, Cunningham et al. 1992, Smith 2004) Literature suggests that in order to be effective, event sponsorship must be supported with other forms of promotion. Advertising is often linked with major event sponsorships – it is common for sponsoring companies to spend more tens of millions of dollars on television advertising during the course of the major sponsored event. (Smolianov & Aiyeku 2009) However, many other promotional tools may also be integrated around an event. Event marketing is considered a holistic marketing method that can offer the sponsoring company the most value for money from a sponsorship by allowing the company to leverage the sponsorship deal with other promotional efforts to create competitive advantage. (Kronvall & Törnroos 1998, Cunningham et al. 1992, Smith 2004) Event marketing as a marketing tool has become widespread since the 1980s (Taylor & Cunningham 1999).

Event marketing is a form of marketing communications that goes further than sponsorship – it is an extension of it (Kronvall & Törnroos 1998, Taylor & Cunningham 1999). Event marketing is defined by Kronvall and Törnroos (1998, 2) as “the use of unique sponsored activities or events in specific places and at a certain point in time for reaching corporate marketing and communication objectives”. Another definition linking event marketing and sponsorship is that of Taylor and Cunningham (1999, 425), according to which event marketing is “the integration of an event sponsorship with a mix of marketing activities around the event theme”. Although the terms event marketing and sponsorship have sometimes been used interchangeably in marketing and sponsorship literature, a clear distinction should be made between the two. Event sponsorship, and sports event sponsorship in particular, has received a significant amount of academic attention, however, on the specific area of event marketing there is less existing research available. (Wood 2009)

Event marketing has specific characteristics that distinguish it from sponsoring and other forms of marketing communications. Event marketing makes it possible to use multiple communication channels, which ideally should help overcome the problems of over-communication. Sponsorship deals often form the basis for event marketing, after which several promotional activities are designed around the event theme.

(Kronvall & Törnroos 1998) Events are selected by their potential to reach target markets and accomplish objectives in the most efficient way compared to alternative investments. Various marketing efforts can be integrated around events, for example product alterations, price discounts or specials, distribution channel alterations, and promotional efforts such as event displays. The event provides an integrating force for all the marketing mix elements designed around it. This is what makes event marketing particularly effective as a marketing communications tool. (Taylor & Cunningham 1999, Cunningham et al. 1992)

Common in much of event marketing literature is that the perspective is that of a company that integrates its marketing communications strategy around an event that is externally organized. While many researchers define event marketing through sponsorship – as if dependant on sponsorship deals to even exist – Wood (2009) argues, that in order to develop event marketing theory specifically, we need to recognize that not all event marketing is sponsorship-related. She suggests that we should limit examination to those events that are *created* primarily for marketing purposes, not *used* for marketing purposes (through for example, sponsorship) later when the event already exists for other purposes. These kinds of “marketing events” are organized by the company to promote its brands. Such marketing events may include for example conferences, product launches or sampling events, exhibitions and trade shows, and even events such as music festivals that act as a product on their own to carry the brand values. (Wood 2009) The term sponsor-based event marketing is sometimes used in literature to describe event marketing that is based on a sponsorship deal, to distinguish it from self-organized marketing events.

Perhaps the most strongly distinguishing characteristic of event marketing in general – both sponsor-based and self-organized – compared to other marketing communication strategies, is that it is an *experiential* marketing method that allows consumers to experience and personally interact with brands face-to-face (Wood 2009, Sneath et al. 2005). The focus in marketing communications in the twenty-first century has been on the emotionally acting consumer, which has contributed to the growth of these kinds of emotional and creative marketing communications tools

(Martensen et al. 2007). Experiential marketing as a concept is not particularly new anymore, but it is still very relevant in marketing today. Schmitt presented a comprehensive guide to experiential marketing already in 1999. According to Schmitt (1999), the key difference between experiential and “traditional” marketing is that whereas traditional marketing regards consumers as rational decision-makers who are mostly interested in products’ functional attributes and benefits, experiential marketing views them as both rational and emotional human beings who want to achieve pleasurable experiences. Thus, experiential marketing focuses on customer experiences, treating consumption as a holistic experience and recognizing consumers as rational and emotional beings, who often pursue fantasies, feelings and fun with their consumption experiences. The methodologies of experiential marketing are often eclectic, and organizations that practice experiential marketing usually place a high emphasis on creativity and innovation. An experience-oriented company sees creativity and innovativeness as its most important intellectual capital. (Schmitt 1999)

Many factors justify the current focus on experiential marketing methods. Few would argue against the fact that traditional media have become overused in advertising, and companies need to do something different in order to stand out. With so many functionally undifferentiated brands competing for market share, there is a need to build emotional attachment between brands and consumers. (Wood 2009) Experiential marketing has been recognized by several researchers as a means to position a brand based on its emotional benefits rather than just its functional benefits (Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006), giving consumers what they desire: individualism, novelty and added value (Wood 2009).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the importance of experiences for media branding. In light of the existing event marketing literature, it seems safe to say that experiences are the key to achieving desired results in any event marketing endeavour. The experiential nature of event marketing, therefore, should encompass all its definitions. Event marketing comes in many different forms and structures in organization of the events, and I believe that we should not get too caught up in who actually organizes the event. Most often, we can look at event marketing as a process of co-creation



between different entities, whether they are media, event organizers or sponsoring companies. In this research, the distinction between sponsorship-based and self-organized event marketing is somewhat irrelevant. Since various brands are involved in the event marketing campaign, the level of “self-organization” varies between the different brands. Nevertheless, they are all integrating their brand communications around the event in question. This co-creation process has implications for all the brands involved, as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 2.5 where the research framework is presented.

The final definition and perhaps the most comprehensive one that I will offer here is that of Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006, 314). They define event marketing as “the interactive communication of brand values by staging marketing events as three-dimensional brand-related hyper-realities in which consumers are actively involved on a behavioural level and which would result in their emotional attachment to the brand”. They present four constitutive features of event marketing to differentiate it from the multitude of activities previously associated with the term, including sponsorship. The constitutive features of event marketing are (Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006, 316):

1. Experience orientation: Personal lived experiences are stronger than traditional one-way media experiences. Consumers are encouraged to become active participants in experiencing the brand reality instead of passive recipients. As a result of these experiences, the consumer’s subjective quality of life is improved.
2. Self-initiation: Event marketing aims to influence consumer’s emotions by staging the kind of events that consumers want to take part in. Through these self-initiated events, the marketer can control the sensory experiences that the consumer associates with the brand.
3. Interactivity: Events are a platform for interactive dialogue between consumers and the brand.

4. Dramaturgy: A unique and creative dramaturgy is required at the event in order to affect the consumers on an emotional level. The brand image must be brought to life in a way that captures the imagination of the participants and thereby lets them experience the lived brand reality. The more the event differs from the consumer's everyday life, the higher the degree of activation.

An interesting feature with marketing events highlighted by Whelan and Wohlfeil, is that consumers voluntarily take part in them, even though the events specifically contain the brand messages that consumers usually try to avoid in traditional media. By providing the platform where consumers can satisfy their experiential needs, brands can form relationships with consumers and these relationships, in turn, drive the brand's value.

In summary, event marketing is a method of experiential marketing that treats rationally and emotionally motivated consumption as a holistic experience (Schmitt 1999). By combining various promotional activities designed to communicate the brand values to attendees and enhance the value of the consumption experience, event marketing creates opportunities for engaging consumers with the company, its brands, and the community (Close et al. 2006). Events make attendees more receptive to the marketing communications and images associated with the event by creating a social setting and raising the attendees' involvement level (Pope & Voges 1999 in Close et al. 2006). Event marketing can provide such benefits regardless of whether the event is organized by the company itself or sponsored by it (Sneath et al. 2005).

#### **2.4.2 Events as part of integrated marketing communications**

Many researchers have noted, that in order for events to be successful in reaching their goals, they should not be thought of as a stand-alone marketing tool, but rather as a part of integrated marketing communications. Events should reach optimal brand effects when integrated across various forms of communication. (e.g. Gupta 2003, Väänänen 2008) Event marketing enables the use of various elements of the marketing communications mix simultaneously both inside and outside the event,

strengthening the effect of each element and at its best, reaching consumers on a deeply emotional level. (Väänänen 2008)

Integrated marketing communications is an approach that aims to integrate and coordinate multiple marketing communication tools, target audiences, and stages (Deighton 1999). In the past, marketing has been largely based on mass-media advertising, and to some extent, it still is. Mass-marketing strategies rely on delivering a single message to an undifferentiated audience through mass media. Due to technological developments, marketers today have access to increasingly sophisticated information about their customers, target markets and buying habits. Marketers have better opportunities than ever to separate good customers and prospects from less important ones. The focus has shifted from mass advertising to more individualized and targeted communication. Now that advertisers are better able to identify various target groups, customers and purchases, it is possible to send customized messages to selected groups or consumers rather than sending a single message to the masses. As a result, the demand for mass media advertising has seen a decline. (Schulz 1999)

### **2.4.3 Event marketing as a branding tool**

According to Kotler and Keller (2006, in Siegert 2008), the usual marketing communication mix concerning brand equity consists of six main methods of communication: advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, and personal selling. Each main method may include various different instruments. The combination of these is the brand communication mix, and all the various instruments within it are aimed at changing the consumer's knowledge about the brand or changing or enforcing the consumer's emotional relationship with it. The brand communication mix can include different combinations of instruments with each instrument having different levels of importance. (Siegert 2008) Events have established a position as key part of the contemporary brand communication mix (Close et al. 2006).

Just like any purposeful marketing endeavour, for event marketing to be effective it must work as a strategic tool against clearly defined goals. Event marketing programs may have various goals, ranging from short term goals such as sales, launching a new product, or expanding to a new market, to long term goals such as changing consumers' attitudes and beliefs. (Schreiber & Lenson 1994, Wood 2009) The most common goals for event marketing programs involve sales, awareness, and image enhancement (Sneath et al. 2005, Close et al. 2006, Gupta 2003). As we have established previously, image and awareness are the main components of brand equity, so image and awareness goals for event marketing campaigns are ultimately aimed at building brand equity. A review of literature shows that event marketing is considered particularly effective for achieving branding goals both corporate and product – whether it be enhancing corporate identity, brand awareness, equity, or image (Gwinner 1997, Gwinner & Eaton 1999, Smith 2004, Sneath et al. 2005, Dregner et al. 2008). Event marketing is also regarded as an effective tool for reinforcing relationships with consumers and other business organizations as well as the surrounding community (Sneath et al. 2005).

The particular advantage of event marketing is that it offers the possibility for consumer participation, interaction and experiences with brands, heightening the consumers' susceptibility to marketing messages. Furthermore, it is assumed that event marketing is particularly effective when participants are personally involved with the event, brand, or area of the event. (Sneath et al. 2005, Close et al. 2006, Martensen et al. 2007, Dregner et al. 2008) The event itself creates a social setting and raises the attendees' involvement level, making them more responsive to marketing communications (Close et al. 2006).

A great deal of the knowledge on the brand effects of event marketing is essentially based on event sponsorship literature. Developing and enhancing the brand image is a basic reason for sponsoring events (Smolianov & Aiyeku 2009). Image transfer is a concept that has been dealt with widely in event sponsorship and sponsor-based event

marketing literature. It is an important objective of sponsorship and event marketing programs when the event is externally organized. What image transfer essentially means is that the positive associations about the event in the consumer's mind are transferred to the sponsoring brand, resulting in a positive consumer response to the brand. (Meenaghan 2001)

The concept of brand personality has also been useful in event marketing research when examining image transfer. Brand personality is understood as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand and associations that relate to the user and usage situations of that brand. It is a way for marketers to differentiate their brand based on non-product related attributes, because it involves the consumer's expectations about the kind of *person* who would use the particular brand. (Gwinner & Eaton 1999)

Image transfer is a concept relevant to far more than just sponsorship and event marketing concepts. According to Keller (1993), brand associations in the consumer's memory may be affected by other information that is not directly related to the product or service in question. A brand may become linked with associations related to another entity, resulting in secondary associations for the brand. Such other entity may be for example an event or a celebrity. The secondary associations produced may lead to an image transfer from the separate entity to the brand. Image transfer from a person or event is especially likely when the primary brand associations are related to brand personality, in other words, user and usage situation attributes. Benefiting from an existing brand with significant brand equity through image transfer is the basic principle behind extending brands and co-branding. (Keller 1993) A similar concept is that of meaning transfer, which has been introduced by McCracken (1989) in his theory of celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement is a method that has been widely used in marketing. According to McCracken, meanings associated with a celebrity endorser may be transferred to a brand when paired together in advertising. The meanings essentially mean the personality traits associated with the endorser, which then become linked to the brand in consumers' minds.

Some moderating factors have been recognized to affect the strength of the image transfer. When discussing media brand extensions, I introduced the term *fit* that researchers consider a moderating factor in the image transfer process in brand extensions. Fit or congruence between event and brand has been recognized as a moderating factor also in the image transfer process in event marketing (Gwinner 1997, Gwinner & Eaton 1999, Gwinner et al. 2009, Smith 2004). A good fit between brand and event is central for the total effect of event marketing when a brand is associated with an event. It has been recognized that a high fit between event and brand creates an opportunity for a value transfer from event to brand. A value transfer from event to brand is essentially what event marketing is about. (Martensen et al. 2007) Therefore, when associating a brand with an existing event, for example in sponsor-based event marketing, the brand-event personality fit is the primary consideration when choosing which events to build event marketing campaigns around. (Gupta 2003) In event sponsorship contexts, other moderating factors for image transfer, such as exclusivity of the sponsorship and sponsorship status, have been recognized (Gwinner 1997, Gwinner & Eaton 1999, Smith 2004, Cornwell et al. 2006, Martensen et al. 2007). However, it's questionable whether these would apply to event marketing that goes beyond sponsorship.

Many researchers have discussed the importance of involvement, active participation, and interaction in event marketing. Involvement with the event, associated brands or area of the event has been shown to lead to more positive consumer attitudes (Martensen et al. 2007, Close et al. 2006). Consumers' active participation in the event has been shown to enhance brand image and strengthen the communication process (Dregner et al. 2008, Lacey et al. 2007). Interaction with brands and products at events has been shown to have positive effects on attitudes, awareness and behaviour (Sneath et al. 2005). In other words, involvement, participation and interaction at events should all lead to better branding outcomes.

Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006) have emphasized the importance of active, voluntary participation and interactivity in event experiences in brand marketing. They state that interactivity makes communication more valuable and leads to brand relationships that increase brand value. Events are a way to increase interactivity between the brand and highly targeted consumers, pulling consumers to the brand message by satisfying their needs for experiences. In contrast to traditional one-way advertising, events make consumers part of the brand's hyper-reality, letting them actively experience the brand values. It is ironic that consumers willingly participate in these branded hyper-realities when in general they tend to try to avoid brand messages in traditional communication channels. Interaction and experiences at events sustain brand relationships, where brand representatives and consumers co-produce added value. Understanding the brand values inside the organization is vital for this process to take place successfully. Through the event, the brand message is transformed into real-lived, multi-sensual brand experiences and further emotional attachment to the brand. (Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006)

One aspect that has received surprisingly little attention in event marketing research is the potential of events as contexts for community building. McAlexander, Schoeten and Koenig (2002) used ethnography to examine brand communities in so-called *brandfests* – events that revolved around a certain brand usage, where members of that brand community gather – in this case, Jeep users. The people, or parties of people, who come to these events may have no other connection to each other than a shared interest in a brand and its consumption. The researchers found that the brandfests give these consumers an opportunity for context-rich interaction and sharing meaningful consumption experiences. This, in turn, enhances the consumers' appreciation for the product, the brand as well as the facilitating marketers. As McAlexander et al. (2002, 44) elaborate, at live events, “virtual ties become real ties. Weak ties become stronger. Strong ties develop additional points of attachment.” The research demonstrated that participating in the brandfest led to stronger integration in a brand community. The term IBC, integration in brand community, carries an emotional and behavioural attachment to a brand and as such it is somewhat similar to the concept of brand loyalty. Yet, it is more comprehensive as it is based on the consumers' “total-life experience with a brand”. The research by McAlexander et al.

suggests that such relationship-building efforts by a brand can have long-term impact. By providing contexts for relationships to develop, marketers can cultivate communities, enhancing IBC and brand loyalty, resulting in differentiation and competitive advantage. Events can have an importance in building a brand community by serving as a context for such relationships to develop.

## **2.5 Research framework**

As the demand for mass media advertising is on the decline, there is a need for media companies with advertiser-supported business models to develop more sophisticated, integrated and customizable offerings to their advertising clients – solutions that can effectively reach certain target groups with customized brand messages. Moreover, as the media industry is fragmented into more and more niche media, smaller media companies especially must offer advertising customers other kinds of value than mere reach. Earlier on, we discussed how media companies are differentiating by offering innovative advertising solutions to fight media commoditization. The need for integrated marketing solutions is recognized in the field of media selling.

The following table summarizes the central theories that help to demonstrate the theoretical gap this research aims to fill. Engagement with advertising media and the effects of this engagement on advertising effectiveness has been studied in online, print and TV broadcasting media contexts. On the other hand, event marketing and sponsorship research has addressed the effectiveness of marketing activities in event contexts. Event marketing has mainly been studied from the viewpoint of companies conducting event marketing strategies through sponsoring events. Media has played a very small part, if any, in event marketing literature and even less attention has been paid towards media companies being active in staging events for consumers. Consequently, no comprehensive theoretical knowledge exists of the role that event marketing plays in media branding. How media companies, and in particular niche media companies, can benefit from the branding impacts of event marketing and selling these impacts to advertising clients is a subject unexplored. The reason why



this is of specific interest is that media companies operate in dual markets where their branding strategies must be projected towards both audiences and advertisers and the traditional ways of selling media space with ratings are not necessarily applicable for niche media companies. What makes it even more interesting is that event marketing strategies by media companies may have brand-building goals for both the media brand itself as well as its advertising brands, in which case both goals have to be taken into account by the media company. Image transfer is a central branding effect that has been addressed in sponsorship, media and brand extension literature. This study carefully explores whether the concept of image transfer could be extended to media advertising in event marketing contexts and if so, on which levels does image transfer take place and how it contributes to building a stronger media brand. Media engagement in general has been examined with various quantitative studies of consumers but qualitative research on the perceptions of media managers in this subject is scarce. The management of niche media in particular is quite unexplored as a subject. I am unaware of any other research that would address niche radio broadcasting media operating in event marketing and the meaning of events in their media branding. In general, as media advertising is becoming more diverse, there is a need to bring together the scattered literature on event marketing, media branding and media engagement. This study will form the basis for future empirical validation of the proposed final model of media branding with event marketing.

Title	Author (Year)	Times cited	Main theories & concepts	Research problem	Methodology & sample	Findings
An Experimental Study of the Relationship between Online Engagement and Advertising Effectiveness	Calder, Malthouse, Schaedel (2009)	126	Online advertising; Engagement; Consumer behaviour; Context effects; Online media; Advertising effectiveness	Does engagement with the surrounding online media context increase advertising effectiveness?	Quantitative survey of 11541 respondents from 11 websites	Two types of engagement were identified: personal and social-interactive engagement. Both can positively affect advertising effectiveness
The Advertising Magnifier Effect: An MTV Study	Cunningham, Hall, Young (2006)	10	Engagement; TV programming; TV advertising; Advertising effectiveness	How does engagement with TV programming affect the performance of embedded advertising?	Online survey with visual stimuli with a sample of 640 respondents, 13-24 year olds who regularly watch MTV	TV programming has a magnifying effect on some advertising metrics, but not all. Strongest ads gain greater benefits from the magnifier effect than weaker ads. The research highlights the importance of creative execution of advertising

Building brand image through event sponsorship: The role of image transfer	Gwinner, Eaton (1999)	655	Brand image; Customer-based brand equity; Event Sponsorship; Event marketing	Will an image transfer occur from sports event to sponsoring brand when linked through sponsorship? Will functional and/or image-based similarity between brand and event strengthen the image transfer?	Quantitative survey of 360 undergraduate students	Image transfer (like that of celebrity endorsement) may occur in an event sponsorship context. The level of similarity between the event and brand image is a moderating factor in the transfer
The Effects of Media Context Experiences on Advertising Effectiveness	Malthouse, Calder, Tamhane (2007)	45	Print advertising; Engagement; Consumer behaviour; Context effects; Advertising effectiveness	How does the qualitative experience of a print media affect advertising effectiveness in that media?	100 qualitative interviews and 11494 quantitative surveys to readers, sample of 19004 respondents. Interviews & surveys based on a sample of 100 most read magazines. Quasi-experiment to test reader experiences with magazines & reactions to ads	Engagement with a magazine is formed of a set of multidimensional media context experiences. Engagement with the media can affect advertising effectiveness
Application of a Model for the Effectiveness of Event Marketing	Martensen, Grønholdt, Bendtsen, Jensen (2007)	70	Event marketing; Sponsorship; Advertising effectiveness; Consumer behaviour; Branding	What are the factors affecting the strength of a value transfer from event to brand in event marketing? How does the event affect participants' brand attitudes and buying intentions?	Quantitative survey among golfers & participants at a golf tournament, pre-measurement sample of 156 respondents and post-measurement sample of 162 respondents	Involvement and a good fit between event and brand are moderating factors in the effectiveness of advertising and the value transfer from event to brand in event marketing
Building Brand Community	McAlexander, Schoeten, Koenig (2002)	1776	Brand community; Brand loyalty; Brandfests; Ethnography	How do consumers' perceived relationships with their vehicles, the brand, the company, and other owners affect integration in the Jeep brand community? How does participation in a brandfest affect overall IBC?	Ethnography at Jeep's brand events and testing key findings with quantitative questionnaire data from 453 pre-event questionnaires and 259 post-event questionnaires of event attendees	Brand communities can be strengthened by the shared experiences in brandfests. This should lead to stronger integration in brand community (IBC) – a conceptualization of brand loyalty
Media Consumer Brand Equity: Implications for Advertising Media Planning	Ots, Wolff (2008)	12	Media consumer brand equity; Media branding; Brand equity	How do media buyers evaluate a media's consumer brand equity? What do media buyers perceive to be the benefits of strong media brands?	Qualitative interviews with 6 senior experts of 4 major media buying agencies	A clear audience segmentation profile, being able to show strong emotional & behavioural attachment in consumers and a clear response to consumption patterns and needs indicate media consumer brand equity to media buyers.

						Communicating these can lead to stronger advertiser brand equity
Magazine Online Brand Extensions: Do They Really Affect Brand Loyalty?	Tarkiainen, Ellonen, Kuivalainen, Horppu, Wolff (2008)	12	Brand extensions; Brand loyalty; Online media; Print media	How do brand extensions affect brand loyalty? What effects do customers' experiences with magazine websites have on loyalty?	Quantitative survey, sample of 807 respondents – readers of 3 different magazines	Online brand extensions may strengthen brand loyalty, but the effects may vary between different media, audiences and online strategies
Advertising Engagement: A Driver of Message Involvement on Message Effects	Wang (2006)	91	Media engagement; Advertising effectiveness; Online media	Does higher engagement from contextual relevance increase advertising effectiveness?	One way experimental design manipulating two levels of engagement, sample of 239 undergraduate students	Engagement increases message involvement and advertising effectiveness
Communicating brands through engagement with 'lived' experiences	Whelan, Wohlfeil (2006)	65	Event marketing; Engagement; Branding	What are the benefits of event marketing in differentiating a brand and enhancing consumer-brand relationships?	Qualitative, participatory case study at a university event in Germany	Events can facilitate dialogue and interaction between highly targeted participants, and thus lead to engagement. In events, the brand message becomes a "real-lived multisensory brand experience", which can lead to higher emotional attachment to the brand

The following graph presents the research framework based on the literature review presented and brings together many of the scattered theories related to media branding, media engagement and event marketing. The framework will be used as a base for comparison when analyzing the results of the empirical data. The findings from the empirical research will be compared with the research framework to find out how the findings relate to the existing theory. The framework together with the empirical findings will then result in the final model presenting how event marketing contributes to media branding and media engagement, and how it relates to the media company's advertising customer brand.

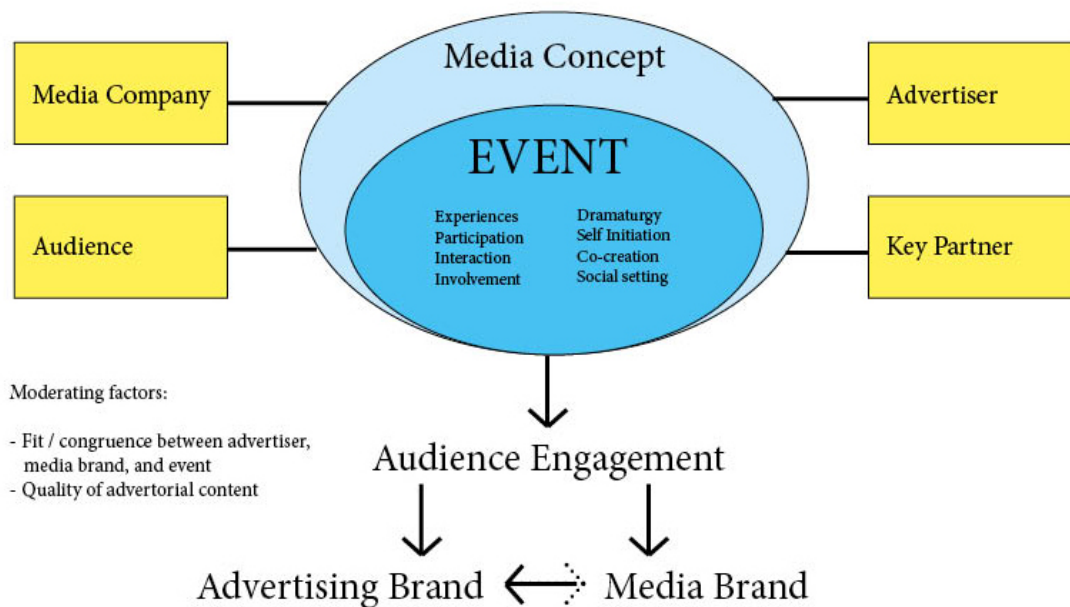


FIGURE 6: Research Framework

Media companies organize events as part of their overall media concept, as an extension of their existing brand. Creation of these events is a process of co-creation between media brand, key partners and advertisers and the audiences taking part in these events. As Peters et al. (2013) suggested a media concept is co-created together with partners. This is manifested in the case event series, which is a cooperative endeavour between various business partners and the media company. Audience participation in the events is an obvious prerequisite for the success of an audience event and hence, audiences are part of the co-creation process in the research framework.

Events are considered a promising tool for branding when they allow active participation of consumers in the brand's hyper-reality and incorporate features such as experience-orientation, interactivity, self-initiation, and dramaturgy (Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006) and serve as a social setting for relationships to develop, in other words, for the brand community to cultivate (McAlexander et al. 2002). Consumer involvement, participation and interaction at events have been suggested to lead to better branding outcomes by several researchers (e.g. Close et al. 2006, Sneath et al. 2005). Furthermore, in today's open brand environment, for successful branding to

take place especially in the media context, consumers need to be given opportunities to co-create content (Mooney & Rollins 2008). The result of a successful event and the collective event experiences should be audience engagement.

Audience engagement with a certain media has been shown to positively affect advertising effectiveness in that media (Malthouse et al. 2007, Calder et al. 2009, Mersey et al. 2010). Successful event marketing, in turn, has been shown to lead to favourable brand effects such as a stronger attachment to the brand in consumers (e.g. Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006). Therefore, in this framework, engagement of the audience positively affects, firstly, the sponsoring brand's advertising effectiveness in the event and secondly, the media brand's own consumer-based brand equity. The strengthening of the media brand in the minds of audiences, in turn, affects the overall advertising effectiveness in that media. After all, a media with highly engaged readers should be able to provide more value for advertisers, justifying premium ad prices since advertising in that media is deemed more effective than in competing media (e.g. Calder et al. 2009, Wang 2006, Cunningham et al. 2006). Ultimately, this should lead to more profitable advertiser relationships for the media company.

This way ideally, the event should result in positive brand effects for both the media brand as well as the sponsoring advertiser's brand. The positive brand effects resulting from engagement have been suggested in both sponsor-based event marketing literature as well as media advertising literature. The engaging experiences that audiences experience at events should therefore lead to positive brand associations for all the brands involved. Furthermore, a sponsoring brand may benefit from an image transfer from the event and/or the media brand organizing the event.

The framework represents the brand effects for the media brand and the advertiser's brand. Since various other partners may be involved in the event in various roles, these partners too may have their own branding goals and they may experience brand effects from the events. However, in order for this graph to remain a simple representation, I am not including the various other partner's brand effects in the

graph since the focus is on the media company and how it builds its brand towards audiences and advertising customers. Yet it can be noted that various partners involved in the event may experience brand effects from the event, including image transfer from the event and the other brands involved.

The possibility of image transfer has been discussed both in the context of sponsor-based event marketing as well as media advertising. Image transfer has been suggested to take place between advertiser and media brand in traditional media advertising contexts (e.g. Ots & Wolff 2008), between event and sponsoring brand in event marketing and sponsoring contexts (e.g. Gwinner 1997) and in brand extension and co-branding contexts in general (Keller 1993). Image transfer is the aim of brand extensions, and when successful, the extension can positively affect the parent brand image and loyalty (Tarkiainen et al. 2008).

Therefore, in light of theory I assume that image transfer may happen on two levels in this graph, firstly, from the event to both the media brand and the sponsoring advertiser brand and secondly, from the media brand to the advertiser brand. In the literature review for this thesis, no research has been found addressing whether an image transfer may occur from advertising brand to media brand. This is something that the empirical research in this thesis touches upon, and as such, the possibility of image transfer in this direction is included in the graph.

As we have discussed, fit or congruence between sponsoring brand and event has been suggested as a moderating factor in the image transfer from event to sponsoring brand (e.g. Martensen et al. 2007). It is also considered a moderating factor in the success of brand extensions and co-branding (Keller 1993). Therefore, in this framework, fit is a moderating factor between the image transfer from event to sponsoring advertiser brand, from event to media brand, and from media brand to advertiser brand.

According to the study by Cunningham et al. (2006), weak advertising concepts will not benefit as strongly from being associated with an engaging context as do advertising concepts that are already strong on their own. Therefore, the quality of advertorial content has been added as a moderating factor in the brand effects between the event, media brand and advertising brand.

This study examines media managers' perceptions of the abovementioned themes and effect relationships, and cannot provide answers to questions such as whether an image transfer has actually taken place in the events. Since the research questions deal with how event marketing as a strategy helps to strengthen the media brand and build competitive advantage, these are the problems that we seek to answer with the empirical data. It is the managers' views and the media company's strategy that are in the focus of examination.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research methodology

Qualitative case study research was used to examine the research problems. Qualitative research is a useful approach for gaining understanding about people, their thoughts, feelings, understandings and motivations. Qualitative research typically involves interviewing people in order to explore and understand issues that lie beneath the surface. It involves selecting a research sample that does not necessarily represent the whole population, but most importantly enables the researcher to understand the research phenomenon and provide useful insights. Interviews with this sample consist of open ended questions and techniques that allow the interviewees to discuss matters in a way that is meaningful to themselves and to set the agenda themselves while allowing the researcher to observe the interviewee as a whole and gain a far better understanding than what would be gained with a mere questionnaire. Based on the interview data as well as understanding of the industry, market and any other factors, the researcher forms interpretations of what this data means for the subject studied. The value of qualitative research is in this interpretation. (Marks 2000)

The nature of qualitative research can be summed up in four components: Firstly, it explores qualitative issues. Qualitative research aims to understand peoples' motivations, needs and wants. It is interested in finding out *why* people think, feel and do as they do. Secondly, it uses concepts, philosophies and theories as the basis for enquiry. Data is interpreted against a conceptual framework in order to gain meaningful findings. Thirdly, qualitative research uses non-statistical, qualitative methods of enquiry. Finally, the findings are presented in a non-statistical, discursive description. The analysis and interpretation that lead to these findings are ongoing throughout the project. (Imms 2000)



One form of qualitative research methodology is case study methodology, which is useful when the research aims at understanding one group of people, organization, problem, phenomenon or situation in great depth. In case study methodology, a particular case is selected for study because it is particularly interesting given the purpose of the research. The case selected should be rich in information about the particular research problem. The result of qualitative case study methodology is an individualized, rich description of the studied case. (Patton 1980) Dul and Hak (2008, 24) list three conditions under which case study research is particularly useful:

- a.) when the topic is broad and very complex,
- b.) when there is little existing theory available, and
- c.) when the “context” is very important.

After highlighting the background of this research in chapter 1.1, the abovementioned criteria justify the use of case study methodology in this thesis. Case study methodology was used to answer the research questions in one particular case – an event series organized by a Finnish media company. Case study methodology was selected due to the complexity and exploratory nature of the research problem and its context.

The case company is a Finnish media company and design agency that practices event marketing. The core business of this media company is radio broadcasting, but the company operates on multiple platforms both online and offline. The actual case is a series of events organized by the media company in cooperation with its advertising client and other partnering companies in the summer of 2014. The case was selected as it presents a unique, “bounded system” that is limited in time and space and because it provides a concrete example of the research phenomenon that is particularly successful from a managerial point of view. This is an intensive, or single-case study research. Intensive case study draws from the qualitative and ethnographic research traditions. It aims at understanding a unique case from the inside by understanding the perspectives of the people involved and thereby providing a thick, holistic description of that single case. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

Case study research aims at producing detailed and holistic knowledge from a variety of empirical sources that are rich in context. Case study as a methodology avoids overly simplistic research designs. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) Validity and credibility of this research was increased with data triangulation, which means that multiple methods of data collection were used. Triangulation helps to overcome the problems of relying too much on a single data source or method (Patton 1980, 193). The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews with managers of the media company and its partners (primary data), as well as participant observation at the actual events and document analysis of various marketing materials and the company's different media channels (secondary data).

The case study research process is a continuous interplay of theory and empirical data in order to form and understanding of how the unique, specific case works related to theory. The goal is not to produce knowledge that can be generalized to other contexts: When it comes to intensive case study research, exceptionality of the selected case is not considered a problem, but instead it is seen as a key issue of research interest. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

The research design and the sample selection process will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.2.

### **3.1.1 Research paradigm**

The research paradigm of this thesis is the critical realist paradigm. Critical realism belongs to the post-positivist philosophical positions. In the post-positivist view, the idea of a single, objective reality is questioned – knowledge cannot be separated from the knower. Critical realists recognize that while there is an observable reality that is independent of human consciousness, any knowledge we have about this world is always socially constructed. And although we cannot perfectly understand reality, we as researchers can make sense of it with rigorous data collection. Critical realism is concerned with identifying the structures of the world. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

Critical realism is quite typical to marketing research where organizations, their managers and processes are studied. Critical realism is the most often discussed form of critical research. Critical research in general has been widely used in the analysis of media. In critical research, the theoretical framework and empirical data are closely intertwined. The data-gathering process and data analysis often progress side to side. Theoretical viewpoints guide the analysis closely and are often merged in the analysis. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

### **3.2 Research design**

Qualitative case study methodology was used for the empiric part of the study, as justified in Chapter 3.1. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews with managers of the case companies. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method because it allows for flexible and deep approach to discussing the research problem, and makes it possible to enter the interviewee's perspective of things. Furthermore, secondary research data was gathered by participant observation at a marketing event and document analysis of marketing materials and the content in the company's various media channels, both in the phase prior to the interviews as pre-research in order to formulate the relevant questions but also to complement the analysis. The secondary data resulting from attending one of the events of the case event series and examining marketing materials were field notes – which were written after the event due to the nature of the event – and researcher's notes on photo and video materials from all the case events in the company's social media, a series of short documentaries about the case company, magazine and web articles about the company, and the company website and the marketing materials available to the public. This kind of data triangulation by including several sources of data strengthens the study design (Patton 1980, 187). Patton (1980, 244) states, that multiple sources of data used together can provide a comprehensive perspective of the research phenomenon. Using a combination of observation, interviews and documents, the researcher can cross check and validate findings, overcoming weaknesses of a single data collection method.

The precise organization of fieldwork is to a large extent reliant on the setting and the researcher's own work habits and style, and there are various ways of proceeding with field notes (Patton 1980). Since the event attended was a party where the researcher was one of the participants, writing notes at the event itself would have isolated the researcher from the context and inhibited full participation in the event. This is why the field notes were written after attending. Attending the event was the very first phase of familiarizing with the case, and a holistic view of the event through participation was deemed necessary at that point. There are however, downsides to this kind of approach: detailed information on the interactions and discussions between attendants were lost, as it is extremely difficult to remember quotations if not recorded at the time. However, to obtain an overall view and experience of the event to serve as secondary data to supplement the analysis, this approach to fieldwork was deemed sufficient.

To gather the primary research data, I conducted interviews with three managers of the case media company, one of their radio show hosts operating with an external firm and with one manager of their business partner company that provides the venue for their daily operations and the events. Due to the small size of the company, the number of managers available for interviewing was by default quite small. However, a carefully selected, small sample of interviewees can provide valuable in-depth information in this kind of information rich case (Patton 1980). The selection of interviewees was based on the media company's CEO's recommendations and careful consideration of how to gain the optimal amount of information about the case in hand. Two of those who were requested did not agree to be interviewed, and this also limited the amount of interviewees. The selection of the interview sample will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.2.2.

The interview guide consisted of certain themes based on the theoretical framework to discuss with the interviewees and some open-ended questions related to each theme to aid the flowing of the conversation. This kind of interview outline improves the

comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data collection from different interviewees somewhat systematic, while still keeping the interview situation conversational (Patton 1980, 288). Even though the interview themes were established in advance as well as some questions, I did not want to guide the interviewees too much, but rather discuss more deeply the matters that they themselves gravitated towards in the conversation. Certain themes were addressed with all of the managers but questions varied with each conversation and conversation gravitated towards each person's own expertise. Each interview lasted between 35-60 minutes. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

Qualitative content analysis of the transcribed narratives from the interviews was used to analyse the case. The interviews from different people were cross-analyzed, analyzing the various answers to each question at the same time. A priori and emergent coding was used to categorize the empirical data, grouping the answers according to the coding topics. The various elements of the research model were used as coding categories to group the data as well as some categories that emerged from the data itself. The secondary qualitative data was used to supplement the analysis, adding certain findings from the secondary data to enrich the findings from the primary data. The coding categories that were used can be found in Appendix 2. The raw case data was constructed into a case record, from which the final case study narrative was derived. The result of case study research is a comprehensive portrayal of the research phenomenon and a presentation that presents the information in a way that makes the phenomenon understandable to the reader (Patton 1980).

### **3.2.1 Selection of the case company and event series**

For this research I needed a media company to serve as an example of successful event marketing conducted as part of their media selling. The foremost selection criteria, therefore, was that the company had recently undertaken some form of event marketing practices together with an advertising client. Another selection criterion was that the company operates with an advertiser-based business model, to exemplify

a typical media industry setup. Also, I was particularly interested in media companies that cater to somewhat niche audiences, which is quite exemplary of the media company of today in the proliferated media landscape. Smaller media companies often tend to be quite flexible and innovative in their operations, and therefore I gathered that it would be likely that this kind of company would practice innovative marketing strategies such as event marketing. My own acumen acquired from several years' work experience with events and media companies played a part in the case selection.

The media company used for this study is Oy Basso Media Ltd and the particular case is their ODD Block Party event series. The idea for this particular case came from becoming aware of the ODD Block Party events in the summer of 2014 and attending one of the events as pre-research. The final selection of the company was due to the uniqueness of the case that fits neatly into the subject at hand as well as fitting all the abovementioned criteria. Basso is a small advertiser-supported media company that besides its core-operation – radio broadcasting – operates on various other platforms, offers advertisers different types of creative solutions and has a distinct, somewhat niche target audience. This event series was deemed suitable for this particular case study research because it had a clear start and end, it was organized in cooperation with an advertiser and other business partners and the project was initiated as part of a media sales deal. The event series presents a unique, bounded system that is limited in terms of time and space and a concrete example of the research phenomenon that is successful from a managerial point of view. The company CEO was contacted with the thesis subject and access was granted to use the company as a case. No monetary or other compensation was exchanged on either side.

### **3.2.2 Selection of the interviewees**

The case company is a relatively small firm – the company employs 12 full-time employees (Hämäläinen 2014). As I found out when discussing with the company's CEO, the procedure is that a single person is in charge of one advertising project as a

whole. The project, in this case the ODD Block Party series, is executed by that key account manager together with the key partners in the project and with help from the media company's interns. This meant that the number of people with experience and knowledge about this particular project would be quite limited. In the interview sample, I wanted to include Basso's top management and individuals who were in charge of the project from Basso's side as well as the key partners involved.

I initially approached the case company's CEO with my thesis subject. She agreed to be interviewed and gave four recommendations for other interviewees, people from various roles who all had a central part in the event operations. Three of these managers agreed to be interviewed; no reply was received from the fourth manager. I managed to schedule interviews with three managers of Basso and one manager of Torikorttelit, which is one of their main co-operators in the event endeavours. Torikorttelit provides the venue for events as well as Basso's daily operations, which essentially forms the basis for Basso's events. To supplement this set of data, I selected one external DJ and event producer who hosts a weekly radio show on Basso and who agreed to be interviewed. From working in the event scene in Helsinki, I had prior knowledge that this particular radio host and DJ is an experienced event producer himself and was also present at the case event series as a spectator. Thus, I judged that he could provide interesting and data-enriching insights about the role of the radio show hosts and DJs in building the media brand as well as his personal experience about event management and the case series in general, from the point of view of a key partner in Basso's content production.

An interview was requested also from the person in charge of the campaign at Pernod Ricard – the company that was the main advertising client in the event series – but due to a busy schedule she refused the invitation to be interviewed. However, Basso's key account manager in charge of this particular account could bring insights about the client's motivations and she was already included in the interview sample. I judged that the existing sample of interviewees should give me information-rich, in-depth data that would be sufficient in order to understand this particular case from the media company's point of view, which is the main perspective of this study. The two

external partnering managers would provide supplementary data on the media brand and value offered in the network of key partners. A detailed list of interviewees can be found in Appendix 1 of this thesis.

### **3.3 The case study – Basso Media ODD Block Party event series**

#### **3.3.1 Case company: Oy Basso Media Ltd**

Founded in: 2006

Industry: Radio programming and broadcasting activities

Turnover (2013): 922 000 € (Kauppalehti 2014)

Number of full-time personnel: 12

Oy Basso Media Ltd is a Finnish radio station, media house and design agency that operates with an advertiser-supported business model. The company was born in 2006 when three existing media companies – Posse-magazine, Basso Internet radio and suomihiphop.com -online discussion forum – combined their forces under one roof. The company currently employs 12 full-time employees. In addition, Basso employs freelance professionals, part-time employees and interns for certain projects. Keeping a small work community is considered both cost-effective and efficient in terms of creativity. (Taina 2011) In their own words, the Basso work community consists of “20-35 –year-old musicians, writers, artists, photographers and lifestyle heroes with a DIY spirit”. In addition to its core work community, 150 freelance DJs co-create content by hosting 60 specialized radio DJ-shows for Basso. (Basso 2014a) No monetary compensation is paid to the external radio hosts, but they receive a certain amount of advertising spots on Basso’s radio platform for advertising their own companies and projects in return for their work in hosting shows (Jyrälä 2014).



In 2009 it was reported in media that Basso's future plans aim towards the web and events. At that time, Basso's operations consisted of radio, an online community and website, a magazine, an online-operated Basso-TV and various events such as club nights, Basso Music Awards and Basso Festival. (Silvast 2009) In 2013, Basso magazine was discontinued. The reason behind this, according to Basso's then-CEO was that the magazine no longer fit into the Basso media concept as a whole. It was stated at the time that now Basso would focus on its other operations: the radio, web, and events. (Kauppalehti 2013)

Today Basso's operations consist of planning, conceptualizing, and producing video-, audio-, textual and visual content for different platforms for both users and advertisers. The media concept operates on four platforms: Basso radio, video productions, events, and an online discussion forum (Basso 2014a, 2014b), the most visible and well known of which is their radio channel.

Basso's target audience consists of young, urban adults – "tastemakers". The typical Basso-user is 18-34 years old, a digitally oriented city-dweller who is a pioneer in adopting new trends. To this audience, multimedia consumption is a self-evident way of life and what Basso offers to this audience is content that converges across its different platforms. What Basso claims to offer for advertisers is a route to the hearts of these consumers. To the firm wanting to promote its products and services, Basso represents the community-sourced, multi-platform content creation model that is very current. Their value proposition is summed up to four "hashtags" presented on their media card – "things that you can't buy": #credibility, #community, #content, #story. In addition to providing advertising space, Basso can plan the whole advertising concept for the client and produce all the content with it. (Basso 2014a)

From spring 2014 onwards, the company offices have been situated in Torikorttelit. Torikorttelit is a Helsinki city project that aims at revitalizing the old market blocks around the Senate Square. This location forms a basis for many unique marketing operations of the media company, for example, providing the space for pop-up

showrooms and events that Basso can offer to its advertising clients in packaged deals. For Torikorttelit, events are a central part of the revitalizing scheme. The cooperation between Torikorttelit and Basso formed the basis for the case event series, as we will explain in more detail.

### **3.3.2 Event series: ODD Block Party**

In the summer of 2014 Basso organized a series of events, ODD Block Party, together with a vodka brand Oddka, which is a product brand of Pernod Ricard Finland, the subsidiary of global alcohol company group Pernod Ricard. The event took place in Torikorttelit. A total of three events were organized – one block party event took place each month in the summer months of June, July and August.

## **4 FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Observations at the event – summary of field notes and analysis of photographs and video materials**

The event was on a warm summer Wednesday early evening, from 6 o'clock onwards, at an inner courtyard of Torikorttelit – the old, atmospheric market quarters of Helsinki. A few of people in my group of friends had mentioned about the party beforehand and enquired if I was going there. It seemed like it was some sort of special occasion, yet no one really knew what it was about exactly, except that it was a “Basso party”. In our group of friends, everyone knew Basso’s reputation of hosting cool parties. An e-mail invitation that required signing up to the event had preceded some days ago and prompted by that, many of my friends had signed up. Before arriving at the party, some concerns were raised among our group of friends about getting in to the party since some had forgotten to sign up beforehand. At the entrance was a large banner with the Basso logo. You could see inside the fenced area – the place was a relatively small outdoor space and quite full of people. At the door, no one actually checked for names or who had signed up. IDs were checked after which were handed three drink tickets each and wished welcome.

It was difficult to get seated but we managed to get seats eventually. People were mostly standing around with drinks. DJs were playing music on a small stage in the corner. There was a Street Gastro food truck selling food – I knew they served tasty, no-fuss food since I had tried some of it before at their brick-and-mortar restaurant in Helsinki and it was some of the best casual street food that you could get in our town. On tables, there were plates with free apple pies – I knew the theme was somehow related to apple pies although I did not really know why at the time. With the drink tickets guests could get free cocktails or vodka shots from a couple of counters where uniformly dressed bartenders were handing out drinks made with Oddka-branded Vodka. The bartenders were wearing top hats and some kind of white lab coats, some with bluish paper moustaches on their faces. The cocktails also involved the apple pie theme. People were standing around with good-looking, apple and cinnamon scented

cocktails. Many were just standing in line since the queues for drinks were infernal. The end result, however, was rewarding – the cocktails tasted like apple and cinnamon and seemed like quality stuff.

An eye-catching feature at the event space was a large tree in the middle of the space that was covered in “Christmas lights” and hanging on the branches were paper speech bubbles with various hashtags and quotes, such as “How do you like them apples?”, “I only came for the Oddka”, “OMG! Don’t tag me in this photo” and “I’m not drunk. I’m with Odd”, and wordplays with the words “outo” (meaning: *odd, weird*), “odd”, and “Oddka”, and also some hashtag signs #Oddka, #Basso and #Bassoradio. The brand Oddka was quite prevalent in the deco, bar displays and posters all around. Many guests were taking pictures. A photographer was taking professional photographs at the event and someone was shooting video. Present were many people I knew from the music and club industries and DJ circles – a lot of cool people, bloggers, the whole scene. Most were good-looking and stylish young people who looked to be around 20-30 years old – a good turnout. This definitely seemed like *the place to be*. The group I came with was a bunch of skateboarder friends of mine. There were several other acquaintances present, which meant a lot of small talk and conversation with other attendees. Talking to other participants, it seemed like most were having a good time, as was I. Some were just passing through and irritated by being held up by the queues at the bar. Luckily, many were happy to hang around longer. After a while, people in the group I was with got tired of the place being so crowded, ran out of drink tickets and decided to go skate in the park. I left with them with a positive feeling of the evening overall.

Browsing Instagram on my smart phone after the event, I could see that many people I knew had been at the party. Some had arrived after I left and I became aware of their presence only later on social media. A lot of pictures were posted online, tagged with the phrases I had seen hanging on the tree, and browsing these hashtags made it clear that many people indeed had happily snapped photos at the event, glad to inform others of their attendance at the event via social media.

## 4.2 Findings from interviews and analysis of documentaries

Beginning the interviews, I was interested to find out managers perceptions of today's media environment and some of the factors which had led to this situation where Basso is today, offering advertisers event marketing as part of their media selling strategy. The managers with a long background in media described that media industry has been in this "revolution" for 10 years already and that big changes have taken place. However, the challenges faced by a small company are very different from those faced by large media companies, which are often the ones mostly discussed in media and research. According to the managers, challenges faced by companies big and small are not necessarily comparable with each other – small media companies have always had to do things differently. However, clients' decreasing advertising budgets are a challenge faced by all advertiser-financed media companies. Apart from that, the problems that a niche media company faces are considered quite different from those in big media companies. The important thing is to stay a little bit ahead of the rest – and here, being small and agile helps.

*"What big companies are only just practicing, we're already pretty good at."...  
"Luckily we're so small and agile, but you have to be awake all the time."* –Reunanen

Different advertising platforms are considered to have different roles, print advertising has its role as does outdoor advertising, but the managers felt that what has increased in recent years is the demand for content marketing and effect – going a little deeper. The managers presume that media buying is more challenging than it used to be, since there are so many different options of media channels compared to 10 years ago. Whereas 10 years ago an advertiser could get quite far advertising on one TV channel, now, budgets are divided between multiple channels on different platforms. In this kind of environment, it is essential that media brands differentiate their offering to advertisers. On one hand, media buying is being automated especially on the web, but on the other hand, there is demand for production-heavy, time-consuming, individualized solutions such as content marketing campaigns and blog

collaborations, which aim to have a deeper effect on the target audience. It is in these that a small and agile company such as Basso may have an upper hand – and differentiating with such solutions is the path that Basso has chosen to take.

While there is still demand for mass advertising, advertisers recognize the importance of specifically targeted, integrated multiplatform solutions in advertising. The managers feel that the significance of events and holistic, multiplatform solutions in general has increased in media selling. The demand for event marketing among advertising clients is essentially the basis for Basso's event operations. In order for Basso to do an event, there must be an advertising client *enabling* it. Surprisingly, events are not considered necessarily "the best for Basso" as a way of creating content for audiences. Yet, as a whole, events provide a way to effectively serve the branding needs of both Basso as well as the advertising client simultaneously.

*"Always if we do an event, it comes from the side that a client wants to do an event with us... We won't do an event unless some other... unless someone wants to enable it. So the content isn't... Events aren't necessarily always the best for Basso."* – Hämäläinen

#### **4.2.1 Co-creation of events together with partners and advertisers**

Events have been a part of Basso's operations for most of its existence; however, the motivations and principles for organizing events have changed significantly. With its history of organizing events Basso has established a reputation among its target audience as a host of parties.

*"We do get quite a lot of requests about it and we do have a reputation of hosting good parties, and I like that we have such a reputation"* –Reunanen

Nowadays at Basso, events are not created for the sake of mere content, but they always require a partner, *an enabler*. Whereas previously events were created as content for serving audiences, now they are mainly practiced as part of media selling

– as solutions offered to advertising clients looking for individualized campaigns. Events are created in cooperation with advertisers and partners, acting as a source of advertising revenues while at the same time serving the media company's own branding purposes. Events have been a part of Basso's media concept throughout its history almost continuously. However, there have been some event endeavours gone catastrophically, that have thus resulted in fundamental changes in perspective inside the company. Events are a production-heavy form of operations that takes up a lot of resources. Whereas previously events were created as a means to serve audiences, now they serve both audiences and advertisers. The company has moved to organize events together with partners in a way that the production process is relatively lean and the financial risk remains small for the media company.

*“In the past, the reasons have been related to the consumers, wanting to somehow serve our audience. And if I'm completely honest, at some point it was so that – well, events aren't born by themselves, suddenly it was taking a huge amount of resources and even though they're done with a small budget, they always swallowed it up and many persons' work effort to a large extent, and then we did them and everything else suffered... Like when we for example had over... or anyway we had them locked in at certain intervals, that we would throw a party. And then it got so heavy, doing them, that's why there came a point that from now on, we won't do events just for the sake of events. Only if there is a reasonable, good partner, then we'll do it. [...] So we are a multi-platform media, but we're not an event production company. That is a business of its own. But on that level we can do it ourselves just fine. When the setting is there, so that the production process is relatively light. But the worst mistakes in Basso's history are related to for example when we organized our own festival. So that's like – that failure almost took out the whole company. So in that sense, events are the kind of subject, that we do do them, but I know that some people here are still sensitive about that. So we don't organize events anymore so that we'll count that this is how much we'll get from ticket sales, we don't do them from those premises. We do them in a way that is more thought-out, on a smaller scale, less risky, and maybe somehow, nicer.” –Reunanen*

Working with partners makes the event production process lean enough for the company to handle; however, events are still not the most cost-effective way of doing things. Yet, the motivations behind producing events are so strong that it is reasonable to do them. Co-creating events in this way means that the media brand and the advertisers' and partners' brands and their respective goals and objectives are all integrated into a common event concept.

*"Perhaps if we were just thinking about the money, events might not be the easiest or most reasonable way to do things. We could spend that energy elsewhere. But because there are so many reasons for doing these events, it is sensible for us at the moment, both – well, in terms of the client and our brand, they have an important role" ... "Previously, there were partners involved in the events, but it was more from the premise that "we have this kind of event, join us" Whereas now we've turned it around so that we have a partner with whom we plan the whole thing together from the beginning and according to what their wishes and challenges and what they want, and... of course, it happens in our terms, but more somehow, together. And even before... we've done them because of the Basso brand, but with much bigger risk." – Reunanen*

The events organized by Basso can be grouped into self-organized events and external media partnership events, where Basso is the media partner that provides media coverage for the externally organized event. Basso's history of self-organized events has greatly revolved around its former magazine release parties. Basso has a history of working on events with beer and alcohol companies in particular due to legislative reasons that limit the visibility of alcohol products in media and thus make events a reasonable marketing strategy for alcohol companies. The fact that a vodka brand has very limited possibilities to advertise in media in Finland essentially formed the basis for promoting the Oddka brand with event marketing. Sharing a common important target group with Basso led to cooperation in the ODD Block Party series. The event concept was created around the sponsoring brand, Oddka. However, it was organized entirely by Basso and considered more of a "Basso-party", enabled by an advertising partner, as described by one of the managers:



*“ODDKA was more like our party. The client brand name was just brought into it. [Oddka] enabled it.” –Hämäläinen*

Events are part of Basso’s media selling and they are offered to advertisers as a means to strengthen their brands, but they also have an important role in branding Basso. The managers did not want to put much emphasis on the financial meaning behind organizing events and the direct advertising revenues resulting from these events, but rather emphasize the meaning that events have in terms of branding. What partners bring to the equation are revenues for Basso, and perhaps most importantly, their contribution means that the financial risk from the events for the media company remains small. Events are a part of the Basso brand, its personality. They have a significant role in fostering a community around the media brand – as a place for similar people to meet, interact and build relationships.

*”I think it’s extremely important that Basso organizes parties. We used to have them at the time when there was the magazine releases and those were really, really fun things and it is one thing for which Basso is known and famous, those good events, so... It is the community which is important, and that it’s not just some media that is bought and sold, but it is a meeting place of people with similar interests, online and on air and at events and everywhere.” –Mäkinen*

The idea for the ODD Block Party series was born when Basso offices relocated to Torikorttelit in the spring 2014. The main aim of Torikorttelit’s strategy is to enliven the old city blocks. Inside Basso there was a desire to do a summer club event series for the media brand community to take part in – to enliven their brand and the community around it. Hence, the idea for the block parties was consistent with both Torikorttelit and Basso’s own strategy. The concept was born, and it could be sold to advertisers who could enable it. Pernod Ricard – the company that owns the Oddka brand – was contacted with the idea for an event campaign and consequently brought into the event concept as the main advertising partner who enables the event. The role of Oddka can be seen as a sponsor-based event marketer, with its brand message integrated around this particular event series. Due to legislative restrictions around

alcohol marketing, events posed a particularly good opportunity for bringing the brand – which was a new brand in Finland – to the consumers. The idea for the event series existed before the main advertising client Oddka was involved. It is not unusual at Basso for a creative advertising to come to life in this way – after the idea is born, potential enabling clients can be approached with the idea. If a suitable partner is found, the idea may be implemented. This particular idea suited the needs of the client in question particularly well, so the idea could come to life.

*”Event visibility is really one of the only ways in which spirits can meet consumers as a brand. So [the event came] from kind of... From our need as well as the client’s need. At Basso it is often done in that order that we have an idea and then we find a partner for it, so there are a lot of ideas born there. And then we implement them if we find a partner, and not so that... Well, of course we sell and it’s a commercial media, but in a way it’s not so... so commercial as it can be in some bigger medias.”*

–Mäkinen

The objectives for the event series were threefold – there were the objectives firstly of Basso, secondly of Pernod Ricard / Oddka, and thirdly of Torikorttelit – and the alignment of these objectives was essential for the successful co-creation of an event series. For Torikorttelit, the idea was to bring life into the area. It was also an opportunity to make the audience of Basso aware that the radio station premises are now situated in Torikorttelit, and hopefully bringing some of that crowd into the area, in other words, building awareness and positive images and experiences around Torikorttelit. Torikorttelit’s manager described the foremost value offered by Basso to them as a partner in the following words:

*”Reputation, doing and enlivening. A human is the best advertising vehicle for telling people that these kinds of things exist and also providing feedback for development or coming here again, that’s a victory for us.”* –Bauer

For Basso, in addition to the previously mentioned motivation of fostering the community around the brand, events aim at creating positive experiences and making the brand meaningful to its audience.

*”On Basso’s side our objectives were in that... Well it relates to branding really, and being meaningful to our target audience and all the same [objectives] that we have had with our events before.” ... ”Somehow creating happy moments, and the fact that all media say that they are multichannel – yeah sure they are, but I want us to be that truly. Basso can even be meaningful to a consumer who doesn’t listen to us on the radio, in some other way, for example through these parties.” –Reunanen*

The key account manager in charge of the Pernod Ricard account considered herself familiar with the client’s objectives and motivations and hence able to discuss them in the interview. According to her, the reason for Oddka’s involvement was that that they wanted to reach the very specific target group that Basso’s audience consists of – urban, young “forerunners” who are willing to go out, try new products and might be susceptible to this kind of “block party feeling” – and get them to encounter the brand. For Oddka, the aim was to reach this particular niche audience, let them experience the product and the brand in a live event. The brand itself was new in Finland, so it was essential for them to build awareness and get the right kind of consumers to familiarize themselves with the product. There were essentially three kinds of goals for the client: awareness and brand building, sales, and visibility in social media.

*“We just wanted a certain kind of urban crowd or what their specific chosen target group is that would be somehow consistent with the Basso crowd, to encounter the product at that party and get to taste good cocktails and so. So that was certainly one [goal]. And of course they think that when people encounter [the product] then maybe sometime when they go to a bar or Alko they’ll buy it. So there is also this kind of sales objective, and then kind of on social media, when people take photos there and share them with some hashtags from [the event] then the brand might show in those photos and we had kind of organized so that it would be visible there.” –Mäkinen*

#### 4.2.2 Creating event series as part of a media concept

After the goals had been established with the partners and client, the actual production of the events took place inside Basso as an in-house production. With their expertise of the target group in question, the partners and client had confidence that an in-house production by Basso would result in the kind of event series most relevant and effective to the specific target audience. The event series consisted of three events that happened monthly from June through to August. The event series received visibility on multiple Basso platforms before and after the events. Before each event, radio commercials were aired on Basso's radio channel and the events were advertised online on Basso's website and social media platforms. Invites were sent to Basso's mailing list, and in the radio and web advertisements people were encouraged to sign up for the events online in order to get their names on the guest list. Visibility was generated during the event through consumers' social media updates and photos from the events. The visual decorations at the event, with various "speech bubbles" with quotes and hashtags hanging from tree branches, encouraged guests to take pictures and tag their posts with the desired hashtags. Afterwards, professional photographs of the events and video highlights were posted on Basso's social media channels and website. What the advertising client got was a comprehensive package and a campaign that generated word-of-mouth among consumers. The visual branding that encouraged consumers to take pictures themselves brought a unique character to the events. The successful use of social media content created by consumers resulted in more visibility for the events and brands involved – visibility co-created with consumers. And this was one of the objectives clearly achieved by the events.

*"The cheapest post-marketing nowadays is social media, if you know how to do it."* – Hämäläinen

The name of the series, ODD Block Party, was a wordplay resulting from the brand name Oddka and brought about the general theme of "oddness" or "weirdness". There were different underlying themes associated with each event: The first revolved around straight-out-the-oven apple pies. The second one's theme was freshly cut grass. The third one had an electric theme. A distinctive visual look of the event was

created for each of the events along with special Oddka-cocktails to reflect the theme. Drink tickets were handed to guests on arrival so they could taste the cocktails for free. Another partnering company, Street Gastro, was the provider of alcohol licences and catering, and their food truck was selling street food at all the events. An interesting feature of the event series was the pre-sign-up that consumers were asked to perform – even though no invitation or sign-up was actually required in order to get into the event. Seemingly, the guest list had no purpose, but perhaps it had a purpose in a marketing sense, as demonstrated by Basso’s external radio show host who was himself visiting the event as a guest:

*“I think it’s funny how it was promoted, that you had to somehow sign up, [and they didn’t even check the names]! But the way it was promoted made you feel like “oh man, I gotta go put my name in quick if I wanna get in” type of thing. They promoted it in the same way as the magazine releases they had at one point, those were also so that they invited people, but they sent a link so you always had to put your name in that list quickly. And then you had your name in that list and you’re like “yay I can get into this party now”, but then when you go there you can just walk in and grab a beer from the fridge! (laughs)” –Jyrälä*

The events were relatively small, intimate even. One of the managers suggested that in recent years there has been a trend towards focusing on more grass root level events as opposed to where previously the focus has been on major events. While small-scale grass root events may not offer immediate, concrete, numeric campaign results, these events that aim to affect the brand experience may yield deeper brand effects that become visible only after a longer time. The manager felt that block party -type, small events might offer more “heartfelt, self-made” experiences, which is something that consumers appreciate as a contrast to major events. When a company has a strategy aligned with providing such experiences, successful results may be achieved with a campaign such as the ODD Block Party series. The most important thing, the manager felt, is that the campaign is integrated with the company’s strategy as a whole and the strategy encompasses all levels of marketing communications – and in this case, the event itself is only “the tip of the iceberg” instead of a stand-alone marketing tool.

*”It has changed also in a way that at some point it was really important that everything looked really big and cool, like big world style – some kind of Las Vegas, you know... Some years ago. But nowadays I think it’s nice that these kind of block party style, that seem more self-made and more heartfelt, I think they’re nicer. The kind of events that look like they were made by people – it’s kind of the same idea of whether you go to some giant chain hotel of somewhere that has a bit more personality, or which café, or anything...” –Mäkinen*

As touched upon previously, events are a production-heavy way of operating and creating events as part of a media concept is not a straightforward task in many cases. One of the main factors enabling Basso to undertake this event endeavour was its newly found location inside Torikorttelit, which opened up various opportunities for creative advertising packaging. For instance, Basso now has a space where it can build client’s pop-up shops, showcases or installations. In this space, they have had for example an “eyebrow lounge” for Lumene and a “gaming lounge” for Playstation, which are packaged with their media deals. With Basso’s strong production capabilities, when buying event or showroom campaigns, an advertising client can conveniently get practically everything from Basso.

*“Probably because we do so much in-house production at the moment, we have all the equipment and expertise and good partners, so we can offer the client a holistic rent real, like, come here and by the way from us you get everything. So for example we’ve had some cases where we bring the DJ-table, sound system, host the opening party, closing party, and for the client it’s easy, because they only have to arrange with one contact person, and they get everything from us.” –Hämäläinen*

There are certain other capabilities in Basso’s organization that enable the production of successful events. One of them is the company culture where everyone takes on various roles flexibly and possesses versatile skills. For instance, the key account manager who is responsible for a certain advertising client is also the producer of that campaign, handling the execution from start to end. Another factor is cross-divisional cooperation between different teams inside the organization in creative processes. The

key account manager interviewed felt that in order for the advertorial campaigns to remain credible towards the target audience, it is vital that the campaigns are created together with the editorial team. Advertorial campaigns are planned in a way that they are consistent with Basso's content as a whole and customized for the specific client.

*"...everyone gives advice and helps, generates ideas together and stuff, so... [...] In some bigger medias it can be so that sales do their own thing and editorial do their own thing and then they may meet somewhere but just try and do like... Especially for the commercial solutions to remain credible, so that towards the listener or user it remains credible – that's why it's really important to plan [these things] as a group, and not just stick some advertisement sticker on top that could be anyone's... I think it's fun that those things are made for the specific clients."* –Mäkinen

The company culture is a creative, flexible, even entrepreneurial one that allows for more unorthodox ways of operating.

*"...that kind of flexible and excited group of people, things like moving a live broadcast somewhere or coming up with ideas together works in a completely different way [than in other work communities] and not like 'yeah that's so much trouble, let's do something else instead...'"* –Mäkinen

Several of the managers interviewed mentioned the "DIY spirit" at Basso that enables them to flexibly execute various different kinds of operations. A particularly good description of this DIY spirit came from outside the interviews, in Basso's 10-year anniversary documentary, where one of Basso's in-house radio hosts Jussi Urpainen described the spirit in the following way:

*"What DIY means for me is that if I want something on our show, whether it be a sound clip or something, instead of starting to write a whole lot of emails or calling people about who could do it, I do it myself or I ask someone if we can do this kind of thing. That's DIY for me that everything is done with own hands. There's not a separate producer, host, journalist, talker (gestures with hands, listing different*

*titles), but being that – handling our show pretty much from start to finish ourselves. And that’s that DIY for me.” (Basso 2014c)*

Many of the capabilities that enable successful event producing are the same that managers consider are the factors that make Basso strong as a brand – having a strong community, competence on multiple platforms, strong capabilities for in-house production and deep understanding of the target audience.

*“Our best strength at the moment is that of all the medias Basso is the closest to its target group. No one else really understands their target group as well as we do. All that our forum represents also, is that community, discussion, that’s all created by us, us creating with them. So we do a lot on the users’ terms.” –Hämäläinen*

Partly, being strong on multiple channels is due to Basso’s history of operating on various platforms before others were necessarily doing it, and this is considered to be one of the factors that gives Basso a competitive advantage. A long history on different platforms and co-creating on those platforms with the audience cannot be duplicated. The target audience naturally uses Basso on multiple platforms. Being on several different platforms, however, brings about the question of focus which is something that the media company balances between – is it better to do all or focus on one thing.

*“From what I’ve been following, it’s kind of a two-sided sword, is it profitable to focus on one thing or do a bit of everything. We are special in a way that Basso has grown from being a magazine, radio, forum, that those were combined, and that’s maybe left us with a multimedia platform... And I don’t think anyone could make a brand that’s similar and a media just like that. They wouldn’t get the target audience involved, like, you have to start from somewhere.” –Hämäläinen*

This multiplatform competence is one of the things that makes Basso a particularly attractive prospect for partners, especially in the midst of the media revolution where many medias are scrambling in their efforts to be meaningful to audiences on different



platforms. According to Torikorttelit's manager, there is also the concrete competence brought to events by Basso, which includes technical solutions and their wide pool of external DJs that cooperate with Basso and can be booked for different types of events. The mentality at Basso is that of a small company where people are creative and things tend to work flexibly. The small company mentality, the creative, passionate and self-directing company culture, their extensive network of content creators and the strategy and will to "do something meaningful" are characteristics of Basso highly valued by the partnering company's manager.

*"Well, all this technology and technical implementation and in general the fact that they have like a 150 different DJs, so whatever genre, even if we have a children's event we can get that from Basso, a cooperation with them, or if we get an older people's jazz – the range is so wide. And also the idea-rich can-do small company's mentality... Whatever thing, we tell them that we're thinking about this thing and they say that they can help so and so" ... "The whole concept has been born from passion, it has been born small, it has been born from the will to do something meaningful, that has meaning, that really means good for firstly the people who want to make that kind of good media." –Bauer*

Due to the wide variety of Basso's operations, the media company is in fact described as a hybrid of a media company, advertising agency and production company. The media company has direct connections with big B2B clients whereas normally these clients might use a "middle man" – media buyers – for their media advertising needs. Basso's offering of strong production capabilities combined with their knowledge of their specific audience and the kind of content marketing that is meaningful and relevant on their platforms means that advertisers can get a customized campaign for the target audience for Basso platforms straight from the media company, and the media company can gain revenues from the whole process from the media space to the actual production.

*"Many media agencies with big clients have to look a bit at what we're doing, and we operate as kind of a media agency, so that we have direct contact with big clients who trust us with how things should be done for our target group. So we have kind of been trendsetters in some things." ... "Maybe the big difference there is that we're after all*

*a media and we have an advertising agency or media agency, so we do after all a lot of the same types of things that a media agency could design for another platform, we just design it for our platform.” –Hämäläinen*

On the other hand, being a small company, Basso naturally operates with relatively small resources compared with bigger companies. That is why partnerships that allow the company to create campaigns that require a large amount of resources – such as events – are of utmost importance.

*“We’re experimental and we’re agile and a lot is talked about this kind of content marketing, or that – the advertising has to be meaningful to the listener or consumer. So I would assert that we have been quite good at that all along, because we have also had to be. And each of our makers here have the kind of mindset that advertising has never been a mandatory evil, but the opposite, together with partners we can do things that we wouldn’t have resources for on our own” –Reunanen*

#### **4.2.3 Engaging consumers with event experiences**

So what is the role of events and the ODD Block Party series in particular in building the media brand in a way that creates competitive advantage? Earlier I presented the different types of event marketing endeavours that Basso undertakes ranging from media partnerships to self-organized events. Different forms of event marketing serve different purposes for Basso. External event partnerships in general, where Basso partners with another external event organizer as a media partner, serve as vehicles for building awareness of the Basso brand as well as creating content for Basso’s platforms.

*“For us, it’s all about visibility.” ... “us being talked about and us being seen, we stay alive through that.” ... “And what events also give us is content-wise, like a festival media partnership as an event, if our banners are there or we have branded a stage to ourselves, then we do contests around it, and that of course interests our listeners because they want to go to Blockfest (an external festival partner of Basso),*

*so they want to listen to Basso in order to get the ticket and thereby get there. So there's a kind of triangle. And through that we also get new listeners who hear that "hey you can get tickets to Blockfest from there, I'm gonna listen to Basso" –*  
Hämäläinen

When partnering with externally organized events such as music festivals, the Basso brand can gain awareness and become a part of those consumer experiences by association with those events. However, Basso's own events, in which Basso is the main organizer along with its partners, offer various other possibilities for building and strengthening the media brand. Mainly, they offer a place for Basso's brand community to gather while participating in the event and interacting with other community members and Basso staff. By creating positive experiences and thereby engaging users in various channels, Basso becomes a part of their lives both online, offline and live in-person.

*"[The brand] is kind of with them in all aspects of their lives, so it is also nice to meet live in person and be part of the whole thing. Like, Basso is after all truly communal in the sense that the whole thing has started from the kind of DJ-community and not the other way around, so the community has existed before the media, so yeah, the listeners experience and want to be a part of that community also, and in events it works out particularly well, that you get to see them – with us, the editorial staff always also comes to those parties and stuff, so us makers can also meet the people and so on..." –Mäkinen*

Basso is described as a brand built on communities, where the community has existed before there even was the media brand. An active web discussion forum has been one of the foundational platforms of Basso. The Basso brand was born when an existing discussion forum was combined with other channels under the same roof. Fostering this community has been a priority from the beginning of the company's lifespan. And the relationship that the community shares with Basso is something that the managers take very seriously. Events play a central role in building and maintaining

these relationships. Events strengthen the brand by strengthening the community around it – building “close and warm relationships” around the brand.

*“[Events] support [the brand], this is after all a media built on communities. And in the future as well, I want the people around us to have a close and warm relationship with our brand. And there, for example, the events play a role.” –Reunanen*

Managers describe that the Basso brand is co-created by consumers. This co-creation is manifested on various platforms, for instance in the online discussion forum, a “Shoutbox” where audiences can comment and interact with hosts during radio shows, the pop-up campaign space where consumers can visit, and live events. Audience events would not be successful without the participating brand community and offering consumers events that they want to attend form the basis for being able to offer these event campaigns to advertisers. It seems thus that co-creation with consumers is an integral part of building advertiser brand equity, and partnering with advertisers and partners that enable the production of events and other content is an integral part of building audience brand equity.

*”We’re not some ivory tower that shouts out that this is what it is, but instead we are making it together.” –Reunanen*

Interesting, relevant, credible content and experiences are the main values that Basso as a media brand offers to its audiences. In events, partners and advertisers are involved in content creation and thus they become part of building the Basso brand towards consumers. Since this is where the commercial part comes in, the media company needs to control the quality of content to ensure their media channel credibility – which contributes to brand equity – is not compromised, and this we will discuss in more detail later. After all, with partners, events organized by Basso are essentially commercially influenced content.

*“Because it is such an important part of all this, without them this wouldn’t exist, this wouldn’t be run... But there we perhaps again come to the fact that when this is done*

*through advertisers, together with partners, we use time and consider how it can be done in a great and new and surprising way” –Reunanen*

#### **4.2.4 Differentiating media with events**

Basso’s managers consider that Basso is the right platform for an advertiser who is looking for a deep effect on the specifically targeted audience rather than just wide coverage. On one hand, clients may achieve wide coverage on other media platforms, and on the other hand use Basso in addition as a platform for achieving a deeper effect on the specific target audience. This is essentially how Basso differentiates in the market for media space.

*“But what we do, our aim is to go a level deeper and we have an impact on our audience, a deeper impact. And that’s our thing.” ... “All types of firms advertise with us, and it’s not even about the firm, or even the product. But it’s about the goal that they want to achieve. And usually at the client’s end... They do both, they build coverage, which is very good, but in addition they want to do something deeper. And that is when we are the channel.” –Reunanen*

The partnering firm Torikorttelit’s manager gave some further insights to the reasons for choosing Basso as a media platform to partner with. Having worked in the media industry herself earlier, the manager feels that the cooperation between advertisers and media has indeed changed in recent years. Although the “media revolution” has been going on for a decade already, change is slow, also when it is happening from the inside. The manager is no longer interested in advertising in some media channel based merely on reach – instead, solutions that reach target audiences on multiple channels in a way that is effective and really has an impact on the audience are deemed attractive. Basso in particular is considered to have a very deep expertise of their target audience and a strong multichannel competence. When media buying in general is challenging, to “decide what is the best channel for which message”, the clear differentiation of the media brand makes that choice easier for the advertiser.

*“I have to say that Basso really is a forerunner in the changing media landscape, one that can say proudly that they understand the target groups of today and where to reach them and how.” ... “When you understand so clearly what is Basso’s target group, and why Basso does the things the way they do, then it’s easy to buy that package, like “okay I want it on radio, I want it on your web” then when they have such a good social media... So you just know it’s going to go through...” ... “Yeah, Hesari’s front page, that’s so... I haven’t believed in that kind of thing for years.” – Bauer*

Managers frequently describe the Basso brand with adjectives such as “credible”, “surprising”, “present” and “involved” in the users’ lives, “DIY-spirited”, “meaningful”, and as offering quality instead of disposability.

*“It’s still perhaps kind of the most credible media, and most surprising. Does what others don’t have the guts to do. And people have liked that we do things in a do it yourself –spirit. So although we operate with small resources, we still work to the fullest and try and develop new ways to bring media forth and reach that target audience. Or be kind of present with them. Be involved. It’s that kind of living together.” –Hämäläinen*

*“...Not wanting any kind of disposable junk, but trying to keep a thought and some kind of responsibility or that kind of feeling of this world. Okay, maybe we have some fun and do funny things, so there has to be a bit of that kind of anarchy as well, but still doing good things and not the kind of plastic – disposable plastic things.” – Mäkinen*

Events are considered to differentiate the brand and create a competitive advantage for Basso in the advertiser market in the way that Basso can offer advertising solutions that provide deep effect on the specific target audiences in ways that bigger companies with larger audiences may not be able to. Even though the production of events is relatively heavy, in-house production is considered a prerequisite for these kinds of customized campaigns for Basso’s platforms.

*“I think it creates competitive advantage, because we’re at the kind of point where we can’t really sell the listener numbers yet by any means, like “well buy these through the media agency, bye”, but instead we have to produce some kind of other value-added then, so we do view it as the kind of competitive advantage with which we are able to get those deals. And, well, I know that the big [companies] don’t necessarily have time to potter around like that – sure these often take a lot of time and effort and such” ... “...because you always run into that where the heck do we have to order those Bajamaja’s again and these... like, it’s just not... you can’t do events like in any centralized manner or by any mould because there are always so many moving parts...” –Mäkinen*

Basso is a relatively niche media channel and although the aim is to grow, the amount of this specific target audience will always be relatively small. The way that Basso differentiates from other media companies is offering a profound effect on this target audience based on their strong brand image among the target group and the engaging advertising solutions they offer. This means that the best and most effective kind of advertising on Basso’s platforms is the kind of advertising that is customized for the particular channel and audience. Closely cooperative relationships with advertisers are what Basso lives on.

*“With us, [they] specifically want to do something that’s a little deeper and a little differently, so then it means that we also do the productions ourselves.” ... “Yes, [cooperation as competitive advantage] is what we live off. Because we are still a small channel, so with ratings we will never shine. Of course we are aiming for growth and those ratings have to be in order, it’s not about that, but I don’t believe we will ever really be a challenger to SuomiPop, and it doesn’t have to be like that. But that is why we have to do that, because we don’t have that mass or coverage, we have to do things in a different way.” –Reunanen*

What Basso offers to advertising clients and partners is deep target group understanding and the ability to produce target-group relevant content to reach the Basso brand community. Advertisers and partners, in turn, enable Basso to create

better content for its audiences, such as events where audiences can participate. Since Basso has moved away from organizing events on its own without the support of partners, the partners play an essential role in creating the media concept and allowing the media company to build its brand. And as the media company curates its content, it is vital that it controls the quality of content supported by advertisers, in order to ensure its media channel credibility.

*“We are that commercial media where partners enable us to do even more, even better content, we’re able to organize such great parties like that...” “And that is specifically what we invest in, that since we live off that credibility, so we have to do it well and with style, and not glued-on-top, so that is maybe my most important message.” –Reunanen*

Basso has established a strategy of offering holistic, individualized solutions to advertising clients and credible, meaningful, multiplatform content and experiences to consumers. Much more than just a radio channel, it has a strong focus on in-house production of advertising solutions. The company is described as a hybrid of media, advertising agency and production company. The managers see production side of the operations yet increasing in the future, as well as their skills in production and marketing of those skills outwards to the clients. Offering these creative solutions and in-house production of these solutions to advertising clients is Basso’s way to differentiate from other media companies competing for the same advertising clients. And offering these experiences to audiences is a way to differentiate in the eyes of consumers. Although Basso aims to grow its ratings, the nature of its target audience is such that it will always be relatively small. This competitive edge is the focus of Basso’s operations, which is not likely to change even as growth is achieved. Instead, Basso is likely to go into even more deep solutions and even more in-house production. Video production is a field where managers see large potential growth possibilities.

*”Indeed, it is a [hybrid]. Clearly. A hybrid of advertising agency and production company and design agency. And media, of course.” ... ”Well, it’s got to do with [the fact that Basso is small and agile] and also, it has been our own choice. The other*



*option would be that we would be competing against the bigger companies with the same weapons. And we have established that that is not sensible, because we would still always be the smaller option there, so we have to do things differently, and this is specifically the thing that we have invested in.” ... ”It is our goal, definitely, to grow, but like I said, we will nevertheless always be smaller than that SuomiPop. So the ratings will never – we are still – this target group will always be a limited number. But yes, we aim for growth nevertheless, but I don’t think it would still change the way we do things. We still won’t turn into a channel that sells contacts and coverage solely.” –Reunanen*

#### **4.2.5 Image transfer and its moderating variables – fit and quality of content**

Events provide a channel to bring a brand to the consumers’ attention and allow consumers to interact with brands, and especially in the case of consumer brands, to try them and actually experience the branded products. The particular benefit of working in an event endeavour with Basso, is the opportunity to bring the partnering brands to that specific target audience’s attention. The specific niche audience that Basso caters to is not necessarily easy for a brand to reach in a way that is credible, relevant and effective to that audience. Basso provides a way for the advertising brand to reach them. This is why Basso’s audience contacts are sold to advertisers based on their quality – *how* they reach the audience – instead of just how many they reach. A company that targets “everyone”, a wide audience in terms of age and demographics, may find it useful in addition to buying media space with wide coverage to also buy niche media campaigns from a company like Basso in order to reach a certain niche that is difficult to reach via mainstream media. And this young, urban, forerunner crowd that Basso targets is after all, quite a desirable crowd to many consumer brands.

*“The quality of our contact is – we don’t sell the numbers as such, but instead that this is – this one person of ours is equivalent to quite many contacts if you were buying some mass media or something.” –Mäkinen*

As the manager of Torikorttelit explained, the value that Basso brings to the table is that it speaks to the audience in a way that the audience is interested.

*“It speaks to a target group that for us is quite difficult to reach. It’s hard for anyone to reach young people. Like how do you do it in a way that the young people are really interested?” –Bauer*

The interviewees consider that Basso has a substantial amount of credibility among its target audience. Basso’s managers consider the media’s credible image a factor that is reflected on the partnering brand as well, such as Oddka in the ODD Block Party series.

*“Basso as a media there, it brought the credibility, that it’s a credible booze. Like, if you had served it in a sedula [mainstream nightclub chain], people would have taken it quite differently, what this vodka brand is about and stuff... Maybe Basso’s... well, yeah, credibility as a media... is what brought Oddka the premise that they want to partner with us.” –Hämäläinen*

The previous quote about credibility suggests an image transfer from the media brand to the partnering brand. The credibility of Basso as a brand could be transferred to the partnering Oddka brand through this collective event endeavour, and this may have been one of the deciding factors in the advertising firm’s decision to choose Basso as their media platform – hence, a point of differentiation for Basso. An interview where image transfer was strongly present was with the external radio show host / DJ when discussing the benefits of hosting a show on Basso. External DJs do not get paid salary by Basso for hosting regular shows, but they receive a certain amount of ad spots to place their own ads in addition to the airtime they receive on their show. Although a lot of awareness is gained through the radio, the most distinctive benefit is the credibility that being associated with the Basso brand brings to the DJs own artist brand. Hosting a show on Basso is a way to differentiate your own DJ brand or concept. Furthermore, it is a means of staying relevant to their listeners’ lives. It is

considered a kind of “badge” that you are a Basso-DJ that certifies quality to audiences and booking agents. Since hosting a show on Basso, the interviewee has experienced significant improvement in his live gig bookings outside of the radio.

*“Probably the biggest benefit is being able to write ‘Basso radio’ next to your DJ name or the name of our SMOOD collective. It just has a sort of... It’s even funny how... it evokes in people the kind of... Like if you say to people you’re a DJ, compared to you’re a DJ and host a show on Basso radio, it’s different.” –Jyrälä*

The interview data suggests that image transfer from media brand to advertiser brand is indeed considered a factor in cooperative marketing endeavours. However, the managers don’t see image transfer as something that happens automatically in all their advertising deals. The cases where Basso creates the advertising content in-house, the possibility of image transfer is particularly prominent. It is in the cases when Basso is given the liberty to create advertising content for the specific client on the terms of their specific audience, that image transfer is most likely. What this means, is that endeavours such as the ODD Block Party which is especially tailored to the needs of the audience and designed and created as Basso’s in-house production, making most of their expertise of the specific target group, present a valuable opportunity for advertisers to benefit from the images associated with Basso and its content, including the event itself.

*“It depends also on how much liberty we’re given. Sometimes it is so that we get very clear instructions, that we’re used as an advertising platform and that suits us perfectly fine as well, we don’t have anything against that. But the kind of things when we start from the target group’s terms and go for something deeper and we’re given free hands, those have often been the most delicious cases.” –Reunanen*

The manager of partner company Torikorttelit felt that image transfer is a welcomed result between Basso and the various companies and brands that operate within Torikorttelit.

*“Yes, definitely [the Basso brand is reflected on us]. And all our other operators have taken Basso in gladly... [...] Of course. This is a win-win if I may say so.” –Bauer*

When consumer brands partner with Basso in creative marketing campaigns, seemingly regular, everyday consumer brands can gain personality when being associated with Basso. For instance, Basso has in the past done a campaign with grocery chain Alepa, where the launch of 24-hour opening hours at a certain shop were celebrated with a 24-hour radio broadcast by Basso, aired live at the shop premises. Another example was partnering with Reissumies, a rye bread brand. While partnering with brands that are by nature similar, cooperative campaigns are easy, but as Basso’s CEO suggests, bringing a seemingly un-similar brand to the media platform in a creative, credible campaign can result in particularly good outcomes.

*“Of course there are brands with whom it’s easy to come up with things, if I may say so crudely. We for example worked with Heineken for many years and hopefully will in the future as well and it’s the kind of partnership that looks a lot like us. And it’s been extremely smooth and easy that cooperation. But another one with whom we work a lot is Alepa and that’s not like principally such a ‘cool’ brand... But I get the biggest kicks out of being able to work with, like Alepa, or a couple of years ago we worked with Reissumies. And the Reissumies case was in a way very dear to me that, like after all, it’s a rye bread. And they did this one kind of deeper thing with us after which their brand manager said that Reissumies – that she gets an enormous amount of contacting from some skiing events and city festivals, ”because you guys are so in this right now...” because they had done this one thing with Basso. So the whole rye bread was being positioned again after they had worked with Basso. And these kind of rye breads I get the biggest... So I think we can work with pretty much anything, as long as it’s done in a way that is thought out and good.” –Reunanen*

When it comes to advertising deals, the media company does not discriminate between different client prospects or choose clients based on fit. However, when forming media partner deals with external events as the company often does, the fit between event and Basso brand must be considered – Basso would not partner with an

externally organized music event that inconsistent with their own brand, and in media partnerships a good fit ensures that the externally organized content is consistent with Basso's brand. However, the most important variable that Basso needs to consider in their own events and advertising partnerships in general is the quality of content that is created as part of these deals and the consistency of that advertorial *content* with Basso's brand. The value that a media channel offers to its audiences is carefully selected, quality content. Basso as a media is co-created by partners and audiences. When it comes to co-creating with advertisers, quality control on Basso's side is important so that credibility is not compromised. In the view of Basso's managers, advertorial content – especially the closely cooperative content such as events– needs to be extremely well thought-out. This media company lives on advertising revenues and all kinds of clients are welcome. What is important at Basso, is that advertising is transparent and ideally, the media company has complete control over the quality of the advertorial content.

*“We're pretty strict as a media, that usually we make the rules to a large extent, how it's visible on our [platforms]. So of course, if there's a campaign that's been bought for our platform, we execute it according to the client's wishes, but we do a lot of “enable” type of things, so we have funding and then together with the client we think about what the event or whole concept on our platforms will be. And in principle, it's always from our initiative and our... us first. So we direct the client so that it is best represented on our Basso platforms.” –Hämäläinen*

Credibility is considered one of the central characteristics of Basso as a brand. One of the foremost adjectives used by managers to describe the Basso brand is “credible”. Therefore, for the Basso brand in particular, it is vital to control the advertising content on the platforms, selecting and to a large extent creating the content in-house. This is also the best interest of the advertiser, as they get to benefit from Basso's expertise of the target audience and what kind of content is relevant and meaningful to that audience. By allowing Basso to create the advertising content, advertisers get the kind of advertisement that has the best effect on the Basso-audience and thereby, they get the most out of the advertising deal.

*“I want us to be credible, to be meaningful, to be current. For example, if I go into this subject, I’m extremely careful when we do for example marketing partnerships, that... What we live off is credibility, both towards our advertisers, Basso brand to them, as well as our listeners, that’s why all these things have to be done really thought-out and really well. I’m quite strict on that. At the point where our advertising is for example that our hosts would be sipping on Coca Cola like “this is really good this Coca Cola today, do you like this Coca Cola?” then we’ve gone really badly wrong. So that’s why somehow this credibility is the thing that... I want to underline that.” –Reunanen*

At times, clients may have illusionary ideas about what kind of advertising content they could or should put on the radio. And Basso possesses the best knowledge about what kind of content works on *their* media channel and how the client’s brand message can be aligned with Basso’s brand messages in order to have the best effect on the audience.

*“...the client can’t know what is good radio programming, what sounds good on radio. And on the other hand, in the client’s product or thing may have some edge that works exceptionally well on the radio, and we have to kind of make those things match.” –Mäkinen*

Control over the quality of content applies strongly when the content is an event. Marketing with events is an extremely experience-oriented marketing method and thus it poses its own requirements for quality. A number of things can go wrong and these variables must be controlled as any negative experiences that consumers experience at events may be reflected on the brands associated with the event. Managers recognize that when consumers demonstrate their engagement with the media brand by actively participating in the brand events, their expectations for value are also higher.

*“A variety of things can go wrong there. Just like... the organization has to go really well so that – it’s after all the person that has in their personal time to come to some place so that person has already devoted their own time and they need to get a good*

*experience out of that. It's a whole different thing if you see a shitty ad on TV, you don't experience it like... The closer and more personal a marketing communications tool, the more important it is that it has really been thought out to the end." ... "Catering, queuing, seating, music – even all the basic things have to be in shape, let alone what the brand message in there is." –Mäkinen*

Event marketing is seen as a vehicle that must be integrated with the brand strategy as a whole. In the advertorial campaigns where the media brand itself is strongly present alongside the advertiser's brand, campaigns have to be particularly well thought out and the various goals integrated. The event itself is only a small part that is visible of a strategy that encompasses various levels and activities. Collaborative advertorial event campaigns such as the ODD Block Party have to be credible and aligned with the media brand strategy overall – they cannot just be something that is “glued on top”.

*”[Event marketing] can be so much of everything and it should always be so that the event itself is only the tip of the iceberg, it based on everything else that is done, it's visible through everything that is done that the different things support each other and they're not just some stuff that's glued on top.” –Mäkinen*

## **5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Discussion of the findings**

This case is an example of a niche media company incorporating event marketing successfully into its media branding and media selling strategy. The media company has positioned itself in the niche that caters to a certain young, urban, trendsetting crowd interested in underground music and a certain DJ culture in Finland, foremost in the capital city Helsinki. Due to the limited size of the target group, which is a relatively niche group, the company has a strategy of selling media space to advertisers based on a deeper effect on the specific target group rather than wide coverage. The way in which the company has chosen to differentiate in the eyes of the audience is that it offers the specific target group carefully selected, credible and relevant content, giving them both meaningful and entertaining experiences. In the eyes of advertising customers, the media company differentiates with a very distinct positioning in terms of target group, a deep expertise of this specific target group and their consumption habits, and extensive in-house production capabilities on multiple channels in engaging ways. As a means of providing superior value to their advertising customers, the company has a strong focus on creative, target-group customized advertising campaigns that can be designed for the specific advertising client and produced in-house in a way that is most relevant and effective to the target audience, hence producing a deeper effect on them. The case event series is exemplary of this kind of campaign, an in-house produced event series by the media company that also involved several partners and an advertising client around whose brand the campaign was built.

#### **5.1.1 Co-creating media with event marketing**

Events play an important role in the media firm's own media branding strategy, but organizing events solely for own branding purposes and to create content for audiences has proved inefficient and risky in the past. Working with partners and



offering events as advertising solutions in media selling means that Basso can produce events that serve both their advertising client's needs as well as the media company's own branding purposes in a way that is relatively risk-free financially. Basso's events therefore have several sets of goals: the goals of the advertising client, the goals of partners, and the goals of Basso. Basso's motivations for practicing event marketing can be divided into media sales goals, in other words, creating and maintaining profitable relationships with advertisers, and media branding goals designed to build and strengthen the media brand in the eyes of both audiences and advertisers.

Basso has successfully extended its brand to the live event platform and with its history of organizing successful events it has established itself to its target audience as a credible event organizer. Basso has a reputation among its audience for hosting hip live events that bring together the community that revolves around the brand. These event campaigns are now sold to advertising clients as multiplatform, holistic solutions that utilize the specific strengths of this particular media brand and its expertise of the target group and credibility and positive image within that group. In Basso's event operations, even though events have an important role in the media company's own branding, an advertising client is needed to enable events. While Basso's event marketing for its own branding purposes can be considered self-organized event marketing that fits the definitions by e.g. Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006) and Wood (2009), the role of the advertiser in the media company's event marketing is that of a sponsor-based event marketer that integrates its marketing mix elements around the event in question with the help of the media company, fitting the definitions of event marketing as defined by e.g. Kronvall and Törnroos (1998) and Taylor and Cunningham (1999). What is interesting in this particular case is that the media company fulfils various roles that usually in event marketing may belong to different entities altogether. The media company acts in the roles of media partner, event organizer and producer of the client's advertising campaign. What makes this case particularly unique is that a media company, whose focus seemingly lies in radio broadcasting, possesses characteristics of a media or advertising agency as well as a production company. While traditionally media or advertising agencies may have been the ones to make media space purchasing decisions for big companies buying advertising space and the design agencies or production companies handling the

production of campaigns, Basso has direct connections to clients and produces many of the clients campaigns in-house. This applies to various types of campaigns at Basso, including event campaigns. In this way, the company can attain closer, more cooperative relationships with advertising clients and gain revenues from not only the media space but also the production processes. Thereby, these event campaigns provide a source for a much wider range of revenues than simply selling media space for advertisements.

These kinds of cooperative relationships with advertisers have been described as a promising path for advertiser-supported media companies struggling with the commoditization of media space (Ots 2009). Rather than selling mere numbers and demographics, Basso is selling their understanding of consumers. The highly differentiated offering that Basso offers to its clients based on this understanding of the specific target group and its unique capabilities is what brings that which Keller (2003) called the “multidimensionality” of the brand – what makes Basso as a brand different and valuable to advertising customers. The case event series is a clear manifestation of this multidimensionality of the media brand.

According to Schmitt (1999), organizations that practice experiential marketing often implement eclectic methodologies, place a high emphasis on creativity and innovation and see these characteristics as their most important intellectual capital. Basso exemplifies this type of organization quite well and it has several characteristics that enable the successful implementation of event marketing strategies. On the operational side, Basso is a small company with an employee base that includes many part-time employees and interns, which makes it flexible when facing different workforce needs at different cycles in projects. The “DIY spirit” described by the managers refers to the company culture where employees take on different types of tasks and roles flexibly and this enables the implementation of production-heavy projects such as events. The creative, artistic spirit in the company culture is a fertile breeding ground for generating ideas for creative packaging of media sales deals. Since its very birth, the company has operated on various media platforms ranging from print to radio, web and live events, resulting in a strong competence on its

currently remaining platforms. The focus that the company places on in-house productions is making it increasingly competent in this area and able to offer comprehensive packages to advertising clients wanting to reach its target audience effectively. Most important of all, the media company possesses deep knowledge and expertise of their specific target audience and the kind of content they find relevant and meaningful, enabling them to create the kind of content that gets the target audience involved.

Being a small, niche media company, on the other hand, means having relatively limited resources. Previously when conducting event marketing on their own, the financial risk from event endeavours has proved too big for the company to handle. Now, partners and advertisers enable event marketing. Events are built in cooperation between partners, advertiser, and media company – all communicating their brand messages to consumers simultaneously. Audiences are an integral part of this co-creation process, taking part in the co-creating events by participating in the events and engaging in the brand community. Being able to successfully facilitate this co-creation process between the media company and its audiences, partners and advertisers is a central characteristic that enables the practice of event marketing as part of the media concept.

Chan-Olmsted (2011) suggested that for a media company operating in an advertiser-supported business model, having a strong brand should lead to increased revenues as advertisers aim to benefit from the media brand by creating customized campaigns around the brand and its content. Furthermore, in the media industry, brand extensions such as add-on products and services have emerged as an additional source of revenue and profits, even a strategic orientation to combat decreasing advertising sales. Vehicles that have previously been means for audience retention – such as Basso's events that previously served audiences – have been repositioned as an independent source of revenues and profits. (Habann et al. 2008) The ODD Block Party series was a co-branding endeavour by the media brand and an advertiser brand. It can be viewed as an extension of the media brand, a branding vehicle that has been repositioned to serve advertisers along with audiences. Due to the existing brand equity that makes

Basso an attractive brand for advertisers to build their campaigns around, the media company has been able to reposition this vehicle in such a way.

When it comes to marketing events to consumers and advertising clients, Basso's foremost strength as a media brand is that it is a brand "built on communities". Basso has established such relationships with its users that it has a community around its brand values, a group of consumers who are likely to want to attend Basso's events. Basso has the means to reach these consumers on its various platforms. Without a brand community willing to attend marketing events, the media company would have little to offer to advertising clients from events. As said earlier, co-creation with consumers is an integral part of building advertiser brand equity with events, and partnering with advertisers and partners that enable the production of events and other content has become an integral part of building audience brand equity. Events offer advertising clients a unique opportunity to reach consumers in the media company's brandfest, such as that described by McAlexander et al. (2002), and persuade and encourage consumers from that media brand community into their own. The fact that Basso holds strong media channel credibility associated with its brand within that target group means that there is a possibility that associating with Basso can transfer some of that credible image to the advertiser brand. And with Basso's deep knowledge of that target group and what kind of content really affects them, Basso can use its in-house design and production competence to produce such advertorial content that reaps the optimal benefits for the advertiser brand. These are the values that Basso can sell to advertising clients with event campaigns.

### **5.1.2 Events in strengthening the media brand – engaging the brand community**

The interview findings made it clear that media branding is a foremost objective for the media firm's event marketing. The most central way in which events build the media brand is providing a space for relationships to develop, to build and strengthen the community around the brand. Creating experiences, "happy moments" for the consumers in these events means that the media company remains meaningful to their

audience. Creating these kinds of experiences on multiple platforms, including radio, on the web and social media and in live events, means that the brand is more strongly part of the consumers' lives. Also, the company can potentially reach certain consumers on certain platforms whom it might not necessarily reach on other platforms, create experiences and be a part of their lives in some other way. Creating positive experiences for consumers at events leads to more engaged audiences. And possessing highly engaged, brand loyal audiences is the basis for achieving high media brand equity in the eyes of advertisers.

Basso's events are designed with the main intention that they foster the brand community. McAlexander et al. (2002) suggested that brand events as relationship-building efforts can have long-term impact, as events are a context where relationships develop, and relationships, in turn, are what communities are built of, and that successful brandfests enhance integration in brand community (IBC) and brand loyalty and result in differentiation and competitive advantage. Mooney and Rollins (2008) suggested that branding activities should enable customer participation in a way that is relevant to their lives, thereby engaging the consumers more richly, deeply and meaningfully. According to them, for a brand to be meaningful, consumers need to be able to co-create content and participate in communities around the brand. The fact that consumers willingly signed up and attended the ODD Block Party events indicates that consumers find these events relevant and want to be a part of those events and thereby experience the media brand values. It is a prime example of an "open brand" where consumers actively participate, co-create and form relationships. According to Mooney and Rollins, such an open brand turns the consumers into the brand's "allies", allows quick access to those audiences and improves the effectiveness of marketing activities.

The constitutive features of event marketing according to Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006, 316) were experience-orientation, self-initiation, interactivity and dramaturgy. The ODD Block Party events displayed all of these features. The events were designed to provide a fun party experience for consumers where consumers actively participate in experiencing the brand reality. Attention was paid to detail in the planning of practical

matters to make the experience pleasant for the consumer: drinks and food were served, the visual appearance of the venue was impressive, and the music was designed to enhance the mood. The result was a series of very special events to improve the consumers' subjective quality of life. The dramaturgy of the events was thought out in order to make it capture the consumers' imagination and to let them experience the lived brand reality. Events need not be grand, but they need to differ from the consumer's everyday life. This was a series of grass root events for relatively small audience groups – intimate and welcoming block parties. Specific themes were designed for each event and those themes were visible in things such as the decoration, music, and cocktail menu at each of the events. Self-initiation was evident as the event was organized by Basso together with its partners where consumers were invited. Hence, the company had control over the kinds of experiences they wanted to create for consumers at these events. The event was an informal party where consumers could interact with other attendees as well as brand representatives, facilitating interactivity inside the brand community. All these features were designed around the advertising client's Oddka brand while at the same time enlivening the partner Torikorttelit's place brand and building Basso's own brand by inviting the media brand community to experience the media brand and other associated brands in a live setting.

Consumers avoiding brand messages is a challenge we discussed earlier in the literature review in this thesis. In this case, consumers were invited to the events, and they themselves chose to sign up and participate in the events even though it was clear that the events contain brand messages that consumers may tend to avoid generally in media. These were not the kind of events consumers might just wander into by accident, such as a promotion at a shopping mall. And not only would consumers arrive at the event, they would promote the event themselves by posting pictures of themselves at the event online onto social media channels. This is a significant factor that displays the engaging nature of the event experiences. Being able to demonstrate the engagement that consumers feel towards a media brand and its events should make the media brand more valuable to potential advertising customers and partners and hence increase advertiser brand equity, since engagement with the media brand

has been shown to improve the effectiveness of advertising (Malthouse et al. 2007, Calder et al. 2009, Mersey et al. 2010).

The results from the interviews suggest that the events organized by the media company build the media brand on the audience side mainly by strengthening two of the components of *brand resonance* as defined by Keller (2001): building the audience's *sense of community* and their *active engagement*. Taking part in the events leads to consumers feeling a stronger affiliation with other people associated with the brand, while investing their time and energy into the brand. This active engagement is, according to Keller, the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty. The effects of audience brand loyalty, in turn, are essentially that which is sold to advertisers (Ots 2008). Brand loyalty is essentially the main outcome of brand equity and for media brands, high brand equity manifests as loyalty in both audiences as well as advertisers (Ots & Wolff 2008). When it comes to branding towards advertising customers, having strong audience brand equity, in other words audience loyalty, and being able to demonstrate this as Basso did with its event series is what creates competitive advantage in the competition for advertisers.

The advertiser can benefit from the brand effects associated with sponsor-based event marketing in general. Positive experiences at the event and the resulting consumer engagement are likely to lead to various positive brand effects that apply for both the media brand and the advertiser's brand. The events attracted an audience already likely to be involved with the organizing brand, Basso. Involvement with the event, associated brands or area of event has been shown to lead to more positive attitudes towards sponsoring brands (Martensen et al. 2007, Close et al. 2006). Consumers were active participants at the events, and active participation has been shown to enhance brand image and strengthen the communication process (Dregner et al. 2008, Lacey et al. 2007). At the events, consumers got to taste the sponsoring brand's products, interact with other participants and the associated brands' representatives. This kind of interaction with brands and products at events has been shown to have positive effects on brand attitudes, awareness and behaviour and develop brand relationships (Sneath et al. 2005, Whelan & Wohlfeil 2006). This research cannot

establish whether the sponsoring brand Oddka actually experienced these kinds of brand effects, but based on the existing knowledge and the characteristics of the event series that exemplified factors such as active participation and interaction established in research to bring about such effects, we can carefully assume that such effects may have resulted. These kinds of results would make association with Basso and its events valuable for the advertiser, strengthening Basso's advertiser brand equity.

The brand effects achieved from advertising in a certain engaging media depend also on the quality of the advertorial content (Cunningham et al. 2006). With Basso's expertise of the target group, the credibility of Basso as a media brand inside this target group and Basso's in-house production capabilities mean that Basso is able to create such advertising content that is likely to have the optimal effect on that specific niche target group – again, making advertising on Basso's platforms more effective and increasing the brand value.

Image transfer from event to sponsoring brand is a possibility established in event marketing research. Furthermore, from their association with Basso there is a possibility for image transfer from the media brand onto the advertiser brand (as that suggested by Ots & Wolff 2008). The findings suggest that image transfer is indeed considered an important factor in cooperative event endeavours between Basso and its advertisers and partners – advertisers and partners have reported to experiencing positive brand results from their association with Basso in the past and transferring of the credible image from Basso's events to Oddka was considered by Basso's managers to be one of the decisive factors in Pernod Ricard's decision to promote their brand in cooperation with Basso.

According to the study by Ots and Wolff (2008), for advertising customers, the most important contribution to the value of a media brand is based on audience loyalty towards the media brand, clarity of the audience profile and answering to certain consumption patterns and needs. In Basso's case, advertiser brand equity is created foremost from having a very specific target group, demonstrating the loyalty of this



audience by engaging consumers on channels such as live events, and answering to the multiplatform consumption patterns of the consumer in that target group – creating relevant content for them both online, offline and live. By creating successful consumer events that demonstrate audience engagement and a loyal brand community, the media brand should gain stronger advertiser brand equity.

### 5.1.3 Events in creating competitive advantage for a niche media company



FIGURE 7: Model of Branding Media with Event Marketing

The graph above presents the final model of branding media with event marketing, which is based on the theoretical framework presented earlier in this thesis together with the empirical findings. It differs from the initial framework in two ways: Firstly, brand community was found to be equally central as a result of event marketing alongside audience engagement, and it has been added to the model as a consequence. Secondly, the possibility of image transfer from advertiser brand to media brand was not supported by data and was thus removed from the model. Audience engagement has been established in previous research as a central determinant of the value of a

media brand for advertisers. Based on this research, I would suggest that media managers consider media brand community equally important and one of the main building blocks of their overall brand equity. A brand community is in a way both a prerequisite as well as a result of successful event marketing in media selling and media branding.

Event marketing is a method for creating media engagement which should strengthen both audience- and advertiser customer-based brand equity for media company as well as effectively serving the branding purposes of the advertising client. This media company has adopted an advertiser-customer-centric viewpoint where they provide not only the eyeballs, but also – and most importantly – a deeper effect on the target audience through media engagement. One of the main competitive advantages for this company is the strong brand community that it holds, and events play a central role in strengthening and maintaining the relationships within this community. Niche media companies should hold the expertise of their target audience that enables them to help advertisers gain additional value from not only media engagement and the existing media brand community but also by creating the advertorial content that best serves and affects the target audience. Being able to offer advertisers advertorial content creation and campaign planning and production that are optimized for the target niche means that the media company provides a highly differentiated offering to advertisers. This creates competitive advantage when competing with bigger media companies and wider coverage.

Possessing audience brand equity is prerequisite for strong advertiser brand equity when the value being sold to advertisers is the loyalty of consumers. Differentiating the media brand with events helps the company to build profitable relationships with advertisers, strengthen and build a media brand that is attractive to advertisers, and foster brand community that advertisers want to reach. Engagement of the target group with the media brand and with the live events should increase the effectiveness of advertising messages associated with the event and with the media brand in general. Reaching highly engaged audiences, in turn, should justify premium ad prices in media selling.

From the media management point of view, the suggested research model describes how co-creation of events together with partners, advertisers and audiences, events that facilitate experiences, participation, interaction, involvement, dramaturgy, self-initiation, co-creation and a social setting lead to audience engagement and a stronger brand community, strengthening the media brand as well as making advertising in that media more effective, thereby effectively strengthening the advertiser brand.

Media engagement and a sense of community within the audience generate audience loyalty, which should ultimately lead to competitive advantage for a media company in the market for audiences and advertisers. Advertisers want to reach loyal audiences. By demonstrating high engagement and a strong brand community within the target audience, a media company is able to offer advertisers a highly differentiated offering and superior value. Furthermore, image transfer may occur from event to advertiser brand as well as from media brand to advertiser brand and key partners' brands. When a media brand is highly differentiated and holds high audience brand equity, image transfer from that media brand and its events should be a desirable outcome for companies advertising in that media and a competitive advantage for the media company. In the initial framework, we held questionable whether an image transfer may occur from advertiser brand to media brand, and this possibility was not supported by the research data. Instead, the data suggested that images from the events themselves and advertorial content in general might transfer to the media brand. This is why quality of the content and fit between the content (i.e. events) and media brand is especially important.

Interesting findings adding new knowledge to the theoretical framework can be found from the moderating factors. The foremost moderating factor in image transfer was quality of the advertorial content and this is what managers placed a large amount of emphasis on. Fit is a variable that effects the image transfer process and it was somewhat a problematic variable to analyse in this case. Fit between the advertising brand and media brand was not considered such an important factor by media

managers since the image transfer is seen to occur from the media brand and the event to the advertising brand, instead of the other way round. Managers stated that they would not turn down prospective advertising clients based on poor fit. It is, however, likely that fit is a factor considered by the advertising client when choosing between advertising media, and hence poor fit is an issue that the managers of Basso rarely encounter. However, fit is a factor when choosing other key partners apart from the advertiser for closely cooperative event endeavours. Fit indeed has an effect on how easy it is to plan a campaign for the Basso platform and in closely cooperative relationships a good fit makes things go smoothly. A surprising finding was the opinion that particularly good results can be achieved when the companies are seemingly un-similar but they are brought together particularly well with a creative campaign. Interestingly, managers also viewed that creative campaigns featuring high quality advertorial content that is customized for the particular advertiser and channel can compensate for a poor initial fit between partnering brands, and thereby result in particularly positive image transfer outcomes.

The most important variable for the media company to control is the quality of the advertorial content that is considered to affect their media channel credibility, which in turn, affects the media brand equity. For a media brand that lives on “credibility” as a core value, content quality control is especially important when it comes to advertising content. By creating customized, creative campaigns that align the various brand messages, brand effects can be optimized for the advertising client as well as the media brand. The important congruence relationship for the media managers was actually the fit between the advertising campaign and the media brand. The quality of the campaigns and their congruency with the media brand image are what ensures that the media channel credibility is not compromised and also that positive image transfer effects from the event to the media brand itself can take place.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

This study confirms that event marketing is a vehicle used for media branding and as such, it can provide valuable ways for niche media companies to differentiate their

offering, build brand equity and effectively compete against bigger media providers that have wider coverage. Our main research question asked, “*How does event marketing create competitive advantage for a niche media company?*” The answer to this question was sought with the aid of a sub-question: “*How does event marketing strengthen the media brand?*” In the dual markets that media firms operate in, we needed to look at this question with regard to both advertisers and audiences. In this thesis, scattered media branding, media engagement and event marketing literature were brought together in a common framework that helped to develop the final model that visualizes the co-creation process of event marketing that serves the branding needs of the media company and its advertising partner.

Event marketing strengthens the media brand by creating audience engagement and strengthening the brand community. Engaged audiences mean better value for advertisers as advertising in the media becomes more effective. Events that are co-created by different partners with aligned brand messages can yield positive brand effects for all the brands involved resulting from the engaging nature of the consumer experiences at events. Advertisers can also benefit from image transfer as the images associated with the event and the media brand can be transferred to the advertiser brand. The engagement of the brand community at events should demonstrate audience loyalty, which should increase the value of the media brand in the eyes of advertisers as they can benefit from the media brand’s high audience brand equity through image transfer effects at events. Offering such campaign solutions where these brand effects can take place is what creates competitive advantage for the case media company in the market for advertisers.

When creating events as advertising solutions, the central moderating factors that the media company needs to control are the fit between the advertorial content, i.e. the events, and the media brand and the quality of the advertorial content in general. Controlling these is a means to ensure that advertorial events will not negatively affect the audience media brand equity. Furthermore, high-quality creative advertorial content can compensate for a poor fit between media brand and advertising brand, resulting in particularly good image transfer outcomes for the advertiser brand.

Having a very distinct target group and being able to demonstrate the engagement of this target group in events and the resulting advertising effectiveness in the media, and being able to offer these kinds of solutions to advertisers gives the media brand a clear differentiation and competitive advantage in the market for advertisers. Differentiating the media brand with events helps the company to build relationships with audiences, which when successful, should lead to an engaged brand community that advertisers want to reach. And that, in turn, should lead to more profitable relationships with advertisers.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

This thesis offers an example of a case where a niche media company incorporates event marketing successfully into its media branding and media selling strategy and thus provides valuable implications for managers of media companies and niche media companies in particular. This study underlines the possibilities that event marketing offers for niche media companies to differentiate their brand and strengthen their media brand equity in the eyes of both consumers and advertisers. Working with partners and offering events as advertising solutions to clients in media selling makes it possible to create events that serve both the media company's as well as the advertiser's branding purposes.

Niche media companies have the possibility of reaping greater benefits from their expertise of the specific target niche by taking on a more substantial role in the planning and production of campaigns for their platforms and offering clients comprehensive packages. Deeply cooperative relationships with partners and clients provide opportunities for revenue streams beyond just selling media space – revenues from the production processes of creative campaigns on multiple platforms. Being able to offer complex, unique and customized solutions such as events which competitors cannot duplicate paves way for closer, more cooperative and lasting relationships with advertising clients and competitive advantage against competitors

with wider coverage. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of their audience customer needs – the ways in which they consume media content and the kind of content that affects them – is a niche media company’s key competence.

Events are a complex and production-heavy way of operating and companies should recognize the importance of co-creation among different partners and the value it can provide by allowing the media company to focus on its specific expertise as much as possible. Furthermore, working with partners offers the possibility of reducing the financial risk associated with events. Niche media companies that struggle with limited marketing resources can especially benefit from co-creation of events between different partners, clients and audiences.

Advertisers and partners can benefit from the media company’s ability to create the kind of quality content that will be relevant and effective for the target audience thus maximising the effectiveness of advertorial content for the target audience in question. When working with partners and advertisers, media companies need to carefully control the quality of advertorial content for the sake of maintaining their own media channel credibility and enabling the optimal image transfer benefits to take place.

Operating with events requires certain capabilities and characteristics such as flexibility inside the company’s resources as well as strong competence in live productions. Yet, the most important prerequisite for successfully incorporating events into the media branding and media sales strategy is having some form of an existing media brand community. The community around the media brand and the engagement of consumers within this community are essentially the main values that events can provide for the advertisers and partners involved. Niche media companies should focus their branding efforts on building a strong brand community among their audiences, which will then open up more opportunities for providing superior value to advertising clients. When a brand community exists, events are an effective way to

bring about further positive brand effects, build and strengthen the brand community, engage consumers and make them more committed to the brand.

Audience engagement offers undisputed value to advertisers, and demonstrating audience engagement with the media brand to potential advertisers should be the focus of media branding. Audience engagement and having a strong brand community are the factors that provide substantial competitive advantage. Being able to demonstrate a brand community and audience engagement of a clearly differentiated audience profile at live events should provide the basis for gaining more advertising deals and charging premium prices for advertising – thus, making it in the highly competitive field of media as a niche media company.

#### **5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The biggest contribution of this study is that it brings together the scattered literature on event marketing, media branding and media engagement to form the basis for future empirical validation of the proposed final model.

The empirical research sample was a relatively small one due to the small size of the company where few people had experience and knowledge of the specific case event series. Also, due to the fact that some of the requested interviews were refused, the sample turned out to be smaller than it might have optimally been. Therefore, the sample size and its effect on the findings must be considered. The nature of qualitative inquiry is usually that it focuses in depth on a relatively small sample (Patton 1980, 169). In this particular case, the sample was deemed sufficient to provide a detailed in depth description of the case. Furthermore, data triangulation was used to supplement the interview data with other data sources and strengthen the study design. However, in order to provide more general findings of the phenomenon, more managers should be interviewed in multiple cases. This would help to learn of



any variations that might occur and might be of contrast to the model carefully suggested in this thesis.

The brand effects from events for Basso are mostly judged on a gut-feel basis and the company does not have comprehensive procedures for measuring brand effects. Therefore we do not have the data to establish whether the desired brand effects have been achieved, and that was neither the aim of this thesis. Rather, it has been to establish the possibilities that event marketing offers for branding a niche media company. Future research could be conducted to attempt to capture and measure the actual brand effects that have taken place at media marketing events.

This study was conducted from the media company's point of view, taking into account the advertiser's and key partners' point of views. Future studies could address this issue from the demand side, perhaps examining consumers' experiences and measuring media engagement in these events to find out the true brand effects achieved with event marketing. Another point of view to delve more deeply into would be that of the sponsoring advertiser to find out how media brand equity is constructed with events in the eyes of the advertiser. This study could also take into account the moderating variables and how advertisers perceive their importance in the image transfer process.

In this study, the important congruence relationship that media managers felt needed to be taken into account in advertising campaigns was the fit between the advertising campaign and the media brand. They felt that the quality of the campaigns and their congruency with the media brand image are what ensures that the media channel credibility is not compromised. As traditional media advertising is losing ground and cooperative, creative campaigns are increasing, the importance of campaign-brand congruence in media branding could be a relevant subject for further research.

The outcome of my research is a deeper understanding of a case in which a Finnish niche media company uses event marketing to build their brand and create competitive advantage in the increasing competition for audiences and advertisers in the media industry, offering some insights into the current practices and motivations of managers in the case company and also some of the characteristics that enable the company to practice successful event marketing. This thesis provides an overview of the existing literature related to this field, bringing together media branding, media engagement and event marketing research in a comprehensive model. Most of all it highlights the relevance of this phenomenon and forms a basis for investigating further relevant questions that need to be addressed in future studies. This was an intensive case study that looks deeply into one specific bounded system and further research should be conducted in this field in order to validate the carefully suggested research model in a more general sense.

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# Appendix 1: Interviews

## Interviewees

*Riikka Reunanen, CEO, Oy Basso Media Ltd.* Reunanen has been CEO of Basso for one year. Previously she has been employed in the company's media sales department as commercial director. Altogether, she has spent three years in the company.

*Kasper Hämäläinen, technical producer, Oy Basso Media Ltd.* Hämäläinen is in charge of the technical production of Basso's campaigns. He has been this position for two years, and altogether he has spent three years at Basso.

*Katri Mäkinen, key account manager, Oy Basso Media Ltd.* Mäkinen has been in this position for less than a year, but previously she has been employed at one of Basso's advertising client companies, cooperating with Basso on the client side in alcohol marketing. She also has a background of working in the marketing and sales department of a large media company.

*Peggy Bauer, operative director, Torikorttelit.* Bauer is in charge of the revitalizing program for Torikorttelit, a project of the city of Helsinki. She has been involved in the project for three years.

*Aleksi Jyrälä, DJ and radio show host, Basso / SMOOD.* Jyrälä is a freelance DJ, radio show host and event producer who hosts a weekly radio show on Basso that begun in 2014. He has been in the radio broadcasting and event industry for five years.

## Interview guide for Basso's managers

Background questions about the interviewee

- Role in the company
- How long he/she has worked for the company
- Role in event operations

### Background questions about Basso as a company

- Effects of the "media revolution" on the company
- How operations have changed during the past years
- What are the core operations
- Role of events in operations, how has this changed over the years
- Needs of advertisers, how has this changed
- Needs of consumers, how has this changed
- Basso's strengths as a advertising medium or partner

### Basso's event operations

- How long events have been part of operations
- Motivations for event marketing
- If events have grown in importance, what factors have led to this
- Is growth to be expected in the importance of events
- Financial significance of events, how has this changed
- Advertisers' desires from a media nowadays, how has this changed
- Demand for events among advertising clients

### Basso brand

- What significance do events have in regard to the media brand
- How events support / build the brand
- How consumers create the brand
- How advertisers create the brand
- With what kind of companies is partnering in events possible/desirable (co-branding, fit)
- How partners benefit/harm from each other from events
- How do events create competitive advantage for the media

## Value creation

- What consumers get out of events
- What advertisers get out of events
- What partners get out of events

## ODD Block Party event series

- Initiation
- Describing the event series
- Central goals
- Planning process (by whom, how)
- Execution process (by whom, how)
- How goals were met, result follow-up
- How co-creation was enabled
- What different platforms the campaign was visible in, e.g. video, social media, etc.

## Visions for the future

- How the interviewee pictures the future of media selling
- The future developments in Basso's operations
- In media companies in general

## **Interview guide for partnering managers**

### Background of the interviewee

- Role in the company
- How long he/she has worked for the company or in the field

## Background about the company interviewee represents

- Field
- Core operations
- Role of events in company's operations, has this changed
- Target groups

## Partnering with Basso

- How long have they been partnering
- How the partnership works
- What role events play in partnership
- Initiation of partnership (by whom / how)
- What makes Basso an interesting partner prospect
- What factors are considered when choosing partnering media brand
- What factors considered when choosing advertising media
- How partnering with Basso benefits the interviewee's company (monetary / image)
- How partnering with the interviewee's company benefits Basso
- What special expertise does Basso bring
- Partnerships with other media companies?
- Advertising in other media?
- Partnering with a media generally, benefits/challenges, has this changed
- Visions/goals for future partnership with Basso

## ODD Blockparty series from partner's point of view

- Did the interviewee attend the events
- Partner's role in the event series
- What kind of impressions did it leave
- How do events support the Basso brand
- How do they benefit the partner's brand
- How do they benefit the partner's customers

### Basso brand from the partner's point of view

- How the interviewee sees the Basso brand
- Role of the partner play in building the media brand
- Role of events in building the media brand
- Basso brand compared to other media companies
- Is Basso brand reflected on the interviewee's brand / vice versa? How is this visible



## Appendix 2: Coding categories

- Developments in Basso as a company
- Developments in event marketing in general
- Challenges in the media industry and media selling
- Role of events as part of all operations
- Events as part of media selling
- Events as part of media branding
  - Experiences / Engagement
  - Dramaturgy
  - Interaction
  - Participation
  - Involvement
  - Self-initiation
  - Community / social setting
  - Co-branding, co-creation
- The ODD Blockparty series
  - Initiation
  - Objectives
  - Concept / package
  - Results
- Value for advertiser from events
- Value for key partners from events
- Value for key partners from working with Basso in general
- Image transfer
- Fit / congruence
- Media channel credibility
- Media brand
- Capabilities for event producing
- Media brand from key partners' point of view
- Other creative marketing endeavours
- Future developments