Consumption experiences have attracted great attention from different fields: consumer research, marketing management, brand management, retailing and so forth. Today, managers and practitioners widely regard the creation of experiences for consumers as an important managerial tool, in order to catch their attention and differentiate strategically from competitors. Companies can create highly valuable experiences for their customers by using a broad range of operational tools, especially devised to produce emotions and involvement. This paper focuses on one of these elements, events, which by definition provide participants with emotional and cognitive holistic experiences, by immersing people in complex polysensorial and social contexts (Schmitt, 1999). During events, consumers are truly immersed in a social consumption situation which can be planned and defined in great detail, according to brand values. Events indeed provide an opportunity to be face-to-face with consumers and engage them in the organization, its brands and the community, by creating a social setting for attendees which helps raising their involvement level (Close, Finney, Lacey, Sneath, 2006). Events are therefore considered the best marketing tool to increase ROI, after direct mail (Source: Business Week, 2005). Nowadays events have been growing considerably as a favorite promotional tactic (Sneath, Finley, Close, 2005). Moreover, events strongly engage customers on the level of their personal interests and concerns (Source: Jack Morton, 2006). Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of events in relation to brand image, there is a lack of literature on the measurement of their effectiveness. Neither management practice nor research has established clear objectives for event marketing and formal ratings of their effectiveness (Javalgi, Gross, Traylor and Lampman, 1994). The most common measure to evaluate the success of any event is attendance, which does not take into consideration whether the event actually delivered the particular message the firm wanted to put over – the specific experiential goal – and is therefore clearly unsuitable to explain the impact of the experience undergone by participants on the perceived brand positioning (Gartner and Lime, 2000). To investigate the effectiveness of events, changes in brand positioning must also be measured. We therefore intend to fill this gap and, specifically, we have investigated the effects of an event especially designed to be very experiential by creating intense social relationships between participants, in order to contribute effectively to the building of brand image. To this purpose, we have introduced new ways of testing the effectiveness of consumers’ participation in a highly social event in building brand positioning. In particular, we have run a field experiment structured as a before-after design with control group (Ryals and Wilson, 2005), aiming at measuring the impact of experiential marketing investments in events on enhancing brand image. To test the model structural equation models are used. The experiment undertaken demonstrates that events can contribute to brand positioning actions, since they are able to convey clear, straightforward messages and to lay the ground for more sophisticated, complex and repeated communication. Moreover, the analysis confirms how events can be a
very helpful tool for companies that want to get in touch with their customers and create experiences in which consumers can be
directly involved. Our findings show that emotions such as happiness and love, as well as actual involvement in the activity, are
important drivers of consumers’ brand attitude and the most functionalist dimension of positioning. Social events emerge as a
powerful tool to convey communicative messages. The individual social orientation plays a relevant but not crucial role in shaping
people’s experience at the event, allowing involvement and permeability to the message also for not social prone people. This study
introduces new measurements of the impact of events on brand image according to an experiential framework, leading to a greater
understanding of the factors influencing the success of events, which can be useful to plan future campaigns specifically targeted to
create social experiences for the audience. [1] The authors gratefully acknowledge support by SDA Bocconi School of Management
and the kind collaboration provided by the managers of the companies involved. Correspondence should be addressed to Michela
Addis, Associate Professor of Marketing, Faculty of Economics, University of Rome 3, Via Silvio D’Amico 77, 00145 Rome, Italy,
ph: +39-06-57114622, fax: +39-06-57114797; e-mail: maddis@uniroma3.it

[to cite]:
Michela Addis, Giulia Miniero, Irene Scopelliti, and Isabella Soscia (2007), "Enhancing Social Experiences to Build Brand
Image?", in E - European Advances in Consumer Research Volume 8, eds. Stefania Borghini, Mary Ann McGrath, and Cele

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13999/eacr/vol8/E-08

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in
part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Consumption experiences have attracted great attention from different fields: consumer research, marketing management, brand management, retailing and so forth. Today, managers and practitioners widely regard the creation of experiences for consumers as an important managerial tool, in order to catch their attention and differentiate strategically from competitors.

Companies can create highly valuable experiences for their customers by using a broad range of operational tools, especially devised to produce emotions and involvement. This paper focuses on one of these elements, events, which by definition provide participants with emotional and cognitive holistic experiences, by plunging people into complex multisensory and social contexts (Schmitt, 1999). During events, consumers are truly immersed in a social consumption situation which can be planned and defined in great detail, according to brand values. Events indeed provide an opportunity for companies to engage in face-to-face interactions with consumers and let them get involved in its brands and community, by creating a social setting helping attendees raising their involvement level (Close, Finney, Lacey, Sneath, 2006). Events are therefore considered the best marketing tool to increase ROI, after direct mail (Source: Business Week, 2005).

Nowadays events have been growing considerably as a desired promotional tactic (Sneath, Finley, Close, 2005). Moreover, events strongly engage customers in the level of their personal interests and concerns (Source: Jack Morton, 2006). Despite the widely acknowledged opportunities created by events in relation to brand image, there is a lack of literature on the measurement of their effectiveness. Neither management practice nor research has established clear objectives for event marketing and a formal rating of their efficacy (Javalgi, Gross, Traylor and Lampman, 1994). The most common measure to evaluate the success of any event is the event attendance, which does not take into consideration whether the event actually delivered the specific message the firm wanted to put over--the specific experiential goal--and it is therefore clearly unsuitable to explain the impact of the experience undergone by participants on the perceived brand positioning (Gartner and Lime, 2000). We intend to fill this gap, and propose that in order to investigate the effectiveness of events, changes in brand positioning must also be measured. Specifically, we have analyzed the effects of an event designed to be highly experiential as it creates intense social relationships between participants, in order to contribute effectively to the building of brand image. To this purpose, we have introduced new ways of testing the effectiveness of consumers’ participation in a highly social and experiential event in building brand positioning. In particular, we have run a field experiment structured as a before after design with control group (Ryals and Wilson, 2005), aiming at measuring the impact of experiential marketing investments in events on enhancing brand image. To test the different hypothesis structural equation models are used.

The experiment undertaken demonstrates that events can contribute to brand positioning actions, since they are able to convey clear, straightforward messages and to lay the ground for more sophisticated, complex and repeated communication. Moreover, the analysis confirms how events can be a very helpful tool for companies that want to get in touch with their customers and create experiences in which consumers can be directly involved.

Our findings show that emotions such as happiness and love, as well as actual involvement in the activity, are important drivers of consumers’ brand attitude and the most functionalist dimension of positioning. Social events emerge as a powerful tool to convey communicative messages. The individual social orientation plays a relevant but not crucial role in shaping people’s experience at the event, allowing involvement and permeability to the message also for people who are not socially prone. This study introduces a new measurement method of the impact of events on brand image according to an experiential framework, leading to a greater understanding of the factors influencing the success of events, that can be useful to plan future campaigns specifically targeted to create social experiences for the audience.