

Does Flow Influence the Brand Image in Event Marketing?

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Event marketing is considered a relatively novel marketing tool. In contrast to conventional communication strategies, event marketing features the active participation of target groups in the communication process. This feature in particular has not been subject to sophisticated empirical studies so far. In this article, based on research findings about attitude toward the advertisement, a model for the explanation of the effects of flow experience during marketing events is developed and tested with partial least squares structural equation modeling. The results suggest that the particular advantage of event marketing can be used successfully to influence the brand image.

INTRODUCTION

During the last few years, the term event marketing has been used extensively to describe different phenomena, like events as products, sales promotions, or sponsorships (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2005). In contrast, in this article, the term event marketing is understood exclusively in the sense of a communication tool whose purpose is to disseminate a company's marketing messages by involving the target groups in experiential activities. This means that their members are themselves active during a so-called marketing event, e.g., by doing sports or being creative, thus offering the opportunity for social interaction among the participants as well as between participants and the company (Close, Finney, Lacey, and Sneath, 2006). These marketing events are organized by the companies themselves and can focus on different "event objects/" such as brands, product lines, or the company itself. An example for a marketing event is the worldwide series of "Red Bull Flugtag" organized by the energy drink company Red Bull during which the participants jump from a ramp in a do-it-yourself flying machine into a lake and can win prizes in different categories (e.g., longest jump, most original flying machine). In this way,

the brand is trying to express the advertising message "Red Bull vitalizes the body and mind."

These observations imply that event marketing has to be clearly distinguished from event sponsorship. Even if both communication strategies use events to achieve their respective goals, marketing events are self-staged while event sponsorship involves the use of events staged by a third party independent of the company (an event organizer) to convey the messages aimed at the target group (e.g., the Olympic Games organized by the IOC). Therefore, in contrast to event marketing, the communication of the marketing message in event sponsorship is subject to the restrictions defined by the sponsorship contract between event sponsor and organizer (e.g., number and size of perimeters) (Mau, Silberer, and Weihe, 2006). Further restrictions result from the spectators of an event usually not paying much attention to the sponsor's message. Correspondingly, the short contact period of the target group with the advertising medium limits the content of the message in most cases to the display of a logo or a slogan in the event context (Lardinoit and Derbaix, 2001). This means that event sponsorship is not suitable for transmitting extensive

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information whereas in event marketing, due to the self-staging of the event, the active participation of the target group members, and their intense social interaction with the company, means that the company can communicate even detailed product information. Furthermore, the organizers of major events frequently try to win a large number of sponsors in order to maximize their profit (e.g., the Olympic Summer Games 2004 in Athens were supported by more than 30 sponsors in four different categories). Even if in such cases the selected sponsors come from different fields, a company competes with the event's other sponsors for the attention of the target groups, which potentially affects the communicative impact in a negative way. With regard to big events we must add that the communication efforts of the official sponsors are affected by their competitors' ambush marketing activities, again threatening the identification of the sponsor (Kinney and McDamel, 1996). Because marketing events are staged by the company itself or by a commissioned service provider, employing this communication tool can help the company minimize the number of competing messages or even completely rule them out. Finally, while this is rarely possible in event sponsorship, company marketing events make it easier to actively include the target group in the communication process, thus favorably promoting the communicative impact.

Event marketing's increasing popularity among marketers is caused by changes in the marketing environment as less attention is paid to conventional advertising or as moves grow toward experiential consumption (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2005). This is associated with growing scientific interest in this communication tool. This is particularly true with regard to the evaluation of the effects of marketing events.

Event marketing's increasing popularity among marketers is caused by changes in the marketing environment as less attention is paid to conventional advertising or as moves grow toward experiential consumption.

A review of the literature reveals that there are only a few empirically-backed attempts to explain directly the effects of marketing events (Close, Firiney, Lacey, and Sneath, 2006; Mau, Silberer, and Weihe, 2006; Sneath, Finney, and Close, 2005). Mainly these studies concentrate on how the attitude *toward* or the Image *of* the event object (e.g., the brand or the company) are influenced. In addition, a crucial feature of event marketing—the active participation of the target group in the communication of the marketing message—is neglected.

This article is aimed at advancing knowledge about the impacts of event marketing. Therefore, the construct flow experience has been included in an explanatory model with the image of the brand organizing the event as the target variable. Outlined in the following section are: the model development, the method, the measures applied, and the results and implications of an empirical study, which has been performed to test the model with partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

The image concept is considered as a multi-dimensional attitude construct that represents all the noncorrelated denotative and connotative attribute associations related to an object (Biel, 1992; Ferrand and Pages, 1996; Keller, 1993). Because event marketing is a communication tool mainly aimed

at addressing customers emotionally, it seems rather suitable for influencing the connotative aspect of brand image. Due to the lack of appropriate models, the assessment of this assumption makes it necessary to look at findings concerning other communication tools.

In this respect, the attitude toward advertising research marks the starting point. Several studies and meta-analyses on this issue (Brown and Stayman, 1992; Heath and Gaeth, 1994; Muehling and McCann, 1993) assert an influence of "Attitude toward the Advertisement" (A_{ad}) on the advertised brand (Attitude toward the Brand, A_{brand}). Furthermore, the effects of emotions caused by the advertisement were assessed (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer, 1999). It was found that the emotions affect both A_{ad} and A_{brand} .

Because image is understood as a multi-dimensional attitude construct, these insights can be applied to the process of image manipulation. Because both A_{ad} and emotions are affective constructs, changes in the connotative image component are to be expected. The interpretation of A_{ad} as the image of the marketing event and, in addition, the transfer of the above-mentioned results from A_{ad} research to the issue of event marketing yield the following assumptions: First, the emotions caused by the marketing event influence the event's image (in the sense of A_{ad}) on the connotative dimension. Second, the emotions caused by the marketing event influence the image of the

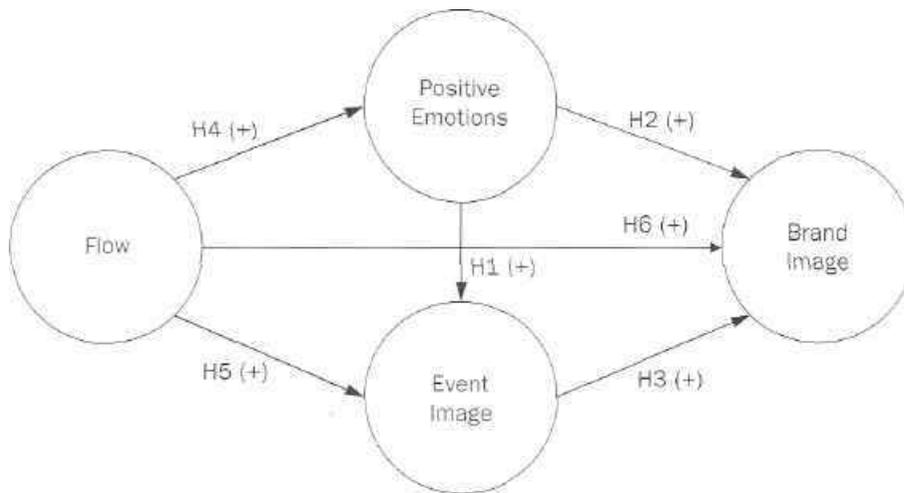


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

event object (in the sense of $A_{L,rand}$) on the connotative dimension. Third, the image of the event (in the sense of $A_{,L}$) influences the image of the event object (in the sense of A_{brand}) on the connotative dimension. This leads to the following set of hypotheses (see Figure 1):

- H1: The more positive the perceived emotions of an event participant are, the more positive is his or her evaluation of the event's image on the connotative dimension.
- H2: The more positive the perceived emotions of an event participant are, the more positive is his or her evaluation of the brand image on the connotative image dimension.
- H3: The more positive an event participant's evaluation of the event's image on the connotative dimension is, the more positive is his or her evaluation of the brand image on the connotative image dimension.

The aim of incorporating the active experience of the event message in the model

development results in the idea of focusing on the construct of flow. This phenomenon, first described by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), is related to individuals' subjective experience of different everyday situations. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1975) it is a highly enjoyable psychological state that refers to "the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (p. 36) in an activity. Flow occurs during activities (e.g., sports, creative work) whose requirements correspond to the abilities of the performer (i) that present a clear activity structure (ii) and immediate feedback on the success or failure of the activity (iii) and facilitate an easy concentration on the task (iv). During the flow experience the individuals involved are fully concentrating (a) and absent-minded (b) by losing all sense of time (c). They also have the impression that their consciousness and activity are merging (d). In addition, they have the subjective impression of having their activity under control (e) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Jackson, 1992; Jackson and Eklund, 2004; Webster, Trevino, and Ryan, 1993).

In marketing research the issue of flow has so far only been employed to explain

the use of software (e.g., Trevino and Webster, 1992; Webster, Trevino, and Ryan, 1993) and the internet (e.g., Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004; Novak, Hoffman, and Duchachek, 2003; Novak, Hoffman, and Yung, 2000). Further empirical evidence derives from different social science disciplines where various studies show a positive relationship between flow and a multitude of other theoretical constructs (e.g., Clarke and Haworth, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989; Ellis, Voelkl, and Morris, 1994). Our model is particularly focused on the relationship between flow and the affective experience of a specific situation (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989; Ellis, Voelkl, and Morris, 1994; Karageorghis, Vlachopoulos, and Terry, 2000), because this leads to the assumption that there is a positive influence of the flow experience on emotions. With regard to event marketing, the conclusion can be drawn that the visitors to an event have positive emotions during a flow experience;

- H4: The stronger the active flow experience of an event participant is, the more positive is his or her perception of emotions.

Furthermore, it is assumed that persons experiencing flow also positively evaluate the situation they are in, which leads with regard to marketing events to the following hypothesis:

- H5: The stronger the active flow experience of an event participant is, the more positive is his or her evaluation of the event's image on the connotative dimension.

Finally, it is very possible that not only the situation, but also the "cause" of the experience, is evaluated positively. If the organizer of an event is seen as the "cause," this leads to our final hypothesis:

Flow is a highly enjoyable psychological state that refers to “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” in an activity.

H6: The stronger the active flow experience of an event participant is, the more positive is his or her evaluation of the brand image on the connotative image dimension.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Method

The subject of investigation consisted of a series of street-soccer tournaments organized by a large and well-known German chain of shopping centers (event object). The members of the target group—11- to 15-year-old youngsters—had the opportunity to participate in 10 minute matches between groups of up to six teams. During the tournament, the brand name was communicated through perimeter advertising, a presenter frequently mentioning the name of the retail chain, and T-shirts with the logo of the event and the company. Four hundred sixty-six participants at 5 out of 194 event locations were asked to fill in a standardized questionnaire. The questionnaires of 338 (72.5 percent) participants were accepted for the data analyses.

Operationalization of model constructs

As Siepke (2005) and Koufaris (2002) point out, there is no generally accepted Operationalization of the *flow* construct so far. Therefore, in the present research it was operationalized on the basis of the five characteristics (a) to (e) of the construct outlined above.

While characteristic (a) was operationalized as an independent dimension “concentration,” due to their similar con-

tents, the flow characteristics (b) to (d) were combined to one dimension called “absent-mindedness.” Finally, taking into account the object of investigation, characteristic (e) resulted in a third dimension called “control of the (soccer) game.” The selection of items for measuring these three dimensions was based on existing scales (e.g., Jackson and Eklund, 2004; Jackson and Marsh, 1996) from which 18 items were generated.

Subsequently, the scale was reduced on the basis of a pretest with 73 participants in the event series. A procedure similar to Likert’s (1932) method of scale development (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005) was employed to make sure that only items actually discriminating between respondents who experienced flow and those who did not reach that state were selected for final measurement. Table 1 shows the resulting eight items.

To operationalize the event participants’ perceived emotions, an extensive list of affective adjectives was first collected by means of a literature analysis (e.g., Aaker, Stayman, and Vezina, 1988; Clore and Ortony, 1988; Edell and Burke, 1987). Because marketing events are aimed at positively emotionalizing their audiences, the selection was focused on positive items, which were subsequently reduced during a discussion by experts applying criteria like similarity in meaning, emotionality, and comprehensibility. This procedure and exploratory factor analyses performed with the pretest data resulted in a reduced scale consisting of seven items.

Because it was decided to measure the connotative dimensions of the event’s and the retail chain’s respective attribute-based images as well, it was assessed during further discussion whether the above-mentioned collection of affective adjectives was also applicable to the measurement of these two constructs. We made sure that the event and the event object were evaluated using the same items in order to track down a possible image transfer from the event to the brands involved (which is not subject of this article). This time, the findings, together with exploratory factor analyses on the basis of the pretest data led to a reduction of the two identical scales to 11 items, respectively.

All constructs discussed here were measured applying 5-point rating scales (from “totally agree” to “totally disagree”). After the scale development process has been briefly outlined in the following section, the modeling for the structural equation analysis with PLS is explained.

In order not to measure flow as an unidimensional construct (Vlachopoulos, Karageorghis, and Terry, 2000), a three-dimensional approach similar to Stavrou and Zervas (2004) is preferred consisting of “absent-mindedness,” “concentration,” and “control of the game.” Three composites were computed by adding up the respective indicator items and use them as indicators of the single factor flow (a so-called partial aggregation model, see Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994). Advantages of such composites, or item parcels, are discussed by e.g., Hau and Marsh (2004) or Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman (2002). Measuring the exogenous variable flow with these three not necessarily high correlated indexes means that the construct results from a linear sum of the single measures (i.e., the composites). Therefore, the indexes are to be treated as formative

TABLE 1
The Operationalization of the Three Flow Dimensions

Flow Dimension	Operationalization	M ^a	SD ^a
Control of the game	1. I had the feeling I could tackle anything during the game.	3.855	1.027
	2. During the entire game I knew what I had to do.	3.981	1.013
	3. During the game I was always aware if I was doing well or not.	3.872	1.068
Absent-mindedness	4. The playing instinct controlled my body.	3.917	1.007
	5. My thoughts and my body formed a whole during the game.	3.860	1.091
	6. In the course of the game I forgot the time. I had no idea any more of how long I had already been playing.	3.840	1.292
Concentration	7. During the game I was free from thoughts whether I was better or worse than other players.	3.672	1.258
	8. My complete attention and energy were focused on the game.	4.328	0.914

^a Means and standard deviations from the main study ($n = 338$)

indicators (Bagozzi, 1994; Bollen and Lennox, 1991).

In contrast, the endogenous constructs are measured by "classic" reflective indicators (see, e.g., Bollen and Lennox, 1991 or Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001 for a discussion of the differentiation between formative and reflective measurement models). Consequently, they were initially evaluated with regard to criteria of validity and reliability of the first generation (coefficient alpha, corrected item-to-total-correlation, exploratory factor analysis; Churchill, 1979). The results of the subsequent confirmatory factor analyses led to later eliminated items with insufficient internal consistency from the scales of the endogenous variables in order to fulfill the criteria of the second generation (Fornell, 1987). This procedure finally resulted in a five-item scale for

positive emotions, while event image was measured with three items, and brand image with five indicators (see Table 2).

Model evaluation

To estimate the model parameters, the PLS (Wold, 1982) approach was preferred over the more common covariance-based procedures within the structural equation modeling framework—represented by programs such as LISREL or AMOS—for two reasons. First, because of the preliminary nature of our study due to the lack of

theoretical explanations (Fornell and Bookstein, 1982), and second, and even more importantly, because of the above-mentioned formative nature of the flow measurement model (Chin, 1998b). We employed the only recently introduced software application SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, and Will, 2005), the results of which are quite similar to those of Chin's (2003) widely-spread PLS-Graph.

Due to the fact that aspects like internal consistency or convergent validity are not applicable to formative constructs (Bollen and Lennox, 1991; Jarvis, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2003), regarding the flow construct only the weights of the items (i.e., the composites) and their respective significance are reported here (Chin, 1998b). It must be noted that the flow indicator index "control of the game" has a higher weight than the other two indicators "absent-mindedness" and "concentration," while all three of them are significant (see Table 3).

Because formative measurement models are based on the principle of linear regression, testing for multicollinearity is required (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001). However, neither the inspection of intercorrelations, nor the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Hair et al., 2006) show values indicating multicollinearity (see Table 3).

The nomological validity of flow is evaluated by assessing the relationship between this construct and "positive emotions," which is not only postulated theoretically, but also supported empirically by findings from different research contexts

The stronger the active flow experience of an event participant is, the more positive is his or her perception of emotions.

TABLE 2
Evaluation of the Reflective Measurement Models
(PLS Estimation)

Construct/Item (Requirement)	Convergent Validity			Discriminant Validity		
	Factor Loadings (≥ 0.707)	Composite Reliability (≥ 0.7)	AVE ^a (≥ 0.5)	Fornell/Larcker ($AVE > Corr^2$) ^b	R ² (> 0.3)	Q ² (> 0)
<i>Emotions</i>		0.88	0.588	0.59 > 0.41	0.206	0.127
Pleased	0.745					
Contented	0.709					
Enthusiastic	0.763					
Happy	0.843					
Cheerful	0.768					
<i>Event image</i>		0.84	0.641	0.64 > 0.41	0.414	0.270
Inspiring	0.797					
Super	0.810					
Thrilling	0.794					
<i>Brand image</i>		0.86	0.550	0.55 > 0.19	0.204	0.112
Thrilling	0.725					
Super	0.792					
Inspiring	0.734					
Sporty	0.721					
Youthful	0.732					

^a AVE = average variance extracted

^b Corr² = highest squared correlation between the model constructs

(see Hypothesis H4 above) (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989; Ellis, Voelkl, and Morris, 1994; Karageorghis, Vlachopoulos, and Terry, 2000). Indeed, the required influence (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001) of flow on positive emotions is strong (0.45) as well as significant on the 1 percent level ($t = 9.708$). Thus, these findings confirm the assumption of nomological validity and also the operationalization of flow in general.

The further analyses reported here are dealing with the reflective measurement

models (positive emotions, event image, and brand image). Factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability show values above the required thresholds (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006). Therefore, the measurement models seem to have both high reliability and convergent validity. Regarding discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion shows positive results for all four constructs (see Table 2). Thus, we conclude that our measures are valid and reliable.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) describes the share of the variance of an endogenous construct explained by the relationships in the model. For event image R^2 is (reasonably) high (0.41) (see Table 2), while the values for positive emotions and brand image are mediocre at best (0.21 and 0.20, respectively). The explanation of only 20 percent of the variance of the final construct brand image indicates that this construct depends on other variables that were not included in the study. Empirical findings on event sponsorship suggest that the fit between brand image and the event content (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Roy and Cornwell, 2003) or the prior experience with the brand (Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy, 2005, p. 32) could be such influencing factors. Similar effects could result from the attitude toward the communication activities during the event (Mau, Silberer, and Weihe, 2006) and the satisfaction with the event or its single characteristics (e.g., location, catering, staff).

Finally, the Stone-Geisser test criterion, Q^2 , evaluates the predictive relevance within the structural model (Chin, 1998b; Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). Q^2 is assessed by applying the so-called blindfolding procedure that demands measures of Q^2 greater than zero (Fornell and Cha, 1994). This is true for all three endogenous variables (see Table 2). Thus, we suggest that the hypothesized model is acceptable.

Interpretation of results

To test our hypotheses we take a look at the path coefficients and their significance values. Because no distributional assumptions underlie the PLS approach, we use bootstrap resampling (Nevitt and Hancock, 2001) to assess the significance of paths. Only Hypotheses H1, H3, and H4 are supported by clear and significant relationships in the expected direction. For Hypothesis H2 only a mediocre relationship (Chin, 1998a) and for Hypotheses H5

TABLE 3
Evaluation of the Formative Measurement Model (PLS Estimation)

Flow	Weights	Significance Level (p)	Highest Correlation	VIF
(Requirement)			(<0.9)	(<10)
Index control of the game	0.659	0.01	0.362	1.209
Index absent-mindedness	0.348	0.05	0.437	1.319
Index concentration	0.271	0.05	0.437	1.298

and H6 no significant path estimates can be reported (see Figure 2).

Nevertheless, all these findings can be explained in a plausible way. Most important is the result of a dominant path of effects leading from the flow experience during the soccer match to the perception of positive emotions that in turn has a high impact on the positive evaluation of the event image. Finally, the positive evaluation of the event image influences the brand image of the company organizing the event. The meaning of this dominant

path of effects is confirmed by an isolated assessment of the relation between flow and brand image, which results on the one hand in a significant effect (0.211, $t = 3.983$), but on the other hand also leads to a dramatic loss in variance explained (4.4 percent versus 20.4 percent).

Taking the total effects into account as well, it becomes clear that flow has a meaningful indirect effect on the event image via positive emotions. Even the relationship between positive emotions and brand image shows a fair total effect, sup-

porting Hypothesis H2 with certain reservations. To conclude, Hypotheses H1, H3, and H4 are supported, while H5 and H6 have to be rejected, and H2 is supported with reservations.

DISCUSSION

In conclusion, the introduction of the flow construct allows us to examine whether the active participation of the target group in the communication process during a marketing event actually has a favorable brand image effect. It means that the company cannot only communicate directly with its customers, but that this communication between customer and company can be enhanced. The findings suggest that this particular advantage of event marketing can be used to successfully influence the brand image.

Generally, marketing events do not automatically produce flow. Because the flow experience requires active participation by the individual, the event only creates a positive setting that makes it easier for the event participants to reach that state. In order to achieve this, the organizer first has to choose an event content that is of interest to the target group. Second, the conditions (i) to (iv) mentioned above should be taken into account when setting up the event:

- (i) Corresponding requirements: The requirements should correspond to the abilities of the participants (e.g., choosing equal opponents for competitions).
- (ii) Clear activity structure: The participants should get concrete and easily understandable instructions about what to do during the event (e.g., rules of the game).
- (iii) Immediate feedback: The participants should get immediate feedback about the success of their activity (e.g., positive feedback from the event staff).
- (iv) Make it easy to concentrate on the task: Distractions (e.g., noise) and

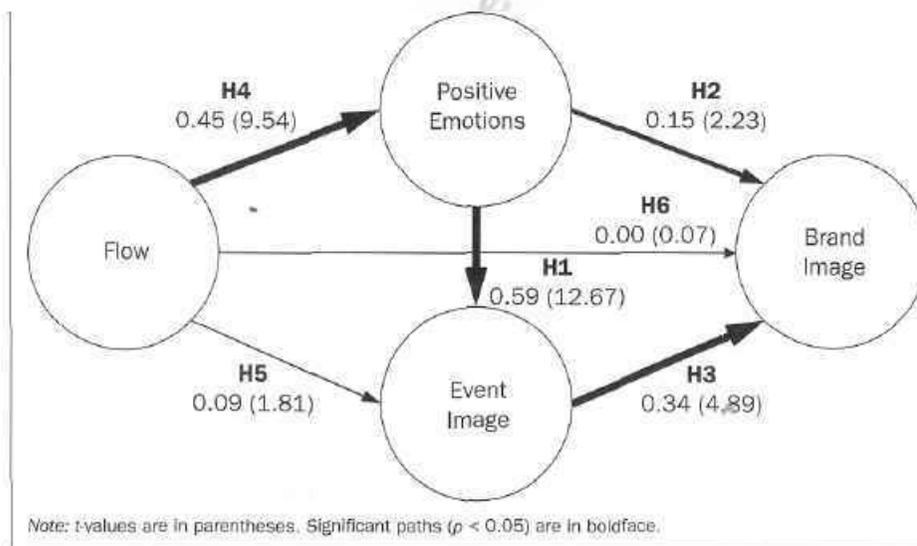


Figure 2 The Structural Model with Path Coefficients (Standardized Values)

Active interpersonal communication about the event and the company or brand responsible may stimulate word-of-mouth communication, which in turn positively influences sales or extends the effects of communication strategies.

interruptions should be avoided during the event (e.g., by choosing and decorating an appropriate event location). Barriers (e.g., social hierarchies), which hinder the participants from quickly entering the sports experience world, should be lowered too (e.g., by choosing homogenous groups of event participants).

Our research clearly shows that flow can occur during social interaction (e.g., while playing soccer). Therefore, an additional recommendation is that event marketers should focus on providing appropriate opportunities. It is not just the interaction between the company and the event participants that should be promoted. Managers should also take care to create a setting that facilitates communication among the attendees. As a result, a positive impact on brand image can be expected. Active interpersonal communication about the event and the company or brand responsible may furthermore stimulate word-of-mouth communication, which in turn positively influences sales or extends the effects of communication strategies (Hogan, Lemon, and Libai, 2004; Liu, 2006).

Finally, some limitations of this study and consequences for further academic work have to be noted. We focused on a particular target group, event content

(sport), and event object (retail company). It follows that replications in other contexts could help answer the question of external validity. Furthermore, future research should also address the denotative image dimension.

Even if we found no significant effects of sex and age on the flow experience, demographic effects should be subject to further studies, because our study deals with a relatively homogenous age group (children and youngsters between 11 and 15 years of age).

Studies from other academic disciplines on flow show positive influences of this construct on theoretical constructs other than those scrutinized here (Clarke and Haworth, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989). In particular, the impact of flow on the efficiency of information processing or the recall of the flow inducing experience seem to be promising for future research in the field of event marketing effects.

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