

**BRANDED MARKETING EVENTS: THE INFLUENCE OF EVENT  
EXPERIENCE ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Teagan Lynette Altschwager, B.Com. (Hons)

School of Marketing and Management

Adelaide Business School

University of Adelaide

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the role of branded marketing events (BMEs) in facilitating customer engagement. As business environments become more dynamic and interactive, customers are seeking participation through unique experiences with brands (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan 2012), and hence customer engagement has emerged as an important concept in academe. Previous research has demonstrated that customer engagement is highly impactful in enhancing customer-brand relationships (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić 2011a), however, there has been little research exploring the antecedents that facilitate customer engagement. This thesis proposes that BMEs can be used as strategic tools to facilitate engagement with an event, with engagement transferred to the brand and ultimately resulting in enhanced behavioural intention of loyalty.

A quantitative online survey was conducted in the South Australian wine industry to investigate how experiential components of a BME contribute to both customer event engagement and customer brand engagement. The impact of BME experiences on behavioural intention of loyalty, and the moderation effect of experiential needs are examined through structural equation modelling.

Results indicate that customer event engagement has a mediating effect on the relationship between BME experiences and customer brand engagement. Sensorial, relational and pragmatic experiences are found to only impact customer event engagement, while cognitive experience has a direct impact on customer brand engagement. This highlights that the heightened state of engagement can transfer between focal objects; from the event to the brand. This provides further insight into the BME's impact on customer brand engagement and behavioural intention of loyalty. In addition, support is found for the inclusion of a social dimension of customer brand engagement, and partial support for a social dimension of customer event engagement. Therefore, results of this thesis suggest

that BME experiences facilitate customer engagement and subsequent behavioural intention of loyalty.

The moderating influences of the individual's experiential needs, namely need for cognition, need for affect, and novelty-seeking needs are also examined. There is evidence that attendees with a strong need for cognition engage more strongly with relational BME experiences, while attendees with low need for cognition engage more strongly with sensorial BME experiences. However, few moderating effects are identified overall.

This research empirically demonstrates the strong and positive relationship between BMEs and customer engagement, and advocates the use of BMEs as an effective brand-building activity. This thesis contributes to the knowledge of customer engagement through identifying engagement transfer between two focal engagement objects, and provides support for the inclusion of a social engagement dimension. The findings provide support for the BME activities that managers undertake with the intention of facilitating customer engagement and providing brand-related outcomes through such endeavours.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	III
LIST OF FIGURES .....	VII
LIST OF TABLES .....	VIII
DECLARATION .....	X
PUBLICATIONS.....	XI
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	XII
KEY TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....	XIV
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background to the Research .....	1
1.2 Research Problem and Propositions .....	2
1.3 Justification for the Research.....	3
1.4 Research Context .....	5
1.5 Research Method .....	6
1.6 Delimitation and Scope of the Thesis .....	7
1.7 Outline of the Thesis.....	9
1.8 Chapter 1 Summary .....	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
2.1 Chapter 2 Introduction .....	11
2.2 Customer Engagement.....	14
2.2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Customer Engagement.....	14
2.2.2 Customer Engagement Conceptualisation .....	15
2.2.2.1 Different Perspectives of Customer Engagement.....	18
2.2.2.2 Definition of Customer Engagement .....	19
2.2.2.3 Dimensions of Customer Engagement .....	20
2.2.2.4 What Customer Engagement is not: Related Concepts .....	22
2.2.2.5 Antecedents and Outcomes of Customer Engagement.....	26
2.3 Branded Marketing Events .....	28
2.3.1 Marketing Events.....	28
2.3.1.1 Defining Marketing Events.....	30
2.3.2 Conceptualisation of Marketing Events.....	32
2.3.2.1 Branded Marketing Events - a Definition.....	33
2.3.2.2 Investigating a Broader Conceptualisation of BMEs: Customer Experience .....	35
2.3.3 Customer Experience .....	36
2.3.4 Components of Experience within a BME .....	37
2.3.5 Outcomes of BMEs experiences.....	39

2.4 Customer Engagement and BMEs: A Conceptual Framework .....	41
2.4.1.1 The role of Social Engagement within Customer Engagement .....	44
2.4.2 Relationships between Experiential Components of a BME and Customer Engagement .....	47
2.4.2.1 Cognitive Experience.....	50
2.4.2.2 Emotional Experience.....	52
2.4.2.3 Sensorial Experience.....	53
2.4.2.4 Pragmatic Experience .....	55
2.4.2.5 Relational Experience .....	56
2.4.3 The Interplay between Customer Engagement Objects.....	59
2.4.3.1 Customer Engagement to Behavioural Intention of Loyalty .....	62
2.5 Experiential Needs .....	66
2.5.1 Conceptualising Experiential Needs.....	66
2.6 Hypotheses Summary .....	74
2.7 Conceptual Framework.....	76
2.8 Chapter 2 Summary .....	78
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD .....</b>	<b>79</b>
3.1 Chapter 3 Introduction .....	79
3.2 Research Design .....	80
3.3 Unit of analysis .....	81
3.4 Data Collection Method.....	82
3.4.1 Measurement Instrument .....	82
3.4.2 Operationalisation of the Theoretical Constructs .....	83
3.4.3 Measurement Scales .....	84
3.4.4 Questionnaire Design.....	92
3.4.4.1 Scaling .....	93
3.4.4.2 Questionnaire Content .....	94
3.4.4.3 Questionnaire Structure and Sequencing.....	94
3.4.5 Ethics and Information Confidentiality .....	97
3.4.6 Data Coding and Editing.....	97
3.5 Pre-Test: University of Adelaide Orientation Week.....	98
3.5.1 Overview.....	98
3.5.2 Subjects.....	98
3.5.3 Sample and Respondent Profile.....	99
3.5.4 Data Collection Procedure .....	100
3.5.5 Pre-test Data Analysis.....	100
3.6 Main Study: South Australian Wine Industry.....	103
3.6.1 Overview.....	103
3.6.2 Subjects.....	103

3.6.3 Selection of Participating Wineries .....	103
3.6.4 Selection of Individual Respondents .....	104
3.6.5 Respondent Profiles .....	105
3.6.6 Data Collection Procedure .....	106
3.7 Preliminary Analysis.....	108
3.7.1 Data Cleaning .....	108
3.7.2 Non-Response Bias.....	109
3.7.3 Construct Validity.....	111
3.7.3.1 Convergent Validity.....	112
3.7.3.2 Discriminant Validity and Reliability Testing.....	126
3.7.4 Testing for Common Method Bias .....	131
3.8 Chapter 3 Summary .....	132
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	133
4.1 Chapter 4 Introduction.....	133
4.2 Social Engagement as an Independent Engagement Dimension .....	134
4.2.1 Convergent Validity of Social Engagement Dimensions .....	134
4.2.2 Discriminant Validity and Reliability Testing of Social Event Engagement ...	137
4.2.3 Discriminant Validity and Reliability Testing of Social Brand Engagement...	140
4.2.4 Discriminant Validity of Social Constructs .....	143
4.2.5 Structural Model of Customer Event Engagement.....	146
4.2.6 Structural Model of Customer Brand Engagement.....	149
4.2.7 Discussion of Hypothesis 1.....	151
4.3 Path Model Analysis using Structural Equation Modelling .....	153
4.3.1 Path Model Analysis .....	153
4.3.2 Calculation of Composite Variables .....	154
4.4 Evaluating Path Models .....	158
4.4.1 Model Specification.....	158
4.4.2 Model Identification .....	158
4.4.3 Model Estimation.....	159
4.4.4 Model Re-specification.....	161
4.4.5 Discussion of Hypothesis 2.....	166
4.4.6 Discussion of Hypothesis 3.....	172
4.4.7 Discussion of Hypothesis 4.....	173
4.5 The Moderation Effect of Experiential Needs .....	176
4.5.1 Method for Multi-group Analysis.....	176
4.5.2 Need for Cognition .....	178
4.5.3 Need for Affect .....	180
4.5.4 Novelty-Seeking Needs .....	183

4.5.5 Discussion of Hypothesis 5.....	186
4.6 Chapter 4 Summary .....	189
CHAPTER 5:    DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	191
5.1 Chapter 5 Introduction .....	191
5.2 Summary of Findings.....	192
5.2.1 The Role of Social Engagement .....	192
5.2.2 Experiential Components of A BME that Facilitate Customer Engagement ...	193
5.2.3 Engagement Transfer from Event to Brand.....	195
5.2.4 The Impact of Customer Engagement on Behavioural Intention of Loyalty ...	196
5.2.5 How the Individual’s Experiential Needs Moderate Event Engagement .....	197
5.2.6 Updated Study Framework .....	198
5.3 Contributions to the Academic Discipline.....	199
5.4 Managerial Implications .....	203
5.5 Limitations of the Research .....	205
5.6 Directions for Future Research .....	207
5.7 Concluding Thoughts.....	210
APPENDICES .....	212
REFERENCES .....	220

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: Theoretical Framework.....	5
Figure 2-1: Conceptual Framework.....	76
Figure 3-1: Measurement Model - Cognitive Experience .....	114
Figure 3-2: Measurement Model - Emotional Experience .....	115
Figure 3-3: Measurement Model - Sensorial Experience .....	116
Figure 3-4: Measurement Model - Pragmatic Experience.....	116
Figure 3-5: Measurement Model - Relational Experience.....	117
Figure 3-6: Measurement Model - Event Attention.....	117
Figure 3-7: Measurement Model - Brand Attention .....	118
Figure 3-8: Measurement Model - Event Identification .....	119
Figure 3-9: Measurement Model - Brand Identification.....	120
Figure 3-10: Measurement Model - Event Enthusiasm .....	120
Figure 3-11: Measurement Model - Brand Enthusiasm.....	121
Figure 3-12: Measurement Model - Event Absorption.....	121
Figure 3-13: Measurement Model - Brand Absorption .....	122
Figure 3-14: Measurement Model - Event Interaction .....	122
Figure 3-15: Measurement Model - Brand Interaction.....	123
Figure 3-16: Measurement Model - Behavioural Intention of Loyalty .....	123
Figure 3-17: Measurement Model - Novelty-Seeking.....	124
Figure 3-18: Measurement Model - Need for Affect.....	124
Figure 3-19: Measurement Model - Need for Cognition.....	125
Figure 4-1: Measurement Model – Social Event Engagement .....	135
Figure 4-2: Measurement Model - Social Brand Engagement .....	136
Figure 4-3: Measurement Model - Event Engagement.....	137
Figure 4-4: Measurement Model - Brand Engagement .....	140
Figure 4-5: Measurement Model - Social Constructs .....	144
Figure 4-6: Measurement Model - Customer Event Engagement .....	147
Figure 4-7: Measurement Model - Customer Brand Engagement.....	150
Figure 4-8: Identified Path Model .....	160
Figure 4-9: Re-Specified Path Model .....	164
Figure 4-10: Path for Low Need for Cognition .....	178
Figure 4-11: Path Model for High Need for Cognition .....	179
Figure 4-12: Path Model for Low Need for Affect.....	181
Figure 4-13: Path Model for High Need for Affect.....	181
Figure 4-14: Path Model for Low Novelty-Seeking Needs.....	183
Figure 4-15: Path Model for High Novelty-Seeking Needs .....	184
Figure 5-1: Updated Study Framework .....	199

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1: Overview of Customer Engagement Literature .....	16
Table 2-2 Antecedents and Outcomes of Customer Engagement .....	27
Table 2-3: Key Features of Marketing Events .....	28
Table 2-4: Summary of Marketing Event Definitions .....	30
Table 2-5: Experiential Components within a BME .....	38
Table 2-6: Summary of Hypotheses .....	74
Table 3-1: Measurement of Constructs.....	90
Table 3-2: O-Week Events Profile.....	99
Table 3-3: Winery Participants .....	104
Table 3-4: Respondent Profile for Number of Responses and Age.....	105
Table 3-5: Summary of Data Collection Procedures .....	107
Table 3-6: Testing for Non-Response Bias.....	110
Table 3-7: Summary of Indices Used to Assess Model Fit .....	113
Table 3-8: Goodness of Fit Indices for Cognitive Experience .....	114
Table 3-9: Goodness of Fit Indices for Emotional Experience .....	115
Table 3-10: Goodness of Fit Indices for Sensorial Experience .....	116
Table 3-11: Goodness of Fit Indices for Pragmatic Experience.....	116
Table 3-12: Goodness of Fit Indices for Relational Experience.....	117
Table 3-13: Goodness of Fit Indices for Event Attention.....	117
Table 3-14: Goodness of Fit Indices for Brand Attention .....	118
Table 3-15: Goodness of Fit Indices for Event Identification .....	119
Table 3-16: Goodness of Fit Indices for Brand Identification.....	120
Table 3-17: Goodness of Fit Indices for Event Enthusiasm .....	120
Table 3-18: Goodness of Fit Indices for Brand Enthusiasm.....	121
Table 3-19: Goodness of Fit Indices for Event Absorption.....	121
Table 3-20: Goodness of Fit Indices for Brand Absorption .....	122
Table 3-21: Goodness of Fit Indices for Event Interaction .....	122
Table 3-22: Goodness of Fit Indices for Brand Interaction .....	123
Table 3-23: Goodness of Fit Indices for Behavioural Intention of Loyalty .....	123
Table 3-24: Goodness of Fit Indices for Novelty-Seeking.....	124
Table 3-25: Goodness of Fit Indices for Need for Affect.....	124
Table 3-26: Goodness of Fit Indices for Need for Cognition.....	125
Table 3-27: Reliability and Validity Indices.....	127
Table 3-28: Reliability and Validity of Measurement Model.....	129
Table 3-29: Common Method Bias - Goodness of Fit Indices .....	131
Table 4-1: Social Engagement Items Included and Excluded From Model .....	134
Table 4-2: Goodness of Fit Indices - Social Event Engagement .....	135
Table 4-3: Goodness of Fit Indices - Social Brand Engagement.....	136

Table 4-4: Goodness of Fit Indices - Event Engagement .....	137
Table 4-5: Reliability and Validity – Event Engagement.....	139
Table 4-6: Goodness of Fit Indices - Brand Engagement.....	141
Table 4-7: Reliability and Validity – Brand Engagement .....	142
Table 4-8: Goodness of Fit Indices - Social Constructs .....	144
Table 4-9: Reliability and Validity – Social Constructs .....	145
Table 4-10: Goodness of Fit Indices – Event Engagement .....	148
Table 4-11: Goodness of Fit Indices – Brand Engagement .....	150
Table 4-12: Summary of Hypothesis 1 .....	151
Table 4-13: Factor Loadings and Error Variances for Composite Variables .....	157
Table 4-14: Goodness of Fit Indices for Identified Path Model.....	160
Table 4-15: Regression Weights – Original Path Model.....	161
Table 4-16: Goodness of Fit Indices for Re-Specified Path Model.....	164
Table 4-17: Regression Weights: - Re-Specified Path Model.....	165
Table 4-18: Summary of Hypothesis 2 .....	166
Table 4-19: Summary of Hypothesis 3 .....	172
Table 4-20: Summary of Hypothesis 4 .....	173
Table 4-21: Experiential Needs Groups - Value Classification.....	177
Table 4-22: Nested Model Comparisons and Goodness of Fit Indices - Need For Cognition.....	179
Table 4-23: Need for Cognition.....	180
Table 4-24: Nested Model Comparisons and Goodness of Fit Indices - Need for Affect.....	182
Table 4-25: Need for Affect.....	182
Table 4-26: Nested Model Comparisons and Goodness of Fit Indices - Novelty-Seeking Needs ....	184
Table 4-27: Novelty-Seeking Needs.....	185
Table 4-28: Summary of Hypothesis 5 .....	186

## DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Date: November 28, 2014

## PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are based upon the research presented in this thesis, and may contain results and materials presented herein.

Altschwager, T., Goodman, S., Conduit, J., Habel, C. “Branded Marketing Events: a Proposed ‘Experiential Needs’ based Conceptual Framework” (forthcoming) *Event Management: an International Journal* (accepted May 2014)

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Bouzdine-Chameeva, T., Goodman, S. “A comparison of Wine Event Experiences in France and Australia” (under review) *Journal of Travel Research*

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Goodman, S. (2014) “Dinner or Music: Which Events Enhance Customer Brand Engagement?” *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference*, Brisbane Australia

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Bouzdine-Chameeva, T., Goodman, S. (2014) “Customer Engagement: a Comparison between Australian and French Wine Events” *International Conference of the Academy of Wine Business Research*, Geisenheim, Germany  
\* Best paper award

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Goodman, S. (2014) “Wine events: a way to engage customers?” *Wine and Viticulture Journal* (forthcoming November-December issue)

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., and Goodman, S. (2013) “Facilitating Engagement by Aligning Brand Marketing Events and Customer Experimental Needs” *Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference*, Auckland New Zealand

Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Goodman, S. (2013) “Branded Marketing Events: Facilitating Customer Engagement” *International Conference of the Academy of Wine Business Research*, St Catharines Canada

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*For Grace*

## KEY TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The definitions of selected terms are listed to provide clarity and to set certain terminologies for the context in which they were utilised in this thesis;

**Associative network theory:** theory that customers retain information about events in memory; through a process of ‘spreading activation’ certain sets of event-related information can trigger thoughts about related information, in this case linked information about the host brand (Smith 2004).

**Behavioural intention of loyalty (BIL):** word-of-mouth and purchase intention (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996).

**Branded marketing events (BMEs):** a brand-initiated experience that serves as a platform for customers to interact with the brand and other actors (definition in this thesis, page 35).

**Customer engagement:** “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships” (Brodie et al. 2011a, pg 260). Focal objects investigated in this thesis are; the event (referred to as customer event engagement) and the brand (referred to as customer brand engagement).

**Customer experience:** a customer-centric concept, and encompasses all interactions and experiences between a customer and brand (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci 2007), including those outside of regular consumption activity.

**Engagement dimensions:** This thesis follows a five-dimensional view of customer engagement; attention, enthusiasm, interaction, identification and absorption (So, King, and Sparks 2012). (Definitions of each engagement dimension are provided on pages 22 to 24).

**Event experience:** The broader construct of brand experience is considered to encapsulate event experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). Brand experience includes numerous brand-related stimuli, including branding, communications, as well as the environments and situations in which the brand is experienced, including events (Brakus et al. 2009). This thesis focuses on brand-related stimuli from a BME; therefore, the researcher refers to this as event experience instead of brand experience.

**Experiential components of a BME:** the components of a BME utilised in this thesis are cognitive, emotional, sensorial, pragmatic and relational (Gentile et al. 2007)

**Experiential needs:** the need that an individual seeks to fulfil through experiences

Experiential needs investigated in this thesis are need for cognition, need for affect and novelty-seeking needs (definitions of each type of experiential need are provided on pages 69 to 72).

**Optimum stimulation level (OSL) theory:** theory that individuals seek out stimulation from particular environments in order to achieve satisfaction (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992).

**Service dominant (S-D) logic:** describes the shift in marketing over the past several decades to a new marketing philosophy that considers “the exchange of intangibles, specialized skills and knowledge, and processes (doing things for and with)”, with a view to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective of marketing thought (Vargo and Lusch 2004, pg 3).

**Social engagement:** the customer’s heightened level of interest regarding the focus of engagement (i.e. the event or the brand) based on personal exchanges with other actors (definition in this thesis, page 46). Focal objects investigated in this thesis

are; the event (referred to as social event engagement) and the brand (referred to as social brand engagement).

**Social exchange theory:** argues that customers engage in activities that provide emotional rewards including social approval and human contact (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde, and Marshall 2011).

**Theory of consumption values:** states that various consumption values perceived by the customer are focal in explaining consumer choice with regards to purchase (or not purchase) as well as brand selection (Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991).