OUR EVENTS, OUR AMBASSADORS

Using corporate events as an incremental contributor

to the corporate image

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USING CORPORATE EVENTS AS AN INCREMENTAL CONTRIBUTOR TO THE CORPORATE IMAGE

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Foreword

"It is during such programs that the organization is exposed because you cannot hide who you are, it will definitely come out in what you do, where you do it and how you do it …" (Informant 3)

Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify the dimensions used by attendees in determining an events image and to explore if image contributes to the organizations corporate image. The study used a qualitative design to explore the relationship between an event's image and corporate image. The sample used was purposefully chosen for the interview. The findings reported four main dimensions used by attendees in the formation of an events image: the choice of venue, content/program and physical organization and the profile of attendees. Two main relationships were identified: the relationships and interactions between the dimensions; and the relationship between corporate event's image and the corporate image. These findings can be implemented into the corporate event planning process, corporate and marketing communication strategies of the organization in order to enhance its corporate image.

Keywords: Events, image, corporate, communication, marketing

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Chapter 1.0   Introduction

"What you are speaks so loud; I can't hear what you say".

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A distinctive and positive image is one desired by every organization. It is commonly said that in order to project a positive image everyone needs to work towards achieving this image, and this apply to organizations or corporate bodies as well. One therefore needs to be strategic in today business world in order to perform and create image. According to Dowling (2001), organizations strive through different approaches to gain such positive image which becomes part of its assets. Organizations have their own set of theories, as Dowling put it, which governs their activities in developing an image. These are the "strategic, corporate and marketing plans" (p.3). These plans and strategies constitute of different tested organizational hypothesis which are implemented into the organizational behavior. In effect, organizations devote a lot of time and effort as well as money in order to create that desired image in its reputation building processes. Upon observation, one area where such time and money are spent by organizations is corporate events. Corporate events in this study refer to meetings with various stakeholders, conferences, product launches, corporate entertainments program, and corporate hospitality (business lunches, cocktail parties and other celebration), just to mention a few.

In recent times, the organization of corporate events by companies has consistently increased. Companies employ the use of different kinds of events communications programs in order to reach their targeted audience. Some empirical work has shown that organizations also

devote a lot of time and spend a lot of money in the organization and planning of such events, for example Crowther (2011). In 2008, $122.31 billion was spent in the USA on business events (BEISG, 2008). One may wonder why organizations invest both money and time into organizing corporate events. Other empirical researchers have also associated an event's image with the sponsoring brand's image. An example is Gwinner (1997) who provides a framework for image transfer. Therefore one can assume that an event's image is associated with the corporate image of the organization (host). However, this is a mere assumption that needs to be justified.

1.1   Motivation for this Study: An Personal Observation

The researcher worked in a Conference and Banqueting department of a business hotel in Ghana for over six (6) years. During this period, the researcher booked and coordinated an average of twenty-five (25) corporate events weekly with an average of 50 participants per event. During these years, the researcher personally observed that companies were willing to pay premium rates when organizing corporate events. They also request for the best facilities and service during such events. This observation predisposed the researcher to find out from the event organizers (host companies) why such attention and investment are made into the organization of corporate events. In order to satisfy a curiosity, the researcher had a conversation with some clients from different organizations that patronizes the hotel and its services. The conversation revealed an interesting insight to how managers perceive corporate events and why. Some views obtained expressed that an events organization and atmosphere in a way project the identity of the host company and therefore incorporates it into their strategic activities. Even though some marketers or managers view corporate events as part of their communication processes or channels, there is little established knowledge as to whether attendees associate an events image to the corporate image, hence a gap. This therefore calls for a study to find out

whether corporate events add up to corporate image of an organization focusing only on attendees' perception.

1.2   Problem Statement

The context of discovery is recognized in the title of this study: How corporate events "speak" for the organization through its choice of venue, content/program and physical organization, focusing on an aspect of corporate communication. These variables: choice of venue, content/program and physical organization were identified in a pilot test and were classified based on previous empirical studies by Morgan (2009). Issues of corporate communication are one that should be strategically planned and monitored since it is a valuable asset to the organization. Communication effectively to stakeholders brings out the kind of message the organization intends to deliver. Therefore the real world phenomenon investigates if corporate events, which in this case will be seen as a communication tool, communicate the corporate image through its event's. The primary goal is to identify how attendee's evaluate the determinants of an event's image and how it relates to the corporate image of the organization.

The main concepts "corporate events" and "corporate image" will be addressed and well defined. Existing applicable theories will be applied through a qualitative research to explore if there is a relationship between these concepts (L. Neuman, 2009). The issue of corporate image is a continuous one and is applicable to every successful organization, therefore can be generalized. It is also "empirically observable" since the author has organized and participated in several corporate events; and reflected on how these events impacted the image of the organizers. The phenomenon under investigation also presents "social patterns", since its aim

was to established if there was a relationship between situations/events in as structured manner (Neuman, 2009, p.26).

1.3   Research question

Taking into consideration the above observation and problem statement the research question for this study therefore is as follows:

How can the image of an organization's corporate event contribute to its corporate image?

The key terms that guided this study are: corporate events dimensions, events image and corporate image. These terms or concepts are defined later on in the study. To be able to answer this research question, there is a need for a sub research question which was answered through a pilot test. The sub-question is as follows:

"What dimensions of corporate events contribute to an attendee's perception of an event's image?

The study therefore explores what dimensions of an event attendee's use in the formation of an events' image; and how this image relates to the corporate image. Upon completion of this study, an incremental contribution can be made in relations to a significant communication channel between organizations and attendees through the concept of event management viewing it as a marketing communication tool. Organizations will also have proven knowledge to confirm what dimensions attendees used in evaluating an event's image and whether it contribute to their image about the organization.

1.4   Background for Presumption

The researcher holds a presumption that an attendee's expectations and perceptions regarding the corporate event contribute to the corporate image of the organization. To give a better understanding to the presumption, it will be relevant to give a brief background of theories used. The presumption was based on relevant theories from event management, corporate communication and marketing. Corporate events are identified as part of the marketing communication tool of the organization (Masterman and Wood, 2006, O'Toole, 2011). Marketing communication is also a subsidiary of corporate communication (van Riel, 2005). Corporate communication is part of the identity mix and this mix reflects the image of an organization (Birkigt K. & Stadler M. M., 2000; Brønn P. S. & Berg R. W., 2009). Mentioning some drivers of corporate image, Dowling (2001) links marketing communications as part of these drivers. These theories therefore support the fact that there is a relationship between an event's image and the corporate image. These theories are further discussed in the theoretical framework and the finding will confirm if this assumption holds or not.

1.5   Definition of Terms and Concepts

In order to have a meaningful and successful study, the researcher defined the terms and concepts used (Machi & McEvoy, 2009; L. W. Neuman, 2009). This clarified the differences between several terms used in relation to corporate image and corporate events. Further, a concise definition of the "words and phrases that create meaning" for the concepts under study are presented (Machi & McEvoy, 2009, p. 21).

The words company and organization were used interchangeably in this study, meaning a group of people with one interest who interacts or communicates (van Riel & Fombrun, 2008).

The concept of corporate communication deals with the total communication strategies an organization uses to portray it personality through well-developed communication activities (Brønn P. S. & Berg R. W., 2009; Dowling, 2001). Marketing communications, on the other hand refers to all the marketing tools that an organization uses to exchange "shared meanings" with various stakeholders in order to its product and corporate image (Masterman & Wood, 2006, pp. xvi,4). One cannot talk of corporate image without mentioning reputation and identity. It was therefore necessary to explained it meaning in this study. The term corporate identity and identity have been used synonymously in this study. This refers to the strategies and characteristics which personalizes the organization and influences its behavior (Birkigt K. & Stadler M. M., 2000; Dowling, 2001). Corporate image or image on the other hand is a collection of "beliefs" and "feelings" held by different stakeholder about an organization (Dowling, 2001, p. 19). Dowling describes it as the total "evaluation" of the company's personality and the "emotional reaction" those personalities evokes (pp.19-21). This term addresses how people, both internal and external, see the company. According to van Riel and Fombrun (2008) reputation is the total stakeholders' evaluation of a company. It is the recognized "values" such as trust, credibility, honesty, "integrity" etc. that are formed out of the image a stakeholder has about an organization (Dowling, 2001, p. 19).

Event management in this context means the general management of the corporate event in terms of how it was planned and executed (O'Toole, 2011). The use of the word corporate events, also known as business events, comprises of programs organized for different stakeholders of an organization with different objectives. Such events includes meetings and conferences, product launches, trade shows, business lunches, exhibitions, promotional events corporate hospitality and other related events (Masterman & Wood, 2006; O'Toole, 2011, pp.

47,51). Events Dimensions are the factors that contribute to the total success of the events (Morgan, 2009) such as the choice of venue, content/program outline and physical organization. Choice of venue in this context refers to the location, venue or site used for an event (Morgan, 2009; O'Toole, 2011). This should be idle and suitable in order to achieve the events objective. O'Toole (2011) refers to an event's content/programs as the outline of the activities which informs attendees about the different happenings of the events, the time it will take place, the host (speaker, performer etc.) and what it entails. For the purpose of this study, O'Toole definition of what an event's program is would be adapted and use as the definition for content/program. The physical organization of an event refers to the entire organization of the event. This focuses on how the event is delivered, the services rendered, efficiency and time management (Morgan, 2009). Guests or participants of an event are known as attendees in this study (Gwinner, 1997). This can be employees of the organization, clients or customers, investors, conference participants or exhibitors or potential clients.

Chapter 2.0 Theoretical Framework

As earlier indicated, the assumptions were based on existing literatures. Therefore the concept for this study was developed by applying the following theoretical approach. The main concept of this research, corporate events image as an incremental contributor to the corporate image, was based on earlier theories developed by Brønn (2005) who adapted it from Birkigt and Stadler (2000). The goal was to explore the exceptional character of the concepts "corporate events and image" which earlier studies reviewed so far have not yet identified (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). This section therefore reviewed past literatures relevant for the study. After that,

the theories of corporate image, corporate identity and corporate communication were presented in other to support the argument of this study.

2.1   Literature Review

Literature reviews are used to support the author's position using past studies in order to build a good case (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). Conducting a good literature review was not only important but also helped in the organization of the entire study. In order to conduct a good review of past literatures, Machi and McEvoy (2009) suggests a six-step approach. These steps were taken into consideration during the literature review for this study.

The literature review used an "argument of discovery" to discuss and clarify existing research with regards to the concept under study. In order to examine and criticize the gap in existing literature, an "argument of advocacy" was built which helped in answering the research question (Machi & McEvoy, 2009, p. 61). For the purpose of this study, the main literature reviewed was based on authors who studied the "utility aspect" of corporate image (van Riel, 2009, p.79). The utility aspect of corporate image focuses on image creation processes (Dowling, 2001, Brønn & Berg (2009), Birkigt, & Stadler (2000), van Riel and Fombrun (2008), and van Riel (2009). Supporting literatures from other researchers in corporate image will be referred when applicable.

2.1.1   Existing Literature

The use of events as a communication tool is not new, however, existing literature on the concept of corporate events and its relation to corporate image are limited. Literature reviewed so far on marketing, organizational, corporate communication, reputation and event management theories revealed that research on the concept of corporate image through corporate

communication mainly focused on advertising, media relations, public relations etc. (Masterman and Wood, 2006) and event sponsorship (Gwinner, 1997). However corporate communication goes beyond merely advertising and public relations. This study argues based on existing theories and explored how to use one of such communication tools.

Some past studies on events have examined the economic benefits of events and its significance. Wood (2005) measured both the economic and social impacts of local authority events. In this study, Wood describes the significance of assessing the financial and community benefits of local authority events. However, the study only provided a framework and recommended further research. The findings reveal that sometimes an economic gain for the local businesses can lead to a social loss for residents (p.51). Kose, Argan and Argan (2011) also investigated the dimensions used in managing and marketing special events focusing on a sport event in Turkey. The study provides sport event managers and sport marketing managers an insight on the usage of significant events management dimensions which will help in reformulation organizational strategies. The dimensions considered in this research were ticketing, transportation, HR (volunteer and trained staff), budgeting, marketing and PR as well was risk management (p.8). However, the authors indicated that this study cannot be generalized since the case used was just an example of a sport's event.

Another literature reviewed focused on attendees' motivations for attending events. Lee (2010) conducted an exploratory study to identify what determines attendees' motivation in attending Hong Kong exhibitions, from attendees' perception. The objective of this study was to identify the fundamental dimensions of what motivates attendees. In conclusions, Lee (2010) suggests that attendees' motivations for attending such events are not only for selling and

buying, but also provides a ground for networking and searching. Crowther (2011) provides a framework which will be used to interpret and manage organizational events that are marketing oriented. In this study, Crowther refers to marketing oriented events as providers of a unique "space" whereby organizations can "connect" with its stakeholders (p.69). The study identified this space as unique with comparison to other communication approaches. Crowther describes this space as unique because it offers attendees the opportunity to relate live and experience the company during of the event. Attendees thereafter reflect on the experiences based on expectations and makes judgments out of it. Even though the concept of marketing space and its role in marketing oriented events was discussed, however the study failed to underline the kind of feeling experienced by attendees but only made mention of brand perception. Fredline and Faulkner (2000) also examined the community perceptions of impacts of events. The objective of this study was to identify the local community's attitude towards the event. This paper discussed the result of this analyzes focusing on the host community of two major sports events.

A study conducted by Breiter and Milman (2006) identified the needs and services of attendees focusing on large convention centers. Discussing these needs, one noticeable factor was attendees prioritizing "overall cleanliness of the venue, well-maintained facility" and good guest relations. Another need and service identified was having directional signage and proximity to accommodation facilities for out of town guests. Adequate toilet facilities among other factors were also mentioned. Even though these needs were identified, the study only examined its importance in the attendance of the event. It however failed to examine the effects of these needs on attendees' perception forming about the event and towards the organization as a whole.

Corporate hospitality and aspect of corporate events can also be used as a motivator to commit stakeholders towards an organization (Bennett, 2003). This concept was adapted from social psychology where it has been proven that "liking" stimulates commitment therefore individuals get to like companies that have provided them with a good experience. In an exploratory study, the findings revealed that companies who apply corporate hospitality activities in their marketing rebuilt their relationships with their current customers.

Linking corporate events to image creation and transfer, Gwinner (1997) adapted the theory of meaning transfer and developed a model that can be used by both firms and researchers in image creation and transfer. The model suggests that firms should consider its event's image since it may be linked to the organizations brand image. The model also proposed different image determinants that can help change an event's image. The model indicated that event type, event characteristics and individual factors are the determinants of an event's image but it only focused on the organization as a sponsoring and not the organization as the host.

2.2   Relevant Theories

Considering all the relevant literatures and discussion above, it was important to build a strong argument based on proven theories to support the assumption made earlier in this study. The concept of corporate events and corporate image should therefore was well defined and established in order to support this argument.

2.2.1 Events as a Marketing Tool

Marketing researchers have discussed marketing communication as one of the essential tools of the marketing mix. The concept of marketing communication has also been adapted and introduced in organizational reputation building strategy as well. Fill (2005) defined marketing communication as "a management process through which an organization engages with its various audiences" (p.7). Messages are sent to various stakeholder groups and the targeted audiences are expected to respond to such message either through their attitude or behavior towards the organization (Fill, 2005). The objective of using marketing communication activities is to "try and influence or persuade the consumer through a message" (Pelsmacker et al, 2001, p.5, Fill, 2005, p.13).

It is of common knowledge that for an organization to achieve its business goals there is a need to use different kinds of marketing communication. One of such marketing communication tools is corporate event (Masterman and Wood). As earlier mentioned, communication forms part of the organizations identity mix (Birkigt K. & Stadler M. M., 2000; Brønn, 2005). The model below (see Figure 1) gives a projection of how corporate event can be used as a reflection of the organizations identity. In discussing this model, van Riel criticized it for failing to recognize the "reciprocal effects" of changes that may occur in these three variables, behavior, communication and symbolism (p.34). However van Riel (1995) acknowledged the fact that the work of Birkigt and Stadler (1986) can be used as a key foundation on which an organization can develop its corporate identity.

2.2.2 Cognitive Model: Corporate Event as a Part of the Corporate Identity

In Figure 1, corporate image is seen as a reflection of the organization's identity (Brønn, 2005). One experiences the organization either directly or indirectly through the identity mix. This study proposes that corporate events is part of communication and therefore reflects the corporate image. Using this as a starting point, a new model was developed at the end of this study.

Fig. 1 The Corporate Identity Mix: *Corporate Image as a reflection of the Corporate Identity where Corporate Events is part of Corporate Communication (adapted from Brønn, 2005, p.106)*
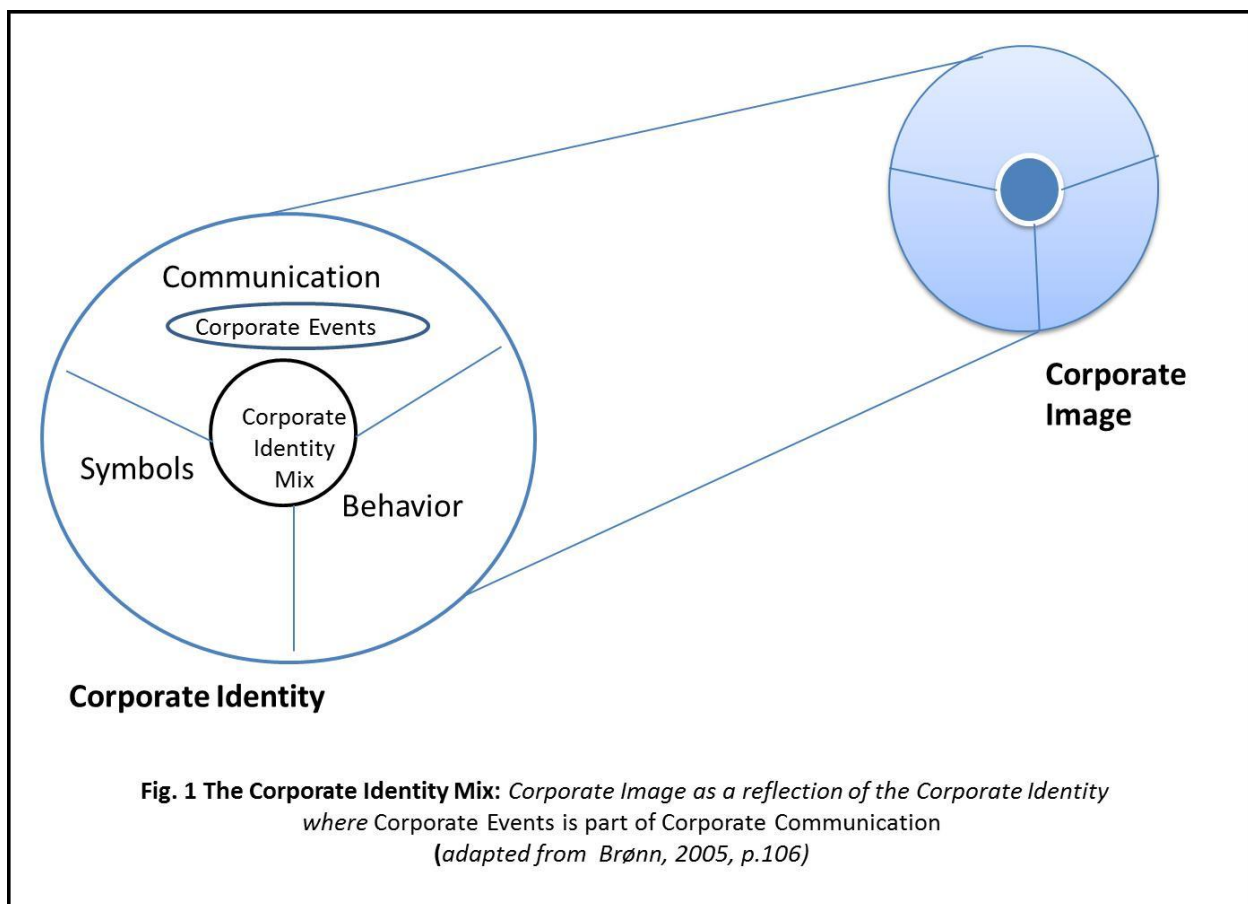
According to Brønn (2005), every little detail of the organization communicates and this communications uses the identity of the organizations to communicate its image. The personality of the organization is directly experienced through it symbols, behavior and communication (identity mix) which develops a perception of this personality (pp. 106,107). The researcher

adapted this model and applied it to the concept of this study. In redefining the identity and image of an organization, Stuart (1999b) defined marketing as a tool in "translating the corporate identity into corporate images" that various stakeholders hold about an organization. If the corporate image of a sponsor can be transferred to an event (Gwinner, 1997), then the corporate image of the organizing company (host) can also be reflected in a corporate event. However, this is just an assumption which needs to be proved.

2.2.3   Corporate Image

As earlier said, one cannot talk about image without making reference to reputation. Reputation management deals with the concepts of reputation, image and identity. Even though, this study focuses on image and some aspect of identity, it is prudent to establish the differences among these three concepts. According to Dowling (2001), an organization is recognized through its corporate identity. Identity can be formed through the identity mix. Exposing to personality to stakeholders creates an image. The different images of individual stakeholders when put together then create the reputation of the organization.

In today's corporate world, the theory of "corporate image" has come to stay. Furman (2010) traces the development of this theory over the past 150 years and concludes that that the issue of corporate image is the key to the whole management process of a company. On a more general note, van Riel and Fombrun (2008) describes image as the fundamental creation of opinions or views in one's mind. The concept of corporate image on the other hand relates to perceptions that organization forms on the various stakeholders minds. Having a good corporate image helps organization in positioning themselves in today's corporate world. A positive corporate image therefore adds up to a company's corporate assets (Furman, 2010).

Going back to the definition used earlier in the clarification of terms, corporate image was defined as the total "evaluation" of the company's personality and the "emotional reaction" those personalities evokes (Dowling, 2001, pp.19-21).   This evaluation should have a relationship with the perception of the organization towards customer needs; and the expectations from the customer towards the organization's performance. Such relationships are established through knowing the needs of guests and satisfying it. These relationships also stimulate the creation of image. Other researchers have also approached the theory of corporate image from different angles. Some viewed it as a "projection of the corporate identity" (Birkigt and Stadler, 1986, as cited in,van Riel Cees B.M., 1995, p. 34); while others viewed it as a reflection of the corporate identity (Brønn P. S. & Berg R. W., 2009, p. 107). Van Riel and Fombrun (2008) compared the corporate image to a mirror of the corporate identity. This reflection or projection can be experienced through the identity mix which would be discussed later in this chapter.

In creating a good corporate image, stakeholders, both internal and external form their impression about a company through various activities or "networks of association" (van Riel, 1995, p.75). The image a stakeholder holds about a company is not developed overnight but rather it is based on different impression forms on different occasions about different activities of the company. The organization interacts with different groups of stakeholders for different reasons at different times. Each group has a different interactional level hence the perception formed differs from group to group and sometime even on individual basis. This is attributed to the fact that each stakeholder group has its own expectation from the organization. Fatt, Wei, Yuen and Suan (2000) highlighted the different stakeholders and their expectations (see Table 1, Appendix 1). In this table he categorized stakeholders into four (4) groups: employees,

customers, shareholders and the public. Employees expect trustworthiness from the organization whiles customers expect reliability. To the customer, a reliable company is safe and of good image.

Dowling (2001) suggests some key issues which contribute to how external stakeholders form their image about an organization. The "perceived value of an organization's product and services" are the main force behind its customers' image creation. The product and the service are the medium of communications the organization uses to reach its target recipient. Corporate image is created through messages sent out by the organization and how it is interpreted by recipients (Kosslyn, 1975; MacInnis & Price, 1987). Taking all these factors into consideration LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) redefined corporate image as the "result of an aggregate process by which customers compare and contrast various attributes of companies" (p.46). A good corporate image of an organization creates a good reputation. The reputation is based on different images the various stakeholders hold about the organization. One important point to note however that organization is do not have a single image but multiple (Dowling 2001).

2.2.4　Corporate Identity - Forming a Personality

Corporate identity refers to the strategies and characteristics which personalizes the organization and influences its behavior. As earlier indicated, such personalities are represented through the identity mix which can be compared to the marketing mix. Olins (1978) describes identity as the "tangible" expression of the "personality" of an organization (p.82). This expression therefore confirms that identity embraces series of positive/negative attributes of an organization in order to form an image.

An organizations corporate identity is its main foundations to corporate communication (van Riel & Fombrun, 2008). Management therefore has a key role to play in its formation. Therefore an organization's identity should be managed. Simões and Dibb (2008) identified some "controllable dimensions" (p.67) as a feature that organizations can use in managing its identity. This means that the dimensions associated with identity can be controlled. Unlike the identity, the image created out of the message sent is uncontrollable since perceptions of individuals cannot be controlled but only influenced by what they see or hear; and based on that, form their perceptions (Alessandri, 2008). Identity also needs consistent management in order to create a good image to all stakeholders (Leitch & Motion, 1999; van Riel Cees B.M., 1995, p. 14). Consistent management means that everything that has to do with the organization should be consistent since it sends a message (Bromley, 1993; Brønn P. S. & Berg R. W., 2009). Strategic management of an organization's corporate identity positions the organizations strategically in a competitive market and also differentiates it.

To some extent, individual organizations can control how the various stakeholders see them based on how they project themselves (C Simões, Dibb, & Fisk, 2005). Corporate identity therefore needs to be "effectively" managed to produce or reveal a good personality (van Riel & Fombrun, 2008, p. 67). Corporate personality refers to the "company manifested self-image" (Birkigt & Stadler, 1986, as cited in,Birkigt K. & Stadler M. M., 2000, p. 2). The personality is crystalized though the use of the identity mix. However, the focus of this studies in on communication only. Corporate identity is created by the internal stakeholders and the organization as a whole but experienced by all who come into contact with the organization. An efficiently managed corporate identity results in a good corporate image which in effect reveals the vision and mission of the organization to its various stakeholders (Stuart, 1999a).

2.2.5   The Relationship: Image and Identity

In discussing the relationship between image and identity Brønn (2005) refers to image as a reflection of the identity. This reflection can be experienced directly or indirectly. An exposure of the company's personality to an individual creates an impression of the mind. This impression is interpreted by the individual who then evaluates it as positive experience or negative experience, which in effect creates a positive or negative image. Corporate image is the "the set of beliefs and feelings" (Dowling, 2001, p. 19) an individual forms about a company. A good desired image paves way for a good reputation and also provides other benefits (see Table 2, Appendix 2). It is of common knowledge that a good positive image brings not only brings financial benefits but most importantly trust and recognition to the company.

2.3.6   Corporate Communication

Earlier discussions have clearly indicated the vital role of communications in the identity mix and the overall company's strategic processes (van Riel and Fombrun, 2008). Masterman and Wood (2006) defines communication as the "process where thoughts are conveyed and meaning is shared'' between people or a group of people.   During this process there is a possibility whereby the receiver may have a different meaning from what the sender intended to say. According to Lorange (2009), effective communication demands an in-depth understanding of the term and its role. In communicating to stakeholders, the message been sent should clear and understood by all since it "creates a sense of trust" (p. 42). Communication does not only acts as a driver for image positioning but also may be the only alternative to reconfirm the organization's values (Dowling, 2001, p. 147). Even though an organization's can communicate either direct or indirect, sometimes indirect communication tends out to be more efficient (Dixon, 1996). In effect, as much as an organization has a formal or direct way to transmitting it

messages to its various stakeholders, the unplanned messages sent are very critical and should therefore also be considered.

Using the earlier definition of communications as a starting point, one can say that corporate communication in its entity deals with how an organization presents itself to the various stakeholders. Balmer (2008) defines corporate communication as a communication process between an organization and it's "customers and other constituencies". The concept answers the question of who the organization says they are and to whom (p.50). For effective communicating process, the organization needs to strategize the kind of channel and message it wants to send. It therefore employs the use of every available communication tool that can help project a good reputation (van Riel, 2005). The effective employment of these communication tools gives the organization preference over its competitors. According to van Riel and Fombrun (2008), corporate communication aids the creation of a unique and friendly image of organization to its constituents and therefore plays a vital role in image formation process (Dowling, 2001). The views or mindset of various stakeholders are influenced through organizations' communication activities.

2.3.7   Corporate Events

Generally, an event is any kind of function that is organized by a group for a targeted audience. However, this study defines a corporate event as any kind of events which is organized to support business objective (Masterman & Wood, 2006; O'Toole, 2011). These include events such as "management functions, training, marketing, incentives, employees' relations or customer relation" (p.47) activities. As recognized in the definition, corporate events embrace other classification of events depending on its target group and audience. In other words, a

corporate event can be a marketing event, entertainment or leisure events, meeting and convention events and many others. Corporate events are organized projected towards the enhancement of business activities of the organization.

The impact of an event can either be tangible or intangible and this can also be positive or negative (Masterman & Wood, 2006; Soteriades & Dimou, 2011). According to Masterman and Wood (2006), corporate events provide a lot of options from which an organization can communicate to its stakeholders. This reduces the cost of communication and also affords the organization an opportunity to speak to a targeted group in a conducive atmosphere. Masterman and Wood (2006) describes this as an "opportunity to create protected, clutter-free environment" where an organization can present a "single-brand message" (p.230). The dimensions of an event can be used as the channel of communication the organization's personality.

There are several dimensions (Morgan, 2009) of an event which can be used to create a positive event's image. Due to the limited time for this study, the researcher is only focusing on the three mentioned earlier. These are the choice of venue, program outline and physical organization. O'Toole (2011) refers to these dimensions as "purposeful arrangement" of items that one uses during an event in order to make the best "impression" on attendees (p.183). A significant word that O'Toole used was "impression". An event design or dimension creates and impression of the corporate personality to the attendees.

2.3.8   Dimensions of Corporate Events

Events dimensions are collective attributes used to evaluate the success of an event (Morgan, 2009, O'Toole, 2011). This study proposes the use of these dimensions in evaluating the events image taking into consideration the process of image creation outlined by Dowling (2001).

-        **The Choice of Venue**

The choice of venue is one of the key elements in an event (Morgan, 2009; O'Toole, 2011; Rogers, 2008). It is also a concrete concept to study since it can be seen and observed easily (Neuman, 2011). An event's venue should be accessible to both the attendees and organizers. Conway (2009) highlights the choice of venue as a great determinant which affects all other event arrangements. It is important for attendees to be in the right environment in order to focus on the event and respond accordingly. The choice of venue on its own can creates an impression since the attendee will have an expectation of the venue based on image of the organization before attending the event. The environment in which the event takes place has an effect on the consumers. The physical environment is able to influence one's attitude and form an image (Bitner, 1990; El Sayed, Farrag, & Belk, 2003). According to Bitner (1992) consumers tries to find "cues" about an organization's efficiency and excellence based on the physical environment before a purchase. Applying this concept to an event, one can say that attendees already form an opinion about an event before attending based on the events venue. The venue chosen should also be ready for the event. Its infrastructure (facilities) and services (purposes) should be suitable for the chosen event objective (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2006). The security of the attendees is paramount; therefore the venue and its

surrounding areas should be safe in order for participants to feel at ease during events (Conway, 2009; Masterman & Wood, 2006).

- **Content/Program**

The content/program also known as the event content is another dimension that this study proposes as an incremental contributor to an organizations image. O'Toole (2011) refers to it as the "ultimate deliverables" (p.156) of the whole event. Such deliverables includes time of the event, scheduling of activities, what to be done and by whom, guest speakers and event objectives. According to Donald Gertz (2007), an event's program substantiates an events objective. Therefore the choice of activities outlined for the event should be consistent to the event's objective and also creates the maximum impact on attendees (O'Toole, 2011). The program should be innovative and presented by the right facilitators. The company should also know the needs of the attendees and draw a program that will meet those needs with the organizations objective in mind (Masterman & Wood, 2006; Morgan, 2009).

- **The impact of physical organization**

The third dimension, physical organization, proposes that the general services provided during an event can also be an incremental contributor to the organization's image. Services rendered during an event should be of good quality and efficient (Masterman and Wood, 2006; Morgan, 2009; O'Toole, 2011). It is of common knowledge that good service always creates an impression on the mind of the recipient. Logically, if attendees experiences good service during an event, a good impression will be formed which creates the image.

Chapter 3.0   Methodology

This study used a qualitative explorative approach in its research method since the phenomenon is relatively new (Howitt, 2010, p. 10). The sub-sections will elaborate on how the entire study was conducted, giving details of the research design, sample, data collection and data analysis. According to Yin (2011), a good research design strengthens the validity of the study. The data collections also explains how the independent (corporate events) and the dependent (corporate image) variables are operationalized (Neuman, 2010).

3.1   Qualitative Research Design

The researcher chose a qualitative approach in order to help analyze social patterns from different perspectives of attendees and clarify how individuals form their opinions (Yin, 2011). Using a qualitative research design also provided a variety of choices in the methodology and holds "a mosaic of orientations" (p.11). The choice of a qualitative research represents the post-modern views that the researcher's knowledge of the real world can just be one out of the lot. Therefore there are possibilities of various perspectives in the real world (Howitt, 2010, pp. 7, 15-18).

Yin (2011) mentions three circumstances that favor such mosaic orientations. These are the possibility of the researcher having a variety of interpretations to the phenomenon understudy, the possibility that these events are unique and the various options of methods one can choose from in a qualitative study. The first condition indicates that multiple interpretations of the same events may arise due to the fact that the respondents may have a different meaning of the phenomenon understudy from that of the researcher. Secondly, the study of a phenomenon in a qualitative study captures the uniqueness of events experienced by participants. Lastly, a

contributing factor that favors the use of a qualitative research is the fact that the researcher had a range of qualitative research types to choose from. This study was based on an assumptions rather than a hypothesis and therefore the data collected was significant and soft in the form of words and sentences. The qualitative approach also enabled the researcher to rely on "principles from interpretive or critical social sciences". It focused on issues that were dependent on "natural flow of social life". Using a qualitative design allowed a "nonlinear research path" due to the fact that the rationality is an ongoing process (Neuman, 2011, pp. 165-167; Yin, 2011). Last but not the least, using a qualitative approach was due to the fact that an event's image has the possibility of being vague and temporal in nature (Gwinner, 1997).

Explorative Research:

The author chose an explorative study for this research because the concept under study is relatively new. Aside this, the use of corporate event is now a "persistent phenomena" and therefore an explorative study can give an idea as to what an in-depth study might reveal (p.92). An exploratory study was, to some extent, helped satisfy the curiosity that the researcher developed whiles working with corporate events; and it was also aimed to have clearer meaning as to why these events took place and why companies spend a lot of time and money to organize corporate events. An explorative study also afforded the researcher the opportunity to gain new understanding into the topic of corporate image and corporate events (Babbie, 2007). Despite the fact that exploratory qualitative researches are complex in nature, the researcher chose it in order to become familiar with the "basic facts, settings and concerns" of the concept under study (Neumann, 2011). The findings of this study will therefore barely give absolute results due to the challenges involved in conducting an explorative study.

3.2   Sample

The interviewees chosen were employees from various working and cultural backgrounds. These were people who attend a lot of events and can answer the questions about the concept under study. They also are the relevant people who can provide significant data needed for this study. The chosen sample was decided on purpose through the use of snowball sampling technique which identified the relevant people to interview (Fisher et al, 2010; Yin, 2011). The interviewer, based on personal contacts identified the first two respondents who then recommended other interviewees who they think attend a lot of events and can contribute to the study. One factor taken into account in the selection of the interviewees was to have those who will offer opinions that "contradict" with that of the researcher (Kuzel, 1992, as cited in, Yin, 2011, p.88). In identifying such interviewees multiple steps were taken. First, the researcher had a conversation with a couple of people suspected to have different opinions about the phenomenon. This brief conversation confirmed the researcher's suspicions and based on that chose them as part of the sample unit in order to avoid the issue of biases in the study (Yin, 2011). The respondents decided on where they thought were idle to be interviewed.

In this study, sampling was used at different stages in the entire study (Table 3, Appendix 3). The classifications for the dimensions used were sampled. In other to increase the believability in the studies, the classification was first identified through a pilot interview and reclassified using Morgan (2009) dimensions for event evaluation as a guideline. Secondly, the classification for the main interview was based on the classification obtained from the pilot interview. Two classmates were given the list to classify them and a final list was drawn out of the three using the most relevant one mentioned. The researcher also used sampling in deciding

on the data to use for the study. The sample unit chosen for the interview was ten (10) interviewees in all. Out of this ten (10), one of them deviated from answering the relevant topic and therefore the "material sampling" used was nine (9). The researcher also "sampled within the material" during the data interpretations, applied "presentational sampling" in the discussion of the outcomes of this study (Flick, 1998, pp. 62 - 63).

In the implementation process, pilot interviews lasted for approximately twenty (20) – thirty (30) minutes whiles the main research interview lasted for approximately one (1) - one and a half (1.30mins) hour. The socio-demographic background of informants cut across different age groups, nationalities and working background. Eight (8) out of the sample were full time employers with two (2) students with part-time work; but all attend a lot of corporate events due to the nature of their work. There was a fair representation of gender and the age cuts across from 25- 34, 35-44, 45-54, 55 – 64 and 65-74. The informants consist of Norwegians, Europeans, American/Canadian, Africans and Asians with two from each, making it a diverse and international group. Occupations of these informant falls within senior management, middle level managers, supervisors and junior staffs.

3.3   Data Collection

Every empirical research requires the collection of data (Yin, 2011). In order to obtain a qualitative data, this study used only one data collection unit, a qualitative interview. The choice of this type of data collection was based on the fact that the phenomenon under study is business and organization related. The data collected was rich its "descriptive attributes" because the researcher obtained the data through an in-depth interview which gave detailed information regarding the phenomenon under study. The use of an in-depth interview also "captured the

individual perspective" (Howitt, 2010). Using a qualitative research design highlighted the personal views of the interviewees of the phenomenon understudy.

3.3.1 Qualitative Interviews

The main motivation behind using a qualitative interview was to explore deeply into the interviewees views and perception. An important aspect taken into consideration during the selections of guidelines were the "what, why and how of the interview" (Kvale, 1996). The "what" requires that the researcher should have some understanding of the concept under investigation. The clarification of the purpose of research addresses the concern of the "why". The "how" involves getting familiar with different interview methods and selecting the suitable one for this study (pp.94-95).

As earlier indicated, the researcher used a set of validated questions as a theoretical guideline for asking the questions in the interview process. The guideline reminded the interviewer of the relevant areas to talk about in order to help develop a theory out of the interview data (Fisher et al, 2010, Howitt, 2010; Yin, 2011). The interviewer was flexible in asking questions based on interviewees' answers with the guideline in mind. The interview was in a form of a discussion which enabled the formation of "social relationships" of the concepts under investigation. Social relationships as explained by Yin (2011) are a kind of interview that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee should be friendly in nature but also should not be overfriendly (p.134). In order to avoid errors in the interview process, the interviewer carefully prepared and read theoretical book on how to conduct qualitative interviews ((Howitt, 2010; Kvale, 1996) and also followed the stages in the qualitative research interview (see Table 4, Appendix 4) as suggested by Howitt (2010).

3.3.2 Prior to the interview

Prior to the interview, the use of the qualitative design and why it was chosen for this study were clarified. The interview guide noted the relevant areas which had to be discussed using previous researches. The main literature used for the guide was an article by Gwinner (1997) "a model of image creation and image transfer in sponsorship" and the book by Masterman and Wood (2006) "Innovative Marketing Communication". In order to obtain basic demographic data (occupation, nationality, gender, age) of the interviewees, the interviewer used direct question.

The researcher had a pilot test in order to get the suitable sample to obtain quality data. This helped in identifying the dimensions to focus on and also afforded the researcher a practical interview experience. For ethical reasons, Participants were briefed about the background of the research and the aim of the study prior to the interview. They were also assured of the confidentiality in interviewing them. Appropriate locations, time and dates were agreed upon by interviewers and interviewees (Howitt, 2010, pp. 67-75). The study consists of a pilot interview which prepared the premises for the main interview. The research also reports a practical observation which came up during the course of the studies. This observation is discussed in the findings of this paper.

3.3.3 Pilot Test

Having the research question in mind, the researcher's quest was to first find out the dimensions attendees associate with an event's image. To achieve this, the researcher conducted a pilot interview which helped identify the key variable which is referred to as the dimensions in this study (Yin, 2011). According to Howitt (2010), the importance of trailing affords the

researcher the opportunity to gain experience and also identify problems. The researchers also read books and articles which was relevant to the phenomenon understudy in order to validate and confirm these variables.

Six informants were used for this study consisting on two (2) course mates who had working experience and four (4) workers from different working background. This was just a brief conversation to explore what words would be used to determine an event's image. In order not to get a lengthy list, informants were asked to list the four (4) most important factors/ dimensions (see Table 5, Appendix 5). Some were able to identify four (4) whiles others gave two (2) or three of what was most important to them. Some variables identified were security, proximity, details of program and speakers or special guests, choice of venue, customer service and total events organizations etc, just to name a few. From the list given from informants, the researcher grouped related together. After, these dimensions were classified accordingly using Morgan's (2009) dimensions as a guide.

3.3.4   Main Interview

As earlier mentioned, the researcher used a set of questionnaire from previous researches (see Appendix 6) and relevant theories as a guideline for the interview, but was flexible and open for redirection of question based on interviewees' answers (Fisher, Buglear, Lowry, Mutch, & Tansley, 2010).   The questions focused on the three dimensions: choice of venue, physical organization and content/program. The interview process was audio recorded with permission from the interviewees. The questions were aimed to investigate how attendees evaluate aspects of corporate events and how it relates to expectations and perceptions of the organization. The researcher therefore, having the guidelines in mind, divided the questions into relevant areas that helped operationalized the variables (Neuman, 2010, p. 205 – 207). Questions were asked on the

following areas: expectations, experiences and perceptions about an event (see Figure 2,). Followed by questions on how informants (attendees) use the events dimensions to evaluate the expectations, experiences and perceptions. The next set of questions explored the relationship between the evaluation and the corporate image. Figure 2 graphically represents how the questions were formed and the sequence in which it followed. This figure was derived from the guidelines and questions used for the interview based on Dowling's (2001) definition of corporate image.

Figure 2 Stages of event's image formation (attendees perception)

Experiences

Expectations

Evaluation

Perceptions

- Choice of venue
- Content/Program
- Physical organization

Image
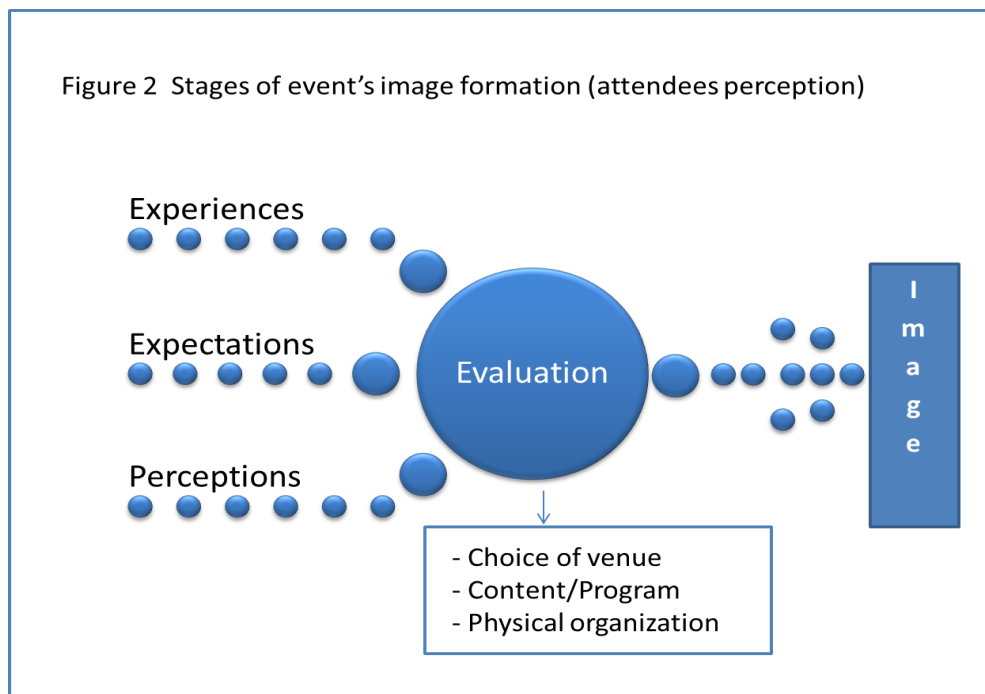
The interview process was divided into three sections. The first section was to obtain the "background" of informants and how often they attend corporate events. The second section focused mainly on finding out the details of the participant's experience of the concept under investigation. Lastly, the third interview concentrated on finding out the participants reflection on the "meaning of the experience" (Seidman, 2006; Seidman, 2006, as cited in,Yin, 2011) . In

order to explore extensively into the interviewee's thoughts, the researcher listened "actively" (Howitt, 2010, p.68; Kvale, 1996, p.147,). Howitt (2010) described an "active listener" as one who takes in a lot of information out of the conversation as possible. The active listener also introduces other questions which help in the exploratory process (p.68). During the interview, a couple of thoughts and issues aroused which were incorporated into later interviews. This supports the flexibility that a qualitative interview affords the researcher.

Following a guideline by Fisher et al (2010) on how to control an interview, the researcher was able to control the interview and understand the interviewees' point of view. All the interviews started with an open or "grand tour" (Yin, 2011, p.137) question that allowed the interviewees to talk freely and extensively. During the interview process, the researcher sometimes asked "reflective questions" when necessary in order for the respondent to freely talk about the emotion surrounding their answer (p.186). The relevant questions were open-ended questions in order to get more information out of the interviewees (Yin, 2011). The use of qualitative interview also made it possible for the understanding of the "participant's world" by interpreting what they said. However, this can be challenging since some of these words may be misinterpreted. The researcher developed "working ideas" in the course of collecting data and analyzing it (Neuman, 2010, p.205). This will be extensively discussed in the findings.

## 3.4   Data Analysis

Data analysis in a qualitative research deals with a series of stages. This stage involves the development of understanding of the interview, highlighting the informants' views, as well as the researcher deriving a new perception about the phenomena (Kvale, 1996). The analysis process used a thematic approach (Howitt, 2010) and Kvale (1996, pp. 187 -190) "six steps to

analysis" as a background guide. The six (6) steps analysis by Kvale (1996) basically helped the researcher in identifying which analysis suits best for the qualitative interview conducted. These analyzed the meaning of the interview, the development of themes, and the condensations of the transcripts. A thematic analysis is when the researcher analyzed what was said rather than how the informant said it. Howitt (2010) described it as a straightforward way of analyzing qualitative data and can be used as a starting point for a researcher. Thematic analysis is when the researcher analyzes the themes discovered in a qualitative interview/data (Howitt, 2010) and thereafter reports it. It is aimed at reducing and describing data whiles giving meaning to them. The researcher identifies and developed themes which describe the information in data collected. It is therefore important for researchers' who uses this kind of qualitative analysis to be very familiar with data collected. For this study, the researcher conducted and transcribed the interview. The recorded interview and transcripts were repeatedly listened to and read by the researcher in order to have a good knowledge of the data at hand. Even though researchers have criticized this type of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis when well-done can be equally compared to other types of qualitative analytical approach (p.165). All this stages confirms that using a thematic analysis requires a flow of activities. Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a model which gives a step by step approach on how to implement a thematic analysis (see Figure 3).

Data Familiarization

In every qualitative research, data is reduced throughout the entire study and one way of doing so is transcription. In transcribing the data does not only reduces the data but also familiarizes one with the information gathered. The researcher used the secretarial/play-script transcription which was straightforward in nature. This kind of transcription focuses only on the

words and not the how it was expressed (Howitt, 2010). Interviews were transcribed immediately after it was conducted.
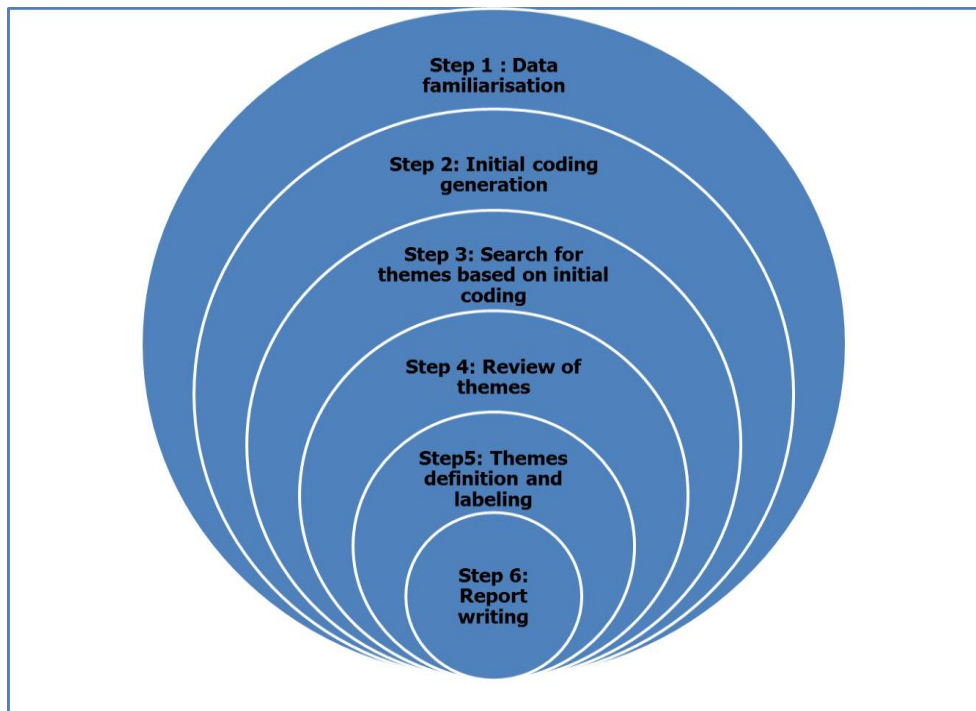
Figure 3: Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis: all steps may refer backwards and forwards to other steps (Source: Howitt, 2010, p.170)

During the interview process, the researcher continuously generated new thoughts based on the reflection of the information gathered. This redirected the questions been asked in analyzing the concept. The analyzing process used by this study conceptualizes the concept of corporate events and image and redefined its theoretical relationship (Neuman, 2011, p.p. 200-205). This new definition was linked to the theoretical framework earlier discussed in this study. To achieve this, the researcher recognized the construct, its measure and also identified what the study aims to explore. Transcribed data were confirmed with informants and saved for later

verifications (Kvale, 1996). The data collected were spoken, recorded and transcribed and therefore has a high volume and diversity. The data was reduced through selecting, simplifying and transforming it. A final report was made from the transcripts which were used for coding.

Initial Coding Generation

This step discusses the systematic approach to how the data was coded. Coding involves identifying themes, divining the research material into chunks or units, allocating units to the themes etc. (Fisher et al, 2010). The researcher based these initial codes on abstract about the phenomenon understudy. According to Howitt (2010), the coding should be abstract in order to have a good theme for analyzing. Using a theory-led approach, the initial codes were generated based on the "unit of analysis" rather than the "line of text" (p.174). A theory-led approach is when initial codes are generated by the main features of relevant theories; for example the elements regarding the formation of corporate image. These codes are just a guide to help researcher develop the themes.

Using initial codes to develop themes

Qualitative interview aims at "describing and interpretation of themes in the subjects' lived world (Kvale, 1996, p.187). Analyzing the initial codes further, the themes were developed. Generally themes are groups of similar elements identified through the codes. The researcher chose to use thematic analysis to display the data since the study was driven by pre-existing theoretical concerns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt, 2010). As already mentioned, thematic analysis is a vital and direct way of doing a qualitative analysis (Howitt, 2010). It is the analysis of the major theme recognized in a qualitative data and it is also more convenient for new researchers.

A thematic research has several advantages (see Table 6, Appendix 7). It was convenient to use this kind of analysis since the data collected consists of textual material and therefore was rich in content. In operationalizing the analysis, the researcher analyzed what was said rather than how it was said (Howitt, 2010). The initial codes generated were sorted on excel sheet grouping the similar ones together. This was done over and over again to identify how best it can be themed. Some of the codes interrelates which called for a sub-theme (Howitt, 2010). The reduced data was examined and relative themes were identified. These themes summarized the content of the entire data collected. In developing the themes, the relevant data to the research question were first identified and redefined till abstracts were clear.

Prevalence for this study was counted in terms of how many informants captured a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using a theoretical approach, the themes developed were analytic driven. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), an analytic driven research is used when the researcher's theoretical interest is used in theme development. Themes were identified at latent level, meaning the researcher identified the thoughts, assumptions, concepts and theories whiles generating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Review of themes

Themes generated were examined alongside the original data. A theme is a capture of important aspects of the data which is relevant to the research question. It usually has similarities which appear in a form of a pattern in the data. The themes were key into an excel sheet in a form of a table and compared with data used for the codes. This in effect confirmed whether the themes chosen were the right one and necessary changes were made where applicable.

Theme definition and labeling

One important point to note here is having an accurate and precise theme (Howitt, 2010). To ensure this, themes where defined in accordance to its use in the study. The researcher developed a better understanding of the data and sub-themes were generated.

Report writing

The final stage in the model constitutes the finds and discussions of this study. Relevant literatures were used in supporting these finding in its discussion.

3.5   Reliability and Validity

As common knowledge, it is important to have a study which is reliable and valid. Neuman (2010) defined reliability as the "dependability" and validity as "truthfulness" (p.208). The study should therefore be consistent and realistic.

3.5.1   Reliability

In order to improve of the reliability of the entire studies and the data collection, the dimensions obtained from interviewees from the pilot test were grouped together. It was again reclassified into three dimensions (choice of venue, content/program and physical organization). This was to enable consistency internally and over time (Howitt, 2010) and validate the dimensions. This was also done for the main interview.

The issue of reliability during main data collection deals with consistency and dependability of the instruments used in evaluating (Neumann, 2009). The researcher had an interview plan which was followed throughout the interview process and interviews were transcribed immediately after each one. To increase the reliability and believability in the

questions asked, the researcher as earlier mentioned used a guideline from previous research work relevant to this study which was already validated. The interviewer also critically questioned the informant's responses in order to test the reliability and consistency in the data collected (Kvale, 1996, p.149). The interviewer was careful in the wording for the "leading questions" in order not to influence the answers given by informants (Kvale, 1996, pp.157-158). This was purposeful in order to enhance the reliability of the interview. According to Neuman (2009), time interval during the data collection is of importance in a qualitative research study. This study used approximately six months in the entire study, making the time of study reliable.

3.5.2   Validity

According to Kvale (1996), validity in a qualitative research interview deals with facts and whether the interview was able to investigate what was aimed to be investigated (Neuman, 2009). This means the extent to which the interview reveals and explores the phenomena under investigation. Yin (2011) refers to a valid study as one whose data collection was properly done and well interpreted. Such studies have a conclusion which that "accurately reflects and represents" the phenomenon understudy.

In order to validate the study, the researcher through the use of qualitative interview obtained the views of people in the business world who attend a lot of event, making it a daily routine (Neuman, 2010). The data collected is therefore real opinions from interviewees. A valid research is also trustworthy and authentic (Neuman, 2011; Yin, 2011). A research can said to be trustworthy if is it credible and dependable. The interview was able to acquire the necessary information needed for this study; hence one can confirm the credibility. Credibility refers to whether the choice of data collection method achieved a good result. Another feature of a valid

data collected is the face validity of the questions asked. Face validity raises the concern of whether the informants understood the questions. Out of the ten respondents, nine (9) well understood the questions without the interviewer repeating and explaining it over and over again. However, due to the issue of language differences, the tenth informants had difficulty understanding the meaning of some words used by the researcher.

The "fidelity of the transcription" of the conversation held with informants during the pilot test indicates that the transcripts are valid (Howitt, 2010, p.368). The transcripts were checked against the recorded interview and co-check by 2 classmates. To validate the transcription for the main interview, the researcher re-checked the transcribed data against the recorded interview twice in order to make sure the relevant information were gathered and accurate (Horwitt, 2010). Two course mates also re-checked the transcription against the recorded data to avoid bias transcription (Kvale, 1996, p.163). To confirm that the transcribed data was exactly the views of the informants, the informants were given a copy of their transcribed interview and necessary amendments were made. The clear description given when discussing the data collection also validates the interview process since the researcher followed valid stages in the interview as suggested by Kvale (1996, p.88).

3.5.3   Validity of Analysis

Validity in the data analysis of a qualitative research questions is the scope to which the "analysis fits the data" (Howitt, 2010, p.168). Taking into consideration the approach and findings derived from the use of the thematic analysis, one can say that the analysis of this research are valid.

Chapter 4.0   Towards an explanation: The Findings

This section presents the key findings of the interview towards an explanation to the query raised in the research question. The outcomes of qualitative analysis are seen more as a revelation than numerical results; hence Howitt (2010) refers to it as findings. According to Howitt (2010), it is a challenge to separate the findings derived from the data and the how the data was understood and explained by the researcher. Hence, this chapter presents both the findings and discussions of the analyzes of this study supporting it with the necessary quotations and theories (Burnard, 2004; Howitt, 2010).

4. 1   Interview – Pilot and Main Interview

In the presentations of the findings using a thematic approach did not require a detailed knowledge of relevant theories. It was therefore easier to use and could easily fit into various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the presentation of the findings, the researcher used a couple of terms and abbreviations. To clarify these, informants refers to the participants who were interviewed. Informants will be referred to as Informant 1, Informant 2, etc. but will also be referred to as attendees in the discussions.

The individual quotations from informants are in italics and with quotation marks. Three spaced dotted points (. . .) were used to in indicating the excluded part of the quotation within a sentence. To indicate excluded parts between two sentences, four (….) dotted points were used (APA, 2009).

4.1.1   The Pilot Test

As already discussed in the methodology section, a couple of themes identified answered the sub-questions of the research question. The sub- question was:

"What dimensions of corporate events contribute to an attendee's perception of an event's image?"

The informants mentioned a couple of factors which were grouped and re-grouped till final classification were made. Final classifications of dimensions were choice of venue, physical organization and program outline.

4.1.2   The main interview

In developing the themes, the relevant data to the research question were first identified and redefined till abstracts were clear (Howitt, 2010). Previous chapters have already indicated that this research explores the factors that determine a corporate event's image and the contribution of this image to the organizational corporate image. Therefore using theoretical analytical driven themes (Howitt, 2010), the determinants of a corporate event's image were identified in confirmation with ones already identified in pilot test. However, a new dimension, (profile of attendees) was introduced in the data. The second part of the analysis focused on the formation of an events image and how it relates to corporate image.

4.2   Corporate Events (Attendees Perspectives)

4.2.1   Clarification of Definition

It was important to clarify what corporate events means to an informant. Eighty percent (80%) of the findings clearly understood the meaning of corporate events without the researcher

giving a further explanation. However, the remaining twenty percent (20%) understood corporate events as business banquets or companies' entertainment events. As illustrated by the following quotation, an informant defined corporate events as meeting, launching of a new product, conference, training programs etc.

"Yes, at least I attend an average of two (2) of such events a month. It can be either a meeting or launching of a new software product or something computer related such as web and data type conference. I also sometimes go to training programs organized by my company and other training companies…., but that is not all; I also go for business lunches or end of year parties", all these I see them as corporate events". (Informant 2)

Going back to the supporting theories used earlier on, O'Toole (2011, pp. 47, 51) defines corporate events as "celebrations event used by private companies to further their objectives" (p.321). O'Toole also defines business events as events which main purposes are business related such as conferences, exhibitions and meetings (p.321). Masterman and Wood (2006) associates events with marketing communication and referred to it as an innovative way of communication. In this association, promotional events, corporate hospitality and marketing oriented events are all part of the innovative marketing communication toolkit. Linking these two together, this study defines corporate events as all events organized by the corporate body in order to communicate to its stakeholders. This communication can be business focused, marketing oriented or a celebration.

However, the findings reveal a new definition of corporate events which has not yet been identified in the literatures used so far for this study. Almost seventy percent (70%) of the informants' defined corporate events as every event. They believe all events are "organized by a

company" (informant 5) and therefore it is a corporate event. This can be identified in the following quotation from another informant:

"I see every event as corporate events since they are all organized by a company. There is always a company behind an event. It is only the objective of the events that differs. I therefore think that whether it be formal events such as conferences, meetings, marketing oriented events etc.; or informal one such as festivals, games, dinner or banquets they are all corporate events…" (Informant 5)

The researcher was quite interesting to note since the researcher never thought of corporate events in that line. This new definition redefines most definition recognized in event management books and may call fall a broader spectrum of re-defining corporate events in future studies.

4.2.2   Determinants of an events image

The findings show four main dimensions attendees used in determining the image of a corporate event by informants. Even though the focus of this research question considered only three of these, choice of venue, physical organization and program outline; the data revealed that attendees use one other factor which they think is equally necessary. This can be noted in the following quotations:

"I look out for what the program entails and who is on the program. It gives me an impression of the whole event. For me if it is a training program or similar events, I expect to have a good resource personal who can add up to my knowledge. I expect the program to run smoothly and for it to do so it has to have the right facilities. Therefore,

everything that will make it possible is of great importance to me since I based my judgment of the events success on it, which I also use to form the image. I also expect to make business contact. Therefore I am always interested in knowing the background of other attendees. I think who you invite to an event also adds up to your events reputation. Not only that but also corporates people go to corporates events in order to build business relationships and expand their network. '' (Informant 3)

The above quotation indicates that informant do not use only the choice of venue (Morgan, 2009; O'Toole, 2011; Rogers, 2008); physical organization (Morgan, 2009; O'Toole, 2011) and content/program outline (O'Toole, 2011) to determine the image of a corporate event but also the profile of attendees. This new variable was identified in six (6) out of the nine (9) interviews conducted making it an option to consider and will be further discussed in subsequent sections. However, a total of seven (7) informants recognized the choice of venue, physical organization and program outline as a determinant of an event's image. The other two had reservations regarding the choice of venue. To these two informants, where the events was held is not significant to how they evaluate the event so far as the event objective was met.

"I don't care so much about where the event is going to be organized. What is important for me if the events objective was achieved? I go there to have a new experience and so I would evaluate this based on whether the organizers were able to deliver what they said they would do…" Informant 2

These findings confirm the dimensions proposed in this study as the main determinants of an events image. Morgan (2009) also identifies these dimensions in evaluating the success of an

event. The next sections will analysis the process by which attendees forms an event's image and also consider each dimensions and its contribution to the image forming process.

4.2.3   Formation of corporate events' image

Analysis from the first four interviews revealed a pattern in the informants' image formation process of an event. This therefore called for an adjustment in the questions for subsequent interviews in order to explore deeper into the formation process. The data indicated that the informants form their image based on three main factors: expectations, experiences and perceptions about an object, which in this case will be the event. The findings also show that, attendees then evaluate and react to these three factors (see Figure 2, pg 41).

The identified themes helped the researcher in discovering how informants described their experiences, expectations and perception of an event and how they evaluated and reacted to these three themes (see Figure 4). This figure shows the graphical representation of how informants used their experiences, expectations and perceptions in the image formation of an event. Looking at the theoretical definition used earlier in this study, corporate image was defined as   the total "evaluation" of the company's personality and the "emotional reaction" evoked by the personalities (Dowling, 2001) which is this case seen in the event. This evaluation and emotional reactions forms the image of an object. In the formation process, there should be a relationship between the evaluation and the perception of the organization with regards to the needs of the customer. There should also be a relationship between the two above and the expectations of the customer's expectations towards the organizations' performance. The customers, who in this case are the attendees, needs are satisfied through the dimensions. Dowling (2001) describes these as the motivations that stimulate the creation of an

organizations' corporate image (p.138). The findings therefore support Dowling's image definition and creation process. Each stage of the formation process is discussed in details.

Image Formation Process By Attendees
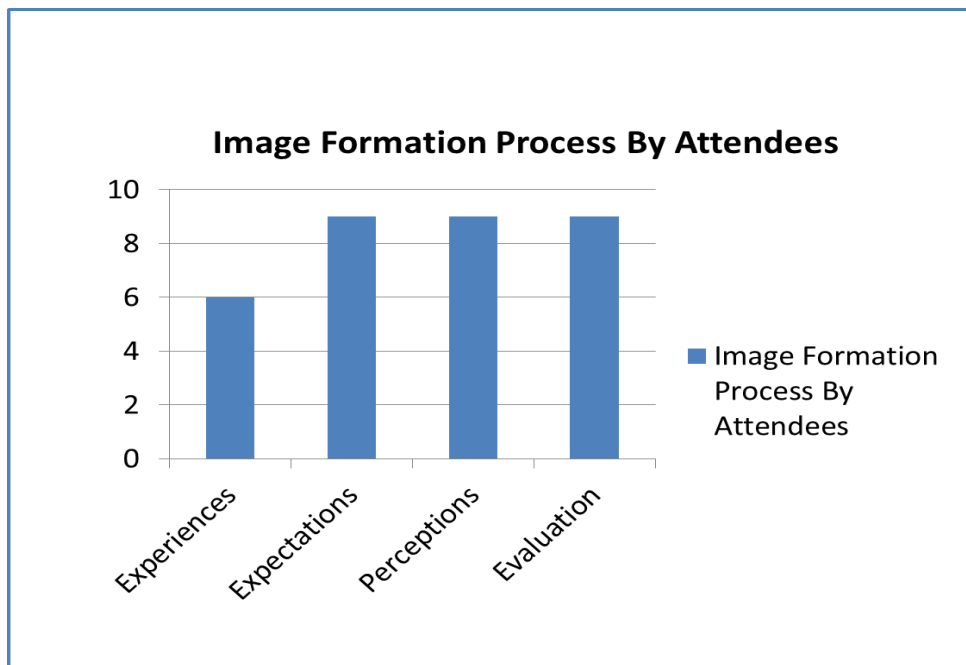
Figure 4: Graphical representation of image formation derived from findings.

A) **Experiences**

About eighty percent (80%) of informants indicated the use of previous personal experiences with the organization as a starting point in their image formation process for an event. Informants had a preconceived image of the event based of what they already know about the organization. They believe that good quality should produce good service and so if the company stands for quality then it should be present in all they do. This can be seen in a quotation of an informant who attends at least five corporate events a month.

I have been to a lot of such events. I know from my own personal experience that the quality of an event is most times determined by the host company. If the company is of good quality they will in most cases deliver a good service or event. Therefore, having in mind the company inviting me to the event and knowing the reputation of the company, forms my own expectation about how successful the event is going to be …" Informant 1

The findings confirm the use of previous experiences with the organization as the foundation in forming attendees' expectations. According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2008), the images of the organization are experienced through the corporate identity mix. The organization exposes its image through its personality traits such as integrity, quality, trust, reliability etc. These traits helps attendees realize their expectations in terms of whether to have a high expectation or not. Attendees therefore having experienced (Dowling, 2001) the organization identity build their expectations of the event around what they know about the organization. Knowing the organization and its reputation, attendees have a preconceived image of the corporate event based on trust. If the organization has a good image and is known for quality, then attendees expect that whatever they do should replicate their standards. It is therefore important for the organization to be consistent in all its communication activities.

B)   Expectations:

About eighty percent (80%) indicated that they use their experiences to form their expectations. These expectations are formed around some dimensions but the study only considered the choice of venue, physical organization and content/program outline and the profile of attendees. According to the findings, informants expect some quality in these

dimensions which matches with the image of the organization. The quotation below expressed an informant's expectation.

"… Therefore, having in mind the company inviting me to the event and knowing the reputation of the company, I form my own expectations about how successful the event is going to be and what to expect in terms of service, the venue and its facilities etc." Informant 1

Another informant also expressed his expectations as follows:

"I form these anticipations, or should I call it expectations, based on what I know about the company. Well sometimes I may be wrong but most times I am correct. What you know about the company organizing the event tells you a lot about what you will get out of the event. It's just like a person, what you are show in what you do". Informant 7

Knowing these expectations are built around the dimensions, it was therefore important to analyze what attributes of each dimension matters to the attendees (see Table 7). These attributes were derived from the data and analyzed not in order of importance. Attendees take into consideration details that may seem insignificant to the organizer. Morgan (2009) describes these dimensions as the factors that are used to assess the success of an event. Adapting it to this study, these are also the attributes that are used in the creation of an events image (Dowling, 2001) since the creation involves evaluation of an object. The object being evaluated in this case is the corporate event. The attributes of each dimension are discussed below in order to give a clear meaning of how they affect the event.

Table 7:   Events dimensions and its attributes derived from findings

Event Dimensions	Attributes
Choice of Venue	Accessibility, security, physical environment, carrying capacity, facilities
Content/ Program Outline	Event type & objective, details of programs, program facilitators/ resource personnel, time management
Physical Organization	Event personnel, general service offerings, promotion of events
Attendees' Profile	Professional background, networking

i)   Choice of Venue:

Questions related to the choice of venue explored what aspects of the venue were of interest to the attendees and how it helped in the formations of their perceptions. The findings indicated the following aspects in relations to the choice of venue: accessibility, security, carrying capacity, logistics/ equipment's and facilities. These aspects would be discussed one after the other. An in-depth discussion of these findings and relevant theories with regard to the choice of venue and its attribute would also be presented at the end of each dimension.

- **Accessibility:**

Findings show that informants take into consideration how easily the events venue can be accessible. An informant expressed her frustration when she has difficulty in accessing a venue.

She prefers to attend event in locations that has various means of getting there rather than one absolute means. This was evidence in about half of the data. International guests expect the events venue to be near the airport and bus terminals. Also there should be adequate parking spaces for the expected guests. Most of the data analyzed expressed showed concern about having to spend time looking for a parking space. They expect the parking allocated to the venue to be idle and big enough for the expected guests attending the event.

> *"For me, it is very important to have an easy means of arriving at the event location or venue. I hate to get stressed from getting a place to park before I arrive. It ruins my whole day because it affects my mood. Therefore the parking should be able to accommodate all guests having cars."* Informant 8

> *"(…) if I am invited to an event I should have easy access to the place. Yes it is not up to the organizers to provide the access; but it is up to them to choose a venue that the guest can easily access otherwise how do you expect us to be there?"* Informant 6

> *"I travel a lot for international business events and I expect the venue not to be so far away from the nearest airport. Travelling by air sometimes exhaust you, especially when you have to change flights and wait at airport etc. it will be over exhausting if the events venue is another 4 hours' drive from the airport. I think ideally 20 – 30minutes should be ok. If it is a local event, I really don't care because they expect me to be familiar with the location so that is my responsibility, not theirs"* Informant 1

This last quotation however shows that the issue of accessibility may not be relevant for local events since attendees are familiar with the environment.

- **Security**

Informants believe an event's venue should be secure and safe, only then would they have full concentrations on the events. Security issues raised in the findings involves choosing a venue in a safe environment, fire safety measures in place and in cases where there participants have to exhibit, the exhibited products are safe. For corporate events where it is held in open environment, informants expect to have some kind of security personnel around. However, the issue of security was not relevant for informants if the event is organized here in Norway. This is because attendees interviewed for this study recognizes Norway as a safe country and so do not pay attention to this attribute.

"I am only concerned about my safety if I am attending conference outside Norway. Otherwise if the event is here, I have no reason to worry. I know I am safe" Informant 1

- **Carrying Capacity**

One attribute also identified in the analyses of the dimensions was the size of the venue, site or room in which the event is taking place. Informants expect that the size of the venue to be big enough to carry the guests and if possible a little bigger so that they do not feel crowded. This was extremely important for those who participate in a lot of conferences, meetings and training program. The quotation below expresses one of such views with regards to the room size.

"Sometimes I feel like we are packed into a small room and I wonder why? I think having a bigger room to accommodate all participants is important especially if it is a

training program or conference. I need the space to take in new information. I don't have

to feel uncomfortable, it makes me tired and then I can't concentrate…" Informant 5

- **Facilities**

The facilities available at the corporate event's venue also add to attendees' final evaluation of the event. Facilities identified include logistics and equipment for effective production of event, accommodation and toilet facilities. All the informants mentioned the importance of having the necessary equipment ready and functional upon arrival. They believe these attributes help in realizing the event's objective. Some get disappointed when they attend business events like conferences and the translating facilities are not working or there is so much feedback from the microphone that one can barely hear anything.

"The equipment enables the audience to follow the event. If they are not in place or not working properly then one would not benefit from it…" (Informant 4)

If the event expects foreign or out of town guests, the accommodation for guests should be well arranged and clean. An informant expressed her expectations of having a good rest in a clean room after a day full of activities. The toilet facilities in the choice of venue should be adequate enough to be used by all guests and should be clean. According to the findings this is one aspect companies usually overlooks.

"I once attended a conference and the hotel has a lot of conference rooms which was always booked with only six toilets, three for male and the rest for the female. It was a three-day conference and every day I have to queue for at least five to six minutes to use

the toilet and I usually use it like two or three times a day. Can you imagine the number

of minutes I spent in all…?" (Informant 1)

- **Physical Environment**

Physical environment in the findings refers to the atmospheres, décor/ambience, lightings and design etc. Findings shows that the room, venue or site should be setup and suitable for the event. Lighting should be appropriate and the environment should be conducive enough to achieve the events objective.

"I expect the room layout to be suitable for the event. When I say layout, I mean the arrangements of chairs, the design, etc. If the event does not need any decoration, then don't use any. Just arrange it in a way that can easily communicate what you intend to do. When I go to a training program, I expect to learn and so I take notes. Arrangement for training program should include things that would help me achieve this. If these things are not considered the event's objective may not be realized because there may be problems". Informant 3

In discussing the attribute of the choice of venue, on could say it is the key element in the organization of the event. Choosing a wrong venue can affect the whole event's outcome. These assumptions were confirmed in the findings since attendees consistently expressed how the wrong choice of venue can change the whole event and sometimes its objective. Conway (2009) stated that the events venue is the "utmost importance" (p.95) since all other activities and preparation are related to it. The researcher noted that attendees' definition of choice of venues goes beyond just the room for the event. The findings show that attendees have an expectation

towards the accessibility (O'Toole, 2011), security (Conway, 2009; O'Toole, 2011), carrying capacity (Conway, 2009; O'Toole, 2011), facilities (O'Toole, 2011) and physical environment (Bitner, 1990; Bitner, 1992; El Sayed et al, 2003). Accessibility to an attendee can be seen from two perspectives, the local and international or out of town attendee.

For an international and out of town attendees, they raised concerns with regards to proximity to airports, bus terminals and city centers (Rogers, 2008). Their focus was to have an easy access to the venue especially after a travel rather than having to spend more time in reaching the venue. They prefer to have such venues in locations that may be of benefit to them as well since they are not too familiar with the environment. Locations therefore have a bearing on the choice of venue and its accessibility (Rogers, 2008). O'Toole defines accessibility as easy access to the events venue and made mention of proximity and transportation. The ideal venue should be easily accessible either by public or private transport. It should have adequate parking space for expected arriving guests. Depending on the type of event, the venue should not be isolated. Attendees in this study expressed their concern with regards to these issues raised above thereby confirming some of the factors mentioned by O'Toole with regards to the venue choice. However, half of the findings show that some attendees do not really pay much concern with regards to venue accessibility especially if the event is organized locally.

It is of common knowledge that people have concerns about their safety. Findings in this study however indicate that attendees are less worried about their safety/security so far are the event is organized in Norway. They have absolute trust in the society and would rather think of their security when travelling outside this country. Conway (2009) would rather refer to it as safety than security since then it goes beyond violence but considers health issues, fire

preventions and exits as well as traffic management. The issue of traffic management is of a greater concern if the event is an outdoor event expecting hundreds of people.

The room, site or venue size, which is referred to as the carrying capacity, is another attribute of the venues identified in the findings. These should be able to accommodate the attendees since organizers are aware of the number of people attending the event. One way of avoiding crowded rooms/sites is to reconfirm all invited guests and making sure the confirmed guests fits comfortably into your choice of room. Size sites or venue helps in managing traffic. O'Toole (2011) outlined some of these issues when discussing the stakeholder's expectations. A suitable room/site size will also help in designing the venue and setting up appropriately (Bowdin, et al., 2006). This will further be discussed later on when discussing the physical environment.

Facilities available at the choice of venue also play a role in the expectations of attendees towards an event. Facilities identified in the finding were logistics, equipment and toilet facilities (Bowdin, et al., 2006; O'Toole, 2011). The ideal choice of venue should be functional for the purpose of the event. Necessary audio visual and public address systems needed for the event should be in place and functional. Other equipment such projectors, display screens, computers etc. should also be available and ready before attendees arrive. These highlight the efficiencies of the organization and therefore can be relied upon. One interesting point noted however was the way attendees referred to "toilet facilities" as the attribute mostly overlooked by the organizer. This is mostly the case when events are held in established conference venues such as hotels, meeting hall etc. These places are usually rented by the event organizer who assumes such places have adequate toilet facilities. Due to such assumptions, event organizers most often fail to

confirm the number of toilet facilities available. Not only is it important to have enough toilet facilities but it should also be clean. As much as the renters are liable to clean the toilet it is also the responsibility of the organizer to make a request of frequent clean up. This is because the toilet facilities are used by all guests of the hotel and it is logical to have a frequent check on it. Other facilities like electricity and internet should also be considered where appropriate.

The last attribute identified in the findings was the physical environment. It is important for attendees to have the right kind of environment suitable for the events. The physical environment relates to the design and décor (Conway, 2009), lighting and the general atmosphere conducive for the event. Attendees find cues of the organization though the physical environment (Bitner, 1990; Bitner, 1992; El Sayed et al, 2003), and therefore expect to see the personality of the organization represented also in the events environment.

ii)   Content or Program Outline:

Analyzing what an event's program means to attendees introduced the word content. One point noted was that informants prefer to use the word content in addition to the program outline. According to them, content gives a deeper meaning to the program outline. Attributes about the content identified are event type/ objective, details of programs/facilitators and time management.

Event type and objective: Findings shows that the type of event and its objectives also add up to the overall image of the event. Event type should be formed around the event objective as well as the company's overall objective.

"When I know the type of event am attending and what the objectives are, then I know what to expect. If it is merely for fun, I do not pay much attentions to it but then if it is for strengthening of business relationships or impacting of knowledge then I have more expectations" Informant 4

Details of program: Details of program should conform to the event's objective and type. Activities scheduled should be one that meets the objective and also well organized. It should also be consistent in its delivery. Facilitators for these programs should also be those who are competent enough to deliver. Putting the wrong facilitator in charge may mess up the whole event and its objective may not be met. Resource personnel should be resourced enough to impact knowledge.

Time management: Attendees expect events to go as scheduled and time efficiently managed. Having a late start to programs and resource personnel not going according to scheduled time may in some instances disrupt the whole event. Sometimes, lack of time management may cause the cancellations of some programs. One informant expressed that he feels respected if the program goes according to the scheduled time.

"If I go for a conference or training program, I am there for a reason and that is to learn something. I expect this learning process to be smooth and organized. I expect to learn from people who have knowledge to impact. I expect this event to be managed in terms of the time and various activities. Such issues change the whole motivation behind my attendance if not taken care of, and then I don't get my return on investment. My return on investment may not necessarily be financial but can also be my time and energy spent in attending the event." Informant 6

"*... it is important to manage the time. It means you respect my time since I also respected your and arrived on time. I expect you also to respect mine because I have order plans."* Informant 8

The content or program of an event equally plays an important role in the events image formation process hence it needs to be well discussed. The content consists of the event type and objective; details of program and facilitators; and time management during the event. O'Toole (2011) refers to this as the "ultimate deliverables of the event" (p.156). These deliverables adds up to overall communication structure of the event.

An event objective is the purpose or aim of the event. Every corporate event is organized with an objective behind it. Conway (2009) defines an event objective as a "single statement" (p.13) which captures the motive behind the organization of the event. It is important to have a clear objective which will be understood by all. The objective may not always be strictly for business purposes but sometimes a way of giving back something to the society. Even for such events, it still has the business in mind since in the long run its effects add up to the organizations reputation.

The details of the program consist of choices of activities lined out for the event (O'Toole, 2011). According to Masterman and Wood (2006), the choice of activities is equally important as the invited guests (profile of attendee). The two inter-relates since activities are tailor-made for invited guests in order to achieve the event's objective. One can therefore see a point of interaction here but these will be discussed later in the relationships section of the study. The choice of activities also determines the host and resource persons needed. Activities should be consistent and should be planned with the objective in mind. According to O'Toole (2011), an

events program creates maximum impact and therefore it should carefully be selected. It should be innovative and presented by the right host. If there is a need for a guest speaker, this should be a person whose presence and message will add-up to achieving the events objective. As much as programs are tailor-made for invited guests or targeted audience, it should still be in line with the event's objective (Masterman and Wood, 2006).

An effective program should also have a good time schedule which is efficiently managed. Activities should be within a specific time frame. Scheduling of time for activities should be appropriate for the activity. Programs should start when they intend to be started and facilitators, resource persons and guest speakers should stick to their allocated time. If time is not efficiently managed, some programs may be delayed or even canceled and this can affect the objective and the overall image of the event. Attendees believe that effective time management during an event shows how time conscious the organization is. They also think effective time management also shows respect to invited guest.

The above discussions all indicates that the content/program outline of an event also plays a role in the event's image formation process. Attendees have expressed their expectations towards the content of the event and its program. These fits into the theoretical frameworks provided earlier in the study thereby confirming an events content/program a dimension worth considering in the corporate event planning process.

iii)   Physical Organization

Physical organization is another dimension used by attendees in forming their expectations. They expect corporate events to be efficiently organized and the event staffs to be

professional trained (competent). Competency here refers qualified staffs to deliver the services suitable for the event. Staffs are expected to render efficient service, be friendly and also have good knowledge about the event. Sometimes the staffs are not fully aware of the details of the event activities. In such cases, staffs do not meet the needs of the client with regards to events details/information. This was identified in sixty percent of the data analyzed. General services offered during events speak a lot about the organization and its level of service. All the findings raised issues about good customer service.

One attribute also identified was promotional activities. A relevant number of informants indicated the use of such promotions to project what to expect at the events. Good events are well promoted to relevant audience in order to achieve its objective.

"I expect to see friendly staffs who know what they are doing, staffs that will help when the need arises and also have available information. I get disappointed and frustrated when I attend an event and the events staffs are not available or do not have the information I need." Informant 2

"I call it quality service. Well organized events are of quality and that is what I expect. I expect some to show some level of professionalism and competency. This is very important in my perception building after the event." Informant 9

Another interesting factor identified was the use of event management companies and other vendors/suppliers. Attendees believe an organization with a good image should outsource their activities to companies who have the same image in order to protect their image.

"I believe the suppliers you choose also portrays you image and what you stand for. If the host company has a good image and good reputation, it will always do business with companies that stands for the same values. Therefore the company should hire an event organizer that also can render the kind of service that will match with the company's I mage." Informant 7

The findings of this dimension take into consideration the monitoring and coordination of the event (Masterman and Wood, 2006). Even though the issues associated with the venue and the event programs are taken care of, there is a need to monitor and coordinate them. Important issues identified in this study were competency/professionalism; general service offerings and promotion of the event.

Attendees expect to have competent event teams that are qualified to manage and deliver the event (O'Toole, 2011). Attendees evaluate the competencies and capabilities of the staffs. Competencies and capabilities are the core skill of an organization's success which reflects in its image. According to Dowling (2001), these two explains how competitive an organization can be. Members of the team should be professional and friendly. They should also have detailed knowledge of the event and its activities. Attendees expressed their frustrations when such information is not known by the event staffs. It is important therefore to brief staffs on every detail pertaining to the event which may be of interest to the attendee. If the event lasts more than a day, staffs should be updated daily in order to be aware of any changes which may occur.

The general services offered by event staff should be customer oriented. An attendee described it as quality service. Quality in service means serving customers with their needs in focus. This should be done in a polite and professional manner. Good customer service is a well-

known concept; hence there is no need to go further into it since this study's focus is more on the image than the service offerings.

Attendees also consider the promotional activities of an event in its image formation process. According to O'Toole (2011), promoting an event increases its chances of success. How the event is promoted either through the print media or television and other advertising means creates an impression in the minds of the targeted audience. Therefore there are aspects to consider which will promote or market it effectively. Examples of such aspects are the objective of the event and the targeted audience or profile of attendees. Knowing who are coming to the event helps you in your choice of advertisement or promotional activities.

In the case whereby the organization decides to use other events management companies and vendors/suppliers for the event, attendees expects the same quality from such service providers. They believe that organizations should associate themselves with other organizations of like image. Events team should therefore ensure to choose event management companies, suppliers and vendors who are able to deliver and maintain the organizations personality in their service.

iv)   Profile of attendees

As earlier mentioned, a new dimension that was consistent in the data was attendees' profile. The findings show that the profile of people and background of people invited to an event also helps in evaluating the event. If the event objective is for a targeted group, for example professional in a particular discipline, they expect to meet people of professional background which is relevant in other to establish relationship and expand professional network.

"… I also expect to make business contact therefore I am always interested in knowing the background of other attendees. Unless it is an entertainment event then even though I try to make contact, I do not focus so much on it since in most cases the audience is not filtered for such events." Informant 8

"For me the aspect that is important to me is the program and what is entails because I have a reason for going, to learn new things. That is what matter, the experience I get and the network I build." Informant 2

The discussion of this dimension noted the researcher's failure in considering it during the data collection. Even though it appeared in the pilot test, the researcher ignored it thinking it was not that relevant but it re-appeared in the findings of the main interview. Attendees have an expectation towards other invited guests to the event. According to them, corporate events afford them an opportunity to expand their network and build business relationships. They are therefore interested in knowing who is coming and from which working background. Conway (2009) mentions that, an events audience should match with the objective of the event. The objective and event type helps an organization in choosing who to invite to the corporate event. However, in situations where the event is a paid event and is opened to the general public it will be difficult for organizations to select their preferred attendees, this may be because they may be more focused on the financial benefits of the events than the network association.

C)   Perceptions:

About eighty percent (80%) of the findings show that after attending the corporate event, they use their experience during the event to form a perception. During the events, attendees look

out for their "expectations" and whether they were met or not. After attending the events, whether these expectations were met or not contribute to how the attendees perceive the organization. They expect the organization to deliver some kind of quality in relation to what it stands for. An informant said that:

" … I came with an expectation and expected it to be met since I know the company…. I don't only get disappointed when these are not met, especially if it happens more than once with the same company, then I will have a different opinion about the company… Yes I know that sometimes things go wrong but if you allow things to go wrong on several occasions than you are not competent"… (Informant 5)

As mentioned earlier on, attendees use past experiences with the organization to form their expectations of an event. These expectations are formed prior to attending the event based on previous experience with the organization. To attendees the dimensions are the "moment of truth" where the organization is tested for what it stands for and the kind of personality it projects. The perceptions when evaluated form the image of the corporate event. Image has two main components, cognitive believe and feelings. These are experienced simultaneously (Dowling 2001) and forms the perception. Dowling argues that, a person's perception can be changed and this may influence the emotional attachment to the organizations. The personality of the organization should be manifested in the dimensions of the corporate events. Corporate event has already been confirmed to be a corporate communication tool (Masterman and Wood, 2006). This makes it a part of the identity mix. This process of manifestations develops the perceptions (Birkigt K. & Stadler M. M., 2000; Brønn, 2005; van Riel & Fombrun, 2008). The identity of the

organization prompts recognition of the organization and this stimulates already stored image (Dowling, 2001).

D)   Evaluations:

Evaluation of an event was prevalence in all the findings. Informants indicated that they evaluate the success of an event at the end of every event. According to the findings these evaluations are compared to the previous experience and the expectations one had prior to attending the event plus the perception formed after the event. Attendees indicated that these evaluations usually comes up when discussing the event with friends or colleagues and is often unconsciously. The following quotation shows one of such findings:

"…usually when I have to attend such events, I talk about it with my colleagues. Through the conversation I talk about my expectations and so I talk about it again when I get back to work. Everybody wants to know how the event went. I talk about what I experienced and most times before I realize we are comparing what I was expecting to what I experienced. So I don't deliberately evaluate but it comes up by itself. Whiles discussing it with my friends, negative experiences come up and if this is frequent it may change my feelings about the company." (Informant 5)

According to the findings of this study, all   the attendees evaluate the dimensions and attributes discussed above after the event. To them, these dimensions are important for consideration when organizing corporate events. If the organization has a good image and is known for quality, attendees expect it to be effective and efficient. The effective and efficiencies of an organization causes a reaction in attendees mind. After attending an event, attendees

compare their previous experiences with the present experiences and draws conclusions. Going back to our earlier definition of corporate image, Dowling defines it as a "total evaluation" which forms an image. Adapting this definition to that of an event image, one can say that the dimensions are the "mix" that an organization can use to create its events image.

4.3   Relationships

About seventy percent (70%) of the findings show that they react to the results of their evaluation. If the corporate event had a positive image, then it strengthens the trust and reliability of the organization. They are confident about the abilities of the organization and attached this trust to other aspects of the organizations activities.

> "*Exactly, because I believe whatever the organization is will reflect in everything they do, even in the program they organize. All the issues I mentioned earlier influence the event and that project the company with regards to their quality and what they stand for. For me, I expect that a good company with good image should have a good event and this should show in everything they do…*" Informant 1

> "*You can never separate them, they go hand in hand, what you are what you produce; your attitude will be show in what you do. That is certain…. Even if it a new company that I have not yet experienced their service. If I should attend an event organized by them and they are efficient, it speaks a lot about the company and then I then will like to get to know them because the level of the event reflects back on them.*"   Informant 6

The final part of the findings discussed the relationships identified. There were two main relationships identified. The first relationship was the interaction between the dimensions. The

second relationship identified was between corporate image and corporate events. It is logical to first discuss the relationship between the dimensions since that will help in understanding the second relationship.

Relationship between the dimensions:

The findings identified a relationship between the content/program outline and the choice of venue. The event objective, which is an attribute of the content, determines the choice of venue and the choice of activities. The venue also determines the layout and design of the room. The objective and choice of activities determines the facilitators, resource persons and guest speakers. There is also a relationship between the choice of venue and time management. If the venue is easily accessible and has the necessary facilities, the program runs smoothly and on time. This enables effective communication. Another relationship identified was between physical organization, content/program and choice of venue. If the event's team is competent, it will be capable in their choice of venue and event activities. One can see that these dimensions interact to form an event's image (evaluation). Some may be insignificant but what may seem insignificant can affect something that may be significant which in the end can affect the overall event's image. Another point to consider is the fact that the organization cannot determine what is insignificant to each attendee. Therefore is better to have all these dimension considered in the event planning.

Relationship between an Event's Image and Corporate Image

The second relationship established had to do with the event's image and corporate image. Dowling (2001) states organizations does not possess only one image but many.

Therefore the overall corporate image is based on several images of the organization. The event of the corporate event together with other images forms the overall corporate image. The findings show that the outcome of the evaluation prompts some reactions in attendees mind (Dowling, 2001). Positive or negative event's image was associated to the corporate image. One informant describes this association as a reflection, echoing the concept of Brønn (2005).

In discussing the relationship between image and identity Brønn (2005) referred to image as a reflection of the identity. As already discussed, the corporate identity in this case is the corporate event which is a corporate commination tool, a part of the identity mix. The findings show that the organization's personality is seen is what they do and they cannot be separated. An exposure of the company's personality to an individual creates an impression of the mind. This impression is interpreted by the individual who then evaluates it as positive experience or negative experience, which in effect creates a positive or negative image.
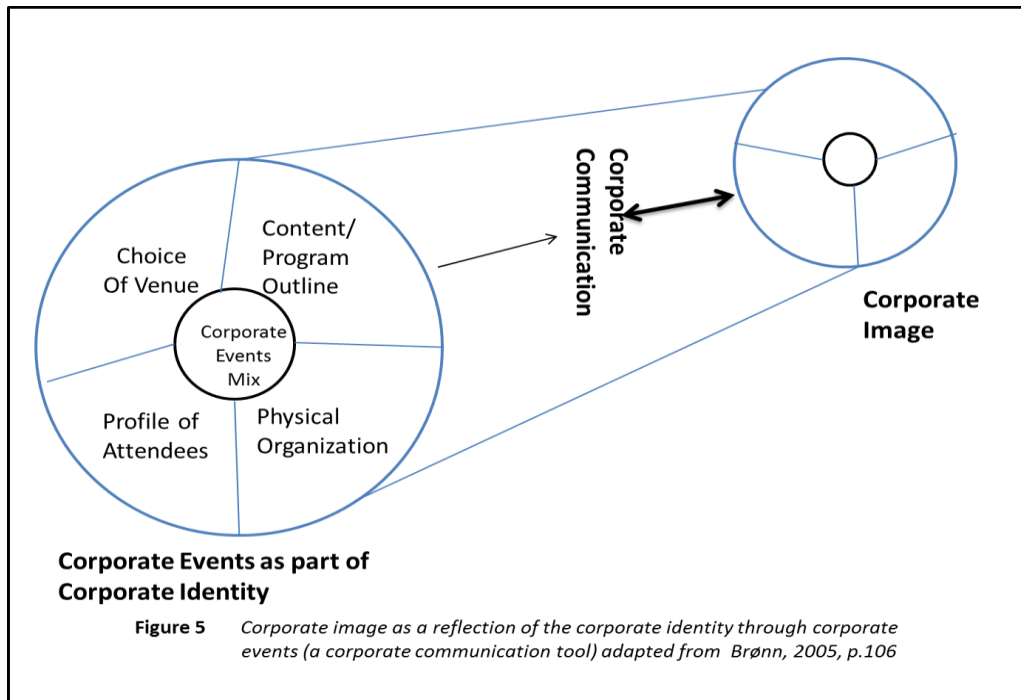
4.4   A Practical Observation

During the study, a practical example of this study came up which the researcher finds interesting due to its relevance to this study. This was the graduation ceremony of the master students at Faculty of Social Sciences which took place on the 15th of June at the University of Stavanger, Norway. The researcher was a graduating student of the Norwegian School of Hotel Management (NHS), a department of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The NHS marks its centenary anniversary (100 years) and therefore re-introduced the use of cap and gowns for graduates as a hallmark for their celebrations. The UIS and the NHS has a reputable image which should be seen in all their activities. The researcher based on previous experience with the UIS participated in the event with an expectation. The expectations of the researcher were not met

during this event. A discussion with two lecturers after the event confirmed the researcher's perception. This discussion identified three main factors that contributed to this; the choice of venue, the content/program and the coordination. Below are findings of conversation based on the event's dimensions used in this study.

First, the event was held in a room which could not accommodate the total number of guests. About fifty percent (50%) of the graduating students had to stand during the whole event. The choice of room did not also fit the occasion. The arrangement and design were also not suitable for such an event. The second issue was related to the program. Almost the whole program was held in Norwegian even though about sixty (60) percent of the attendees were international students and guests who barely speak Norwegian. The third problems identified had to do with the entire organization. The coordination of the event was below average. Some graduating students did not have their names on the list and therefore were not presented with their diplomas, some were told they were not graduating but were called to receive a diploma. This questions whether organizers were adequately prepared for this event. This therefore confirms that dimensions of an event play a role in the event image formation process.

4.5   New Model from Findings

Taking into consideration all the findings and theories discussed, there was a need to adjust the model used earlier as a starting point. The new model therefore captures the dimensions used for this study and refers to them as the corporate events mix. The corporate events mix translates the personality of the organization into the event planning and organizations (see Figure 5)

Figure 5 *Corporate image as a reflection of the corporate identity through corporate events (a corporate communication tool) adapted from Brønn, 2005, p.106*

In the model, corporate image is seen as a reflection of the corporate identity (Brønn, 2005) through the use of corporate events. An organization can use it corporate events to communicate its personality. Kotler (2002) refer to events as "occurrences designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences" (p.576) whiles Getz (Gertz, 2007) defined it as "live communication". Events are therefore not only for business or celebration but also as an image creator which can add up to the overall corporate image. Events afford the organization an opportunity to reach a large group of targeted audience at the same time. Corporate events or improve the organization business activities (O'Toole, 2011) both financially and non-financially. According to Rogers (2008), meetings and other events plays a key role in the marketing of an organizations products and service. It also used as a strategic business driver due to the opportunity it affords organizations to personally relate to its stakeholders. Alternatively, the attendees to these events also get the chance to experience and acquire new knowledge about the organization.

4.6   Analytic Generalization

The findings of the interview confirm the dimensions as a contributing factor in an event's image formation process. It also established a relationship between the corporate events and the corporate image. Similar findings were identified in the practical observation. Linking the two scenarios together, supported by theories and the discussions above, one can generalize this study analytically (Howitt, 2010). This means that the findings of this study can be used as a guide to other occurrences in similar situation (Kvale, 1996).

4.7   Limitations

During the course of this study, the researcher encountered a couple of limitations. However, these did not significantly influence the outcome of the study. Due to the fact that explorative studies have few guiding principles and lack of established measures to follows, the study was challenging in nature since the limited available guidelines were not "well-defined" (Neumann, p.p.38/39). Another challenge was the fact that the direction of inquiry was unpredictable. Doing a qualitative research was time consuming since appointment had to be made and timing should be convenient for both the interviewer and interviewee. The transcription process is not only time consuming but also requires the researcher's intense concentration to be able to have a quality transcription.

A limitation recognized in the thematic approach was the fact that the researcher had to spend a lot of time in generating codes and themes as well as defining them. The study may also be "researcher bias" due to personal attachment of the topic under study (Machi & McEvoy, 2009, p. 19). Bias refers to the personal feelings of the researcher which may influence the respondents' answers and transcriptions. However, this was taken care of in the sampling plan as

sample chosen had interviewees who offered "contrary evidence" (Kuzel, 1992, as cited in, Yin, 2011, p. 88). The study was based on individual experiences and perception and this may be a limitation due to differences in perceptions. Another limitation had to do with the interpretation of the qualitative interview. Since the analysis was thematic, the researcher's thought may direct the data interpretation and this may introduce researcher preconceived thoughts.   Language was also a barrier encountered during the study. Even though the interview was conducted in English, some interviewees had difficulty extensively expressing themselves since English was not their first language.

4.8   Implications for Practice and Research

Practical Managerial Implications

Two practical managerial implications were identified. First, organizations should consider the kind of image they want to associate with their corporate events since it reflects back on the corporate image. It is important to consider the stakeholder's (attendees') point of view when analyzing the organization activities (Dowling, 2001).   Marketing and corporate communication department should therefore conduct pre and post event analysis of the event's image in order to obtain the realistic view and evaluation of attendees' event's image formation process. This will help in the strategic planning process of the marketing and corporate communication departments in meeting the attendees' (external stakeholder) needs.

Event management companies can also consider the issues discussed in the study and review their event planning strategies to suit attendees' needs in order to provide the competent service that can create a good image. This will not only benefit their client but will also add up to their corporate image and sustain their business in today's competitive world.

Research Implications

Future research could use this study as a foundation to develop relevant theories of the relationship between a corporate event and corporate image. It can also be used as a guideline in developing the measurement of a corporate event's image and redefining the meaning of corporate events.

A quantitative research can be conducted based on the findings of this study to test hypothesis based of analytical induction (Howitt, 2010) in order to be able to generalize the phenomenon and also identify the extent to which an event's image can be an incremental contributor to the corporate image.

Last but not the least; a future research could be conduct to investigate the organization's perception in relation to the issues raised in this study. The future research will identify what dimensions seem relevant to organizations and whether they believe an events image contribute to the overall corporate image.

Chapter 6   Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to identify the dimensions used by attendees in the formation of an event's image; and if there exists a relationship between an events image and the corporate image. Putting all the pieces of the findings together the researcher concludes with the following thoughts:

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the findings was able to identify some of the dimensions used by attendees and its attributes. These dimensions are however not the only

dimensions that can contribute to an events image but the only ones studied in the research. Two main relationships were identified: relationships and interactions between the dimensions; relationship between corporate event's image and the corporate image.

In establishing the relationship between a corporate event's image and the corporate image it was important to consider what factors influence the formation of corporate image. Among these factors, marketing communication, previous experience with organization and service quality were applicable to this study. The study linked corporate events to all these factors. Therefore, the strategic use of corporate events coupled with other marketing communication activities can add up to form the overall corporate image. Organization should therefore maximize every opportunity an event could afford them in order to maintain a positive image. However, this study raises more issues such as the organization's perspective and the extent to which the corporate event can add up to the corporate image. These concerns were addressed in the implications for future research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 1   Stakeholders' Expectations

Stakeholders' Expectations of an Organization (Fatt, Wei, Yuen & Suan, 2000)	
STAKEHOLDER	EXPECTATIONS
Employees	Trustworthiness
Customers/associates	Reliability
Shareholders	Credibility
Public	Responsibility

Appendix 2

Table 2   The Importance of a positive image

A positive image adds up to the products and services of an organization and also attracts the right human resources (Blauw (1994), as cited in, van Riel Cees B.M., 1995).
Image offers psychological benefits and adds favorable attributes to products or services. It also makes the organization visible for it to be recognized. The organization gains trust, confidence and support from its stakeholders (Dowling, 2001)
Image affects attitude and thereby affects the behavior. It cannot be ignored since its effects (through impression formation) have an emotional impact on its stakeholders (Bernstein, 1986)
It helps in business relationship building. Image sums up the "truth" about an organization. Consumers use a company's image as a rule in patronizing its products (van Riel, 1995, p.77)

Appendix 3

Table 3   Sampling decisions in the research process (Flick, 1998, p.62)

Stage in research	Sampling methods
While collecting data	Case sampling
	Sampling groups of cases
While interpreting data	Material Sampling
	Sampling within material
While presenting the findings	Presentational sampling

Appendix 4

Table 4   Stages in the qualitative interview process

Prior to the interview	During the interview	What happens after the interview
1. Research conceptualization and development	1. Recording the interview	1. Support for the interviewer
2. Preparation of the interview guide (interview schedule)	2. Orientation stage of the interview	2. Data protection and management
3. Suitability of the sample for in-depth interviewing	3. What qualitative interviewers 'do' when interviewing	3. Data transcription
4. interview trailing (piloting)	4. Bringing the interview to a conclusion	
5. Interview comparison		
6. Communication between interviewers		
7. Sample recruitment and selection		
8.Participant management		
9. The preparation/selection of the interview location		

Source: Howitt, D., 2010, p.67

Appendix 5

Table 5   List of factors that contributes to an event image (Pilot interview- raw data).

Informant	Determinant of an event's image
Informant 1	- Event should have a good program with good speakers - Venue should be accessible - Logistics for event presentation should be in place and working. - Food
Informant 2	- The details of the program and event objective - Good organization - Good venue and facilities - Network
Informant 3	- Ideal venue which matches the purpose of event - Event objective and how it is achieved (activities, time etc)
Informant 4	- The entire program details - Good delivery of events taking into account the venue, equipment and presenters - Business opportunities
Informant 5	- Competency in the event organization - Venue and it accessibility, facilities and security - Details of activities or program and its conformity to aim of events - Entertainments
Informant 6	- Events objective and program - Location should be suitable for event - Audience/participants - Guest speakers

Appendix 6

Theoretical guidelines for interview adapted from Gwinner, 1997, p.146 model of image transfer and Dowling (2001)

1) What kind of event will you call a corporate event?

2) Do you think an event has an image? If you do, what factors contributes to an events image?

3) How do an event's venue, program and physical organization affect the events image?

4) How can one associate an event's image with the organizing (host) company?

5) What factors contribute to this association?

6) How does an event's image affect your attitude towards the organizing company after the event?

7) How does your experience with the organization contribute to your expectations about its event?

8) What factors do you use to perceive an image of an event?

9) How do you associate an events image with the corporate image?

10) How does an event's image contribute to your perception of the corporate image?

Appendix 7

Table 6   Advantages of Thematic Analysis

Flexibility.
Relatively easy and quick method to learn, and do.
Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research.
Results are generally accessible to educated general public.
Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators.
Can usefully summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set.
Can highlight similarities *and* differences across the data set.
Can generate unanticipated insights.
Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data.
Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.

Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006.