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Will the future of events be hybrid? Hybrid festival visitors experience using the event experience theory in the post Covid era

The festival events industry is widely recognized as a thriving and ever-evolving sector, distinguished by its organization of live gatherings that foster communal engagement and offer a wide range of cultural, artistic, and positive encounters (Getz & Ziakas, 2023). The global COVID-19 outbreak has greatly impacted societies across the world, leading to a swift and disruptive transformation with substantial and unfavorable impact on the event industry. Devine et al. (2024) studied the challenges encountered by professionals in the events industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research demonstrated the exceptional nature of the crisis and its disruptive effects on event planning, management, and financial profitability. Litvinova-Kulikova et al. (2023) highlighted the widespread cancellation or postponement of events worldwide and the resulting economic consequences. The events industry has undergone a notable transformation in response to the diverse challenges it has encountered due to the pandemic, with virtual events emerging as a prominent solution.

Hybrid events, within the scope of this study, pertain to a dynamic integration of traditional face-to-face festival experiences and digital aspects. These occurrences surpass the limitations of physical locations, enabling individuals to actively participate in-person as well as remotely via virtual platforms (Chodor & Cyranski, 2020). This research study provides a thorough examination of the evolutionary trajectory of the festival events industry, with a particular focus on the revolutionary changes brought about by the emergence of hybrid events with focus on the event experience theory (EET) and audience interaction dynamics. By delving into these areas, a holistic understanding of the hybrid event landscape can be gained from event attendee perspective.

Following a qualitative approach, the present study aims to investigate the subjective motivations of individuals, with a particular emphasis on the concepts of freedom, individuality, and moral responsibility (Simons, 2019). Hybrid events, which involve the incorporation of both virtual and in-person elements, are gaining popularity in contemporary times. In order to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the influence of a hybrid event, it is essential to consider the perspectives of event attendees within the field (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019). The primary data was collected through online structured interviews, sent via email, via social media platforms and virtual communities with people that have attended Glastonbury

and/or Coachella festivals. Despite the numerous challenges associated with data security, privacy concerns, technical difficulties, and selection biases, the implementation of meticulous planning and effective communication strategies has the potential to significantly enhance the validity of research findings; 100 responses were provided and analyzed.

The research findings provide valuable insights into a range of important observations related to hybrid festivals. The study participants exhibited a positive reaction, often expressing support for hybrid events due to their immersive integration of in-person and digital elements. While some participants lacked direct experience with hybrid festivals, their curiosity and enthusiasm towards this concept were apparent. A proactive approach in using familiarization with technology was used to enhance their personal growth and development. Hybrid events have received considerable scholarly interest owing to their distinctive characteristic of inclusivity, which enables the active involvement of remote participants through virtual engagement, thereby promoting a broader scope and enhanced accessibility. The participants conveyed positive experiences regarding their participation in virtual concerts, thus emphasising the potential of hybrid events in providing enjoyable entertainment.

The research conducted in this study documented a significant rise in participant engagement and interactivity, particularly in relation to virtual interactions with presenters. The participants expressed positive reception towards the economic advantages linked to hybrid events, notably the cost savings resulting from reduced travel expenses. In addition, hybrid events have emerged as a feasible approach to tackle the obstacles related to inclusivity, thus facilitating the active engagement and participation of individuals who encounter limitations in terms of mobility or travel. Furthermore, the research study placed significant emphasis on the immersive attributes of virtual reality (VR) technology as a tool for enhancing the overall event experience among participants. The aforementioned research findings collectively underscore the various benefits associated with hybrid festivals, suggesting a growing level of acceptance and the possibility of transforming the event industry. The long-term viability of hybrid events relies on the proficient handling of technical obstacles and the smooth amalgamation of virtual and in-person components.

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge by enhancing our understanding of hybrid events and their implications. It adds valuable insights to the broader scholarly discussion concerning the future trajectory of festival hybrid events. This

study provides actionable recommendations for individuals involved in event management, academic researchers, and relevant stakeholders who are actively engaged in adapting to the dynamic landscape of this field.

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