



Change in business events' consumer trends due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

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Abstract

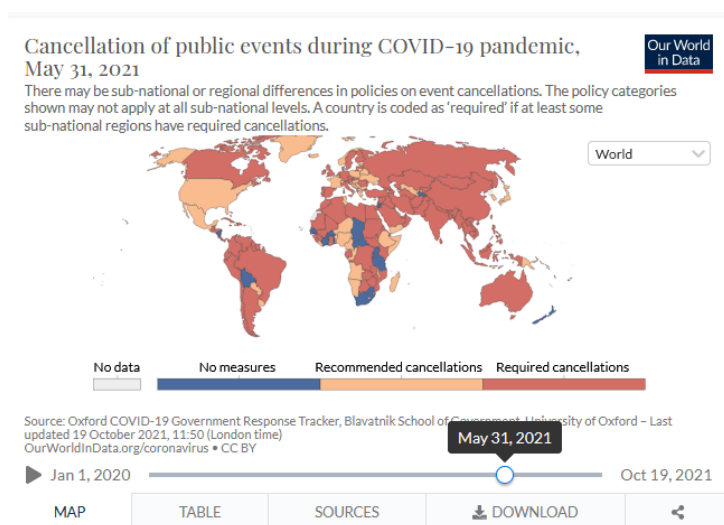
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<p>The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic affected ticket purchasing trends both offline and online in a negative way worldwide. How people attend events has changed, and businesses need to adapt a swift transition to post-covid event trends. This thesis aims to understand and identify the current business event trends, when it comes to participants' needs.</p> <p>The theoretical framework consists of consumer theories, and trends that are being borrowed into the business conventions for entertainment purposes. The thesis explored factors affecting ticket purchasing behaviour. In addition, the gamification trends were explored, how the supporting community within gaming industry can affect audience participation behavior if applied and adapted into the business events.</p> <p>Qualitative data collection method was chosen as it can provide detailed, rich data via interviews. The target participants were company leaders and decision-makers of various fields from Finland and Hungary. Thematic analysis method was chosen to analyse the data collected. In total 11 interviews were conducted through Zoom and Teams sessions which were recorded. The participants were asked questions about three topics which were ticket-purchasing, health safety, and their event experience.</p> <p>The results have showed lower attendance rates and ticket purchasing during the covid-19 pandemic, although not all of the data could be attributed to that reason. The health safety concerned most of the participants, even though all of the participants expect the event health safety restrictions to cease within a few years. Some participants consciously avoided business events if the restrictions were present. Additionally, many participants expressed ideas that could improve the quality of business conventions, with a focus on the virtual events. Those ideas would require separate testing to know how that would affect customer satisfaction and ticket-sales rates. The majority expressed an interest towards attending events with virtual reality programme, to explore how it can work in the current technology level. The majority expressed that it could improve the social limitations of online meetings and seminars.</p> <p>The thesis project was started in spring 2021 and concluded in November 2021.</p>
<p>Keywords Covid-19, Business events, Ticket purchasing, Virtual reality</p>

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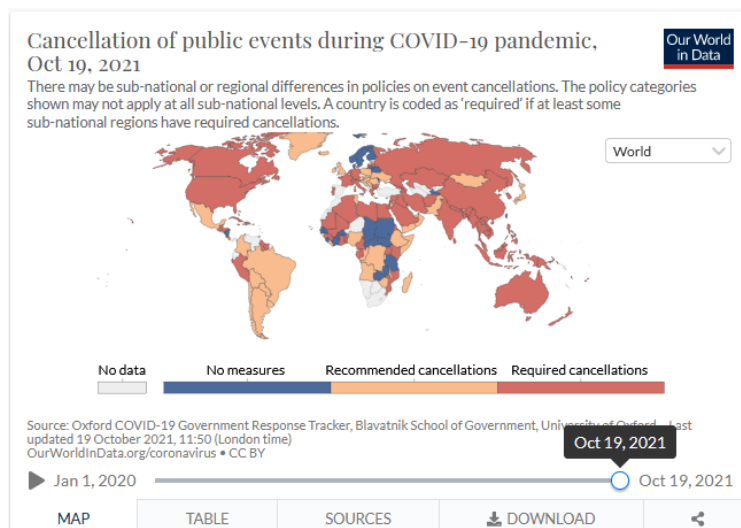
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1 Introduction

COVID-19 has affected how businesses hold conferences for professional purposes. It forced many people to work from home and the need has risen to attend business-related events online. Finding out how businesses can adapt to this new user behaviour could have a positive effect on their ROI when organizing business-related events. In the past two years offline events have failed to reach as many sales as they normally would. Many business-related events had to be cancelled completely due to newly introduced safety standards and even non-cancelled, B2C events such as theatres had to survive a more than 90 percent fall in ticket sales in 2020 (Statista, 2020).



Shown above is a daily updated map that represents global restrictions towards public events. Up until May 31st 2021, most of the world had restrictions and required cancellations towards public events in some national regions. After May 31st the restrictions in some countries have been eased in accordance with vaccination rates and the decrease of covid-19 cases.



As of today, many nations still remain marked as “required event cancellations”, others have no mandatory event restrictions, as Finland seems to be (marked in blue).

The consumers on both B2C and B2B end have not attended large offline events or any at all. Businesses are facing the challenge of the online transition and have to find new ways to convince people to purchase tickets offline or online. Therefore, this thesis will aim to explore the corporate event trends that can be applied into post-covid events to influence ticket purchasing behaviour.

Online and in-person events are experienced in different ways. There are benefits and limitations to each type of events. Both virtual and offline events can have interesting, valuable topics in discussion. The online event could be a stream of the same offline event. Several aspects need to be considered when comparing which event type would be appropriate for a planned event.

The attention span while watching streams or learning online is limited when one is present in an auditorium. For that reason, shorter content works better than in offline, due to the shorter attention span of the attendees. There are many distractions present such as social media, people’s home environment, other outside factors. Currently people prefer face-to-face meetings more as they are more immersive and natural. The human side of connections is important. The way people create business partnerships is not the same online when compared to real life encounters where people can shake hands and be present.

There are multiple trends affecting business events industry. *Festivalisation* in terms of events means that a conference implements elements from festivals into conferences, trade shows and other business conventions. These elements are usually entertainment-related programme, lights and decorations that aim to create a festive atmosphere. For instance, club lights, music concerts, colourful decorations end creating an informal and dynamic experience. (Event Industry News, 2021) The trend of festivalisation at events remains relevant for several years in both online and offline events.

Furthermore, *gamification* is another emerging trend that is explained in detail in the next chapters. It involves borrowing some elements from the gaming industry and community and incorporating them into another industry. Such as but not limited to: the usage of VR and AR technology, more commonly used for games, and applying it into business conventions for entertainment and educative purposes. In the research sections of the thesis, the questions related to how the participants view these possible trends, produced deep ethical discussions as data for analysis.

In festival type of business events people have a more flexible, customizable agenda. People tend to enjoy deciding what they want to attend, when to eat or drink. The experience of online events is often more passive than of offline events, where you need to move around the event space to network with people face-to-face, and it is more engaging to enjoy the food, drinks and entertainment part of the event in real life (Fadini, 2020).

A limitation of online events is that one can attend to other tasks in the background while watching an online stream. It is less exciting due to the limitations of the current IT trends, when it comes to an average person's home equipment, their user level, as well as the standards of the business events' industry. At the moment of writing this thesis, it is uncommon to carry out an event via VR but they could become largely more immersive if there would be a shift towards gamification of the business events.

The research questions that form this thesis are:

- 1. How has covid-19 affected people's attendance to large or small events?*
- 2. How can online events be more immersive, as close to in-person events as possible and how can they go beyond that standard?*
- 3. What do business event attendees miss having about online events?*

1.1 Aim and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to obtain an understanding of how business event trends are shifting, to find out consumer expectations towards both offline and virtual events in terms of event safety and value. The plan to achieve that is by conducting interviews with business event attendees to ask about their needs, behaviours and expectations towards future business events. The main goal would be to use this data to develop a guideline which can improve the overall experience to online attendees as well as for overall awareness of the current trends, that could be adapted by event managers. Therefore, the latter would be of most use to the event companies who are interested in returning to pre-covid ROI levels.

1.2 Value to the community

Providing a safe, online opportunity to attend these events can help to keep the overall ROI and KPIs high enough but it also raises many practical concerns and digital challenges. Online events are found challenging to provide the same value as attending an event itself due to difficulty of networking and the issue of immersiveness. The challenge is relevant to anyone attending events, classes, meetings online. For this reason the consumer theories are outlined in the next chapters, providing an explanation of a purchasing

process and how it reflects in the events industry. All in all, the research will aim to look into and develop ways to meet the attendees' needs and the overcome the challenges of a successful online event.

Geographically, the research was focused on questioning business event attendees in Hungary and in Finland. The plan is to interview at least 6 company leaders from the Hungarian and Finnish business scene.

1.3 Covid-19 situation today

The governments' SARS-CoV-2 response raised many freshly introduced safety standards which made organizing offline events entirely impossible in many countries. The key actors in business-events, such as The Gathering Summit or the Traffic & Conversion Summit had to cancel their events in 2020 entirely. Even though the local laws make it possible to hold their business-related events this year, a huge percentage of their clients are EU-based and simply cannot attend the events because of different safety measures. Irrelevant of the size of the event, event industry companies are facing a common concern to ensure that their events are "covid-friendly" and are capable of generating as high revenue as pre-covid, in order to have a high and stable cash flow to support the purpose of these events. This impacts the most large scale events that welcomed hundreds of thousands of attendees before the pandemic, where the switch to online version does not produce as high ROI.

As of summer 2021, many restrictions have been lifted as the majority of the population is getting vaccinated. However, some countries have started to expect a third wave of covid-19, and in France the borders are expecting to lock soon again. It is likely that the rest of Europe might be under lockdown again, in which case the switch towards virtual event trends will be likely popular again.

1.4 The effect of COVID-19 on corporate events

Due to the cancellations of events during the pandemic, the online version or the hybrid events have been becoming a new norm. Digital options have made it possible to carry out international events despite the global restrictions. Although a digital experience is not nearly as immersive as face-to-face meetings, it has its possibilities and benefits.

For instance, switching to a virtual event in times of crisis, has saved many event forums from larger financial losses they could have accrued, if the event was simply cancelled (Brella, 2021).

The global financial loss in the event industry is estimated to be around 30 billion in 2020, although that number includes concert events as well. These losses are accumulated from tourism industry, transportation, restaurants and other industries involved in physical events. (Flaurad, 2020)

2 Corporate events

An event can be defined as a planned social occasion that varies by the scale of attendees, its purpose and theme. Business events encompass a large spectrum of corporate related events. From small-scale, private business meetings to large-scale multi-national conferences. In this section most of them are briefly outlined. Business events can be of the following types: Internal meetings, product launches, conferences, training workshops, seminars, corporate celebrations (Eventbrite, 2018).

Depending on the type of the event, there are differences in procedure, timetables, catering and planning that occur. If a company is hosting a private event or booking incentive trips, there might be a department for event management within the company itself. This research itself is focusing only on public events to which a ticket needs to be purchased prior to attending the event.

2.1 Types of business events

There are numerous types of business events that exist for different purposes and require different planning. Large companies often have private corporate events that are used for team building, workshops and executive retreats, and although these types of events require careful planning as well, the research is more focused on public business events. In this section the main public business event types are outlined.

Conferences are the type of events where people working in the same company or industry, would listen to and participate in discussions, have open debates and speak about issues of importance. It is common that conferences can last for several sessions to several days. They have by topic sessions that the attendees can choose which ones to attend. Often conferences are held in hotels due to their large capacity for both event spaces and guest rooms. Moreover, due to a large number of customers, the hotel venue often offers discounted prices which is beneficial for the organizers. There are several types of conferences including a symposium, seminars, workshops, and roundtable. (Evenues 2021.)

When it comes to business seminars, they share an educational purpose. During this type of a business event, it is possible to hear success stories, marketing strategies as well as participate in discussions. Guest speakers would be present as well. Groups of 10 to 50 people are engaged in educational content. The formality of a seminar can be non-formal. (The balance smb 2021.)

Symposiums share an educative purpose as well. However, they are by definition highly formal types of events, often with refreshments provided. These types of events have a strict structure, where audience participation is limited to question and answer session. Experts from their fields present speeches therefore the format is highly academic and educative. (Evenues 2021)

Trade shows can be defined as large fairs or exhibitions where multiple companies showcase their products or services. The purpose of those shows is to bring multinational companies together to create value for the customers, the attendees. For instance, tourism industry trade shows include international agencies promoting their tour packages. In trade shows there may also be guest speakers and refreshments stalls. They are the B-to-C types of events. (Shopify 2021.)

A product launch type of event is considered to be a great way for large companies to announce and present their new product. Often held in large venues, these types of events also bring entertainment for their attendees for excitement purposes. (SocialTables 2021.)

When it comes to business forums, they are mainly aimed at start-ups, investors, speakers in the field, companies, and entrepreneurs. The goal of any public business type of event is to bring people together. The author has attended 3 of these events. In Finland these types of events include Future Data Summit, Matka Expo, Slush, Nordic Business Forum. In Hungary the larger types of summits include Marketing Szuperconferencia, MICE Business day, ICEFA. The main challenge that the local event management industry faces is not having large enough venues for grand international summits that could host thousands of attendees.

2.2 Organising corporate events

Organising a corporate event involves the identical theoretical steps as planning any other event. The event organiser needs to consider the purpose of the event, the budget, and the audience of said event. Articles encourage event organisers to consider their corporate event as an extension of the brand of the company, as an experience of it that brings awareness around their company (Forbes, 2021). Therefore, they should strive for making it immersive and engaging. Large companies tend to outsource the event planning to event managing companies, in order to ensure that their event will be handled by professionals and can go smoothly. Moreover, the purpose of outsourcing the event planning to event companies also lies with how time-consuming it can be to plan the steps and to contract the people needed to carry out the catering, design of the venue, tech support and music.

2.2.1 Enablers of business events

From the Finnish event industry market, some of these enablers include Events 365 Oy, Events Group, Lyyti (an event management platform), Messukeskus event space, Finlandiatalo and others. Including online event platforms such as Hopin, vFairs, Accelevents, Splash. From the Hungarian event industry venues, the enablers include Syma Sport and Conference centre, HUNGEXPO Budapest, Budapest Congress Center and others.

2.3 Meeting event safety regulations

There can be several types of safety measures that attendants and companies can follow. Even if the local safety regulations would be followed, international safety laws could be more challenging to comply with. As each country within and outside of the EU has its own safety regulations that affect for instance border control, population's vaccination percentage, quarantine laws. Therefore, there are several complicating factors affecting of-line attendance in an event. This causes a need to develop ways to provide a safe alternative to the people who cannot attend the event to keep them in a company's consumer chain.

At the time of writing this thesis, most countries within the EU have successfully vaccinated majority of their population with the needed two dosages of the FDA-approved covid-19 vaccines. According to European Commission, in August 2021, 70% of the adult population has received the full vaccination course (Ec Europa, 2021). Unless mandatory laws are presented by the government, it is up to an event organizer which safety regulations to upkeep at the event.

2.4 Commissioner

The commissioner of this thesis had been the author's place of internship, MiniEcosystem marketing and website developing agency located in Budapest, Hungary. It is a relatively new company that helps other new businesses create or enhance their online presence. The CTO of the company participated in the research as well, due to fitting to the criteria for the target respondents. The author has been in consistent contact with the commissioning party due to continuation of work with the company, therefore the commissioner was frequently aware of the progress of the research. The interest they had in this research was to acquire a diverse understanding of the business event attendees' needs

and wants, in case the commissioner chooses to host their own seminars in the near future.

2.5 Ticket purchasing behaviour

The consumer decision-making factors are of high interest to marketing agencies and businesses. Marketing algorithms constantly analyse data of our app usage, likes, and generate more relevant ads in order to push people to a purchase decision. Moreover, in today's hyper-connected society, people have a strong need to gather, to present their ideas and gain new connections to develop their professional network. In this chapter some of the consumer theory is outlined as well as how it shows itself in event ticket purchasing behaviour.

2.6 Consumer behaviour theory: business events

The need for business events arises with people's need for networking and hearing insight from professionals in the industry. People's expectations and behaviour can vary depending on whether they would be presented with an opportunity to attend an in-person event versus an online one. Nonetheless, event ticket purchasing can be theoretically divided into steps that a customer goes through when deciding to attend an event until post-event experience.

There are push and pull factors in event participation. As a pull factor from the company's perspective, sending their employees to participate at such an event would be to meet likeminded representatives of the same industry, as well as to hear about the latest industry trends, technology and solutions (Curtis & Coulter, 2019.). From the consumer perspective, attending such an event is driven by networking opportunities and content. There is a high degree of entertainment to large forums and events, which could also be a pull factor of going to that type of event.

There are multiple ways of purchasing a ticket to events. In some cases it can be done from an event venue's physical location or online from a ticket distributing website. If the event is large-scale, aimed to attract international audiences and speakers, the event's own website usually has a payment platform.

2.6.1 Customer journey

Any customer journey starts from the awareness of the product or service, in this case of the event itself. The theory is similar to the funnel theory in a sense that it also has touch points that are the same in both models, but a customer journey also acts as a guideline to the person in charge of creating the product, service or event. The model does not take into consideration the planning of the event itself when it comes to budgeting and logistics. It is more of a guide map from for the brand, a framework that aims to identify crucial moments in the customer experience of the event.

The milestones in the customer journey map revolve around the experience a customer will have during different stages of the event process. It starts from marketing and promotions, navigating the website (possibly using heatmap analytics), registration and ticket purchasing, seating, the venue, the sessions, the facilities, food and drinks, extra activities and post-event communication.

There are multiple ways to track the user experience of the event. It can be done through surveys, mobile applications, softwares such as ExperienceFellow, Indeemo, Touchstone Research, Ethos, Over The Shoulder (Weems, 2017).

2.6.2 The funnel theory

The funnel theory is marketing model of how a consumer becomes a customer. The illustrative models sometimes have less or more steps shown but the general idea is consistent. It starts with the Awareness stage of the interaction with the consumer.



Figure 3. The marketing funnel

Awareness – Consumers notice a business offer through an ad or a social media post.

Interest – The awareness is present and the consumer decides to find out more about the business. For instance, they might install a free 1-month subscription to a service or an app.

Evaluation – At this stage the interest is present, and the customers are evaluating whether the business is credible. They might look on Google reviews and see what other customers' experience with that business was.

Trial – The potential customers have evaluated the business to be trustworthy. They believe it can solve their problems and decide to purchase the service or product.

Adoption – The stage where a consumer becomes a customer.

Most funnel theory illustrations show the steps ending at the purchase. However that is not the complete journey as the business wants to retain its customer. For that reason the author found this funnel model more true to reality, as after a purchase it is important to repeat the marketing process to target existing customers with the goal to reach customer loyalty. Successful event brands like Nordic Business Forum places high importance into making the customer experience as smooth and flawless as possible.

Nordic Business Forum (hereafter referred to as NBF) maintains pre and post event customer engagement. Through newsfeed, social media, emails and photos from the event itself. They try to retain their customer by reminding them of the unique moments from the event. To link it back to the funnel theory, in NBF customer loyalty and advocacy often comes from unusual experiences that the attendees have solved by the NBF volunteers. Every year NBF twitter is full of stories where customers had an inconvenience that is solved by the volunteers. The attendees share their experiences on social media thusly adding awareness to the NBF event brand.

The motivating factors of event consumers could be vast, such as educative reasons, entertainment, escapism and socialisation. Depending on the nature of the event, the purchasing behaviour of the potential attendees might also be affected by their demographics such as age, income, geographical location, as well as social factors such as peer pressure, a need for networking, a fear of missing out. The latter being a goal of many businesses, to create a desire to engage with the product. In particular, the young adult audience is more emotional and sensitive to factors such as price and entertainment side of the event.

A case study performed on Cardiff Metropolitan University students showcased that the students tend to purchase low-cost event tickets faster, without extensive research on the product, whereas the students who purchased high-cost event tickets would do a thorough research into the product before finalising a purchase (Ellis, 2017.).

There has been criticism whether international conferences are as relevant as they used to be, considering their cost-efficacy. The largest summits can charge thousands or tens thousands of dollars per ticket, which can cause companies and individuals to reconsider attending these types of events. Moreover, the travel, accommodation as well as meal costs, add up significantly to the cost per person. For that reason it may be a challenging financial decision for new companies to decide to attend these types of events.

(Väänänen, H., 2020)

2.7 Factors affecting ticket purchasing behaviour

Working life and decision-making pace has slowed down over the pandemic, leaving people with more time and emotional space to make decisions over their purchases. Even though this meant a dramatic increase for the e-commerce sector, social events are not as translatable into the digital world as is possible with physical e-commerce products (EventBrite 2021.). Consumer behaviour has been attempted to be described by several models to understand the buying dynamics and how it can be influenced.

Ticket purchasing behaviour can be affected in multiple ways psychologically. The perception of the brand or the website from which the tickets are sold, affects the decision-making of the potential consumer. These factors include the degree of trust, risk, time or availability and popularity (Tanrikulu, Celilbatur, 2012). There is a higher chance of ticket purchasing, when the consumers are under the illusion of missing out, in case when a product is perceived valuable or popular. A known celebrity's or speaker's attendance may cause an event to sell out within seconds. Many ticket purchasing sites attempt to trigger an emotional need by using psychological pressure techniques, such as but not limited to: stating how many people bought the ticket already, stating product scarcity, the time countdown until the price rises. The fear of missing out is one of the most powerful factors in influencing an impulsive purchase. COVID-19 has affected this as well, since it was a challenging time for the event industry since the pandemic outbreak.

Moreover, the user interface of the website influences the buying experience as well. Hence why the largest e-commerce websites are in neutral colors with minimal accent colors, using predominantly white background for the catalogue and product images. Having a darker background with the main product lines in shades of white or a lighter color, brings the attention of the user toward the main items listed. Therefore the visual appeal as well as a well-structured UI, affect consumer behavior either by driving them in or away. For instance, if the colors are clashing and the website is difficult to navigate, it could affect the company behind said website in a negative way (Shokurova, 2021).

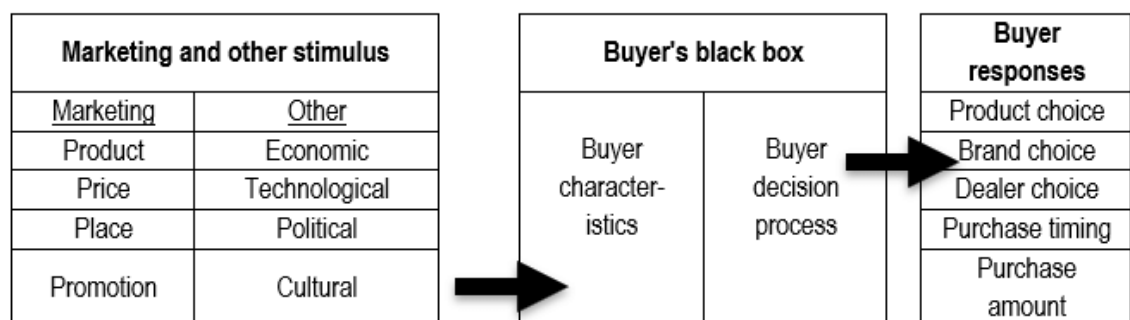
Knowing how to work with those factors, helps to simplify and ease the user experience to increase the chance of sales. When it comes to buying tickets to attend business events, it is just as crucial to be aware of visual factors and UI, as it shapes the brand identity almost as much as the event itself.

Psychological and demographic factors

On a more personal level the psychological factors that influence the consumer behaviour would be trust in the brand, product or website from which the item is purchased from. In the study by Tanrikulu and Celilbatur (2012), trust was determined to be the most significant factor in e-ticket purchasing. Their study was carried out analysing participants who purchased tickets online to many industry segments including festivals, art facilities, conferences and sports games. For that reason they state that the results of their study can be generalised to a large extent. Their findings included that the security factor when it comes to the website's transactions was of high importance, and other findings of the research showed that the participant working in the IT field bought tickets more frequently, whereas gender and marital status play no role on the frequency of purchases.

When it comes to business events, the theory could be hypothetically applied to a form of trust in the high standards of the event, valuable seminars, networking opportunities. Moreover, people also consider recordings from the previous events, as well as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) to decide whether or not to complete a purchase.

There have been books such as Kotler and Armstrong (2008) *Principles of marketing*, that illustrate consumer decision-making in a model below. It consists of 3 parts that illustrate a consumer's interaction with a product.



Model of Buyer Behaviour Sources: Kotler P., Armstrong G., Marketing (2004, p.270)

1. Marketing and other stimuli

The 4 P's refer to 4 components that are all part of a marketing mix. A consumer encounters a stimulus by marketing or deliberate searching, and enters into stages of the (4Ps), or through other means that are external or environmental. These factors interact with one another. (Investopedia, 2021)

The Product refers to any product or service that consumer might want. It comprises of tangible and intangible attributes such as appearance, packaging and its use or features. In this case that product in consideration would be an event, and any services or perks that would be included into the package of the ticket.

The Price stands for the product's value, cost, or status value (luxury). The factors that determine the price of an event ticket, depends on its form (in-person or online), theme, scale, popularity as well as the services included.

The Place refers to the location where the products can be perceived and obtained by the customer. It also refers to a trade channel between the company and the consumer. In case of event tickets, the trade channel could be the event's own platform or an intermediary such as the ticket distributing website.

The role of **Promotion** part of the marketing mix model is to bring the products to the consumers' attention and convince them to purchase the product. An event can actively promote itself on all sorts of marketing platforms, social media, google ads, email marketing, outdoor marketing. The quality of the campaign and frequency of content creation is expected of large events. The campaigns about an upcoming international forum or event often start almost a year in advance, or the content creation is constant within the field.

The interaction between the three parts of the model in reality refers to the market exchange between a customer and the product or service provider. Each party has different objectives in mind to achieve in this transaction. For instance, an objective on the business' side could be to proceed with the transaction only if there it at least an X percentage profit margin on the product, at the end of said transaction.

On the consumer's side an objective to fulfil with that transaction could be: to obtain a product that fits their needs and expectations for a price that matches the product's value. The decision is then made with the information available to the customer, often by comparison of the product's price-value-quality to the alternative options, the business' competitors. Likewise in the events sector, an attendee could be considering whether the event is worth the price of the ticket and other factors such as finding accommodation for the event would affect the final decision as well.

2. Buyer's black box
 - Buyer characteristics
 - Buyer decision process

The buyer's black box refers to the buyer's internal or individual factors that contribute to their purchasing decision. They can be a person's beliefs, lifestyle, culture, working class and other factors that make it difficult to measure and predict how they interact with external stimuli. It is difficult to predict whether a consumer would make a rational or emotional purchase.

3. Buyer response

Assuming there is a need recognition, the next step of the consumer model is the buyer response. The next step would be urging the consumer to make the decision whether or not to buy the offered product. When it comes to business events, the need recognition and buyer response could be affected by the previous stages of CDM, through video clips of the previous events, as well as promotional trailers for the following one. For instance, in NBF there are exclusive offers for the participants of the current event, discounts to book early tickets to the upcoming year's event.

In its original form, the model has been criticised by Dr. Milner and Dr. Rosenstreich (2013), due to many CDM models being rather mechanistic and not easily adaptable by all service industries, in their case - for the financial services.

2.8 Health and security

Due to the recent waves of the covid-19 outbreaks, most of the world had redefined safety regulations and the events industry was paused by law in most countries, until after the first wave has subsided. During the lockdown, many events turned online. It is unclear how the new health regulations and public concerns will shape the future of the events industry.

For that reason it was interesting to find out what kind of mindset the attendees have towards the large-scale business events after the pandemic. It is unclear what type of approach the nations will take towards vaccination policy, whether they will become mandatory in most countries, and how it will affect the business events industry.

After the second wave, majority of the adult population in Europe was vaccinated, which brought back some of the events. Between the waves of the pandemic, the months where events and tourism are resumed, are crucial for increasing the revenue.

Aside from implementing a hybrid option at the event, there can be more ways to ensure event health safety. In 2020, Eventful hosted a podcast featuring J. Spero, a CEO of In-House Physicians, where they discussed health security plans for events in response to covid-19. Spero represents a company that provides health specialists on-site for meetings and events, as it is convenient for attendees to be able to consult and obtain basic medical attention at large multi-day events. It is of convenience both to attendees and the event hosting company, as it saves both parties the expenses with the insurance.

All in all, there are several goals that the event organisers may choose to focus on, whether it's event health safety, hybrid event or focusing on improving the online version of the event. When it comes to business events industry, they may make it more entertaining for the attendees by adapting trends that revolve around show elements and technology. Some of it has recently been festivalisation, and today with the development of METAverse, it can become the trend of gamification, implementing elements into the business events that were previously used mainly within the gaming industry. The trend of gamification is more thoroughly explored in the next chapter.

3 Gamification of the events industry

In the past few years, the business events industry has shifted towards the festivalisation trend, which entails that an event would aim to also be an unforgettable experience both in-person and online. Many summits, forums, and other non-festival events have been borrowing elements from festivals to enhance an otherwise networking and learning-centred event. With festivalisation an event is able to create more points where attendees can engage with the content present at the event. The variety of possibilities are crucial for connecting the business and entertainment. (Event Industry News, 2021) It is becoming a norm at the large business conventions to use show elements, guest singers, and celebrity guests in an attempt to create value for the attendees. The use of stage lights, music and suspense in the beginning, blurs the line between an experience of a concert and a business convention. The amount of effort into the entertainment part of the event could also explain the ticket prices on many international forums that start at thousands of euros.

However, the festivalisation concept has become relatively expected from high-quality business events. The newer trends often emerge from the technological developments as well applying existing technology into tools that could be used during an event. For instance, some events create applications specifically for that year's event, with features that can help attendees and make their experience go smoother. Some event apps may also have a networking feature that lets attendees connect with each other or to set up meetings. Since the current event trends are shifting towards increasing participant engagement via festivalisation and creative environments, there is another emerging trend that can affect both the live and online events in unpredictable yet exciting ways.

This chapter explores the concept of gamification and how it could be applied in some form to both online and in-person events.

3.1 Gamification of business events

The concept of gamification revolves around adding game-like experiences into other areas in life to aid with a user's value creation. Elements and principles from games can be added to contexts in areas not connected to the gaming community. For instance, within the education system some teachers adopt point-systems, prizes for work completed with excellence, using entertainment elements in order to enhance curiosity and learning, such as Kahoot quiz game platform. The possibilities of gamification are vast because applying

it can spark curiosity and attention. Grasping and maintaining the attention of virtual attendees is precisely what has been the largest challenge of hybrid events, specifically the online part of it.

The traditionally serious, professional side of business events has a great opportunity to learn from the first-adapters of the new tech and social trends. In the context of events, applying gamification could mean adding entertainment elements and technology typically used by the gaming community into marketing as well as into the event experience itself. There are recent event trends and challenges outlined in the article by Event Manager Blog, *The Future of The Event Industry Outlook 2021*. Among those is the process of “Twitch-ification”, a term used by Joseph Pine, a Co-founder of Strategic Horizons LLP and author of *The Experience Economy*. In the Twitch online streaming platform, there is active participation among the viewers of gaming streams. The content page of a stream consists of an area where the game is being viewed, a camera window showing the streamer, and on the right there is live chat section where the viewers can talk real-time. When it comes to popular streamers that can have hundreds or thousands of viewers, there are often monetized options for the viewers to show appreciation towards the streamer, as well as asking questions.

The monetised options in Twitch involve paid subscriptions, donations and monetized gifts. There are monetized items that can be viewed as a twitch currency, called “bits”. As a user you can purchase bits, which you can use later on to monetise a message in the streamer’s live chat. The bit’s value can be between 5 euros and 100 euros. Infusing a message with bits is called a “cheer”, and it is one of the ways to monetarily support your favourite streamer. In the cheer messages you can also attach twitch emoticons that would be more animated, the more bits you infuse the message with. (Business Insider, 2021) Some digital artists make these emotes and sell them on demand for that particular purpose to use on Twitch.

The monetised messages are also more visible to the streamer. This entails that the message or question has more chance to be reacted to or answered by the streamer. Streamers may also choose to have a set up to permanently display the largest cheerers, or donors on top of the chat. The Twitch platform takes a cut of an initial purchase of bits, around 30%, however the donations that the streamer receives are not split by the platform (Streamers Playbook, 2021). Moreover, the value creation within the Twitch platform also includes random give-aways, that could include a subscription to a streamer’s channel, or depending on the donation, the streamer might do something in-game. It is up to them how to choose to engage with their audience, which creates a fun atmosphere for both the users and the streamers.

That is all part of the ways how the Twitch platform is has been a supportive community for gamers and streamers for a decade, since the platform was launched in 2011. The creativity, entertainment and support that is present in the gaming community has a potential to shape and influence industries outside of it as well. The monetised question option can already be applied into speaker sessions that have online chat support. Among hundreds or thousands of attendees, the certainty of an answer to the question could be valuable to some attendees.

The importance of gamification lies with how fast-paced the trends within the gaming community evolve. The gaming community has already popularised VR-chat and AI motion detection games that Xbox had for some years through Kinect that discontinued in 2017. Microsoft's Azure Kinect that was created for non-gaming industries is a successor that can be used for applications related to virtual reality experiences (Azure Microsoft, 2021). Some of these trends are a possibility that to enhance the event that event managers could apply if the budget allows it. For instance, implementing Virtual Reality elements into an online event, or as a part of a programme at the in-person event. It could act as a bridge between live speakers and the online audience.

To explore how virtual reality can be implemented into the events industry, there are several aspects to consider. Accessibility, usability, costs, adoptability of the trend. Outside of the gaming community, the VR headset has uses in many industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, education, and military (Sheikh, 2016). When VR or AR will be more widely adapted by several industries, it is challenging to predict how it will effect everyday life. The experience of events through VR may become more immersive compared to frequent passiveness in video conferences and the amount of distractions for the attendees. Nonetheless, there are downsides as well. Due to accessibility, cost, and wearability of the glasses. Some people may experience discomfort during the VR sessions after prolonged periods of time.

All in all, the events industry, alongside others, may be on its way of transformation by the technological advancements of the gaming industry.

4 Research approach and methods

In this chapter the research approach is outlined, brief explanations of available research methods, and reasoning behind choosing the data collection method. The objective of the thesis is to find out how the people's event attendance is shaped by the pandemic, in particular what their expectations are towards health regulations and the hybrid events. These three topics are the core of the exploration. Since the questions of the thesis prompt answers that are more descriptive in nature rather than numerical, the author decided to focus on obtaining qualitative type of data, instead of quantitative. Originally it was planned to collect data via an online form, however, that became problematic as soon as it became evident that there was not enough answers in the online form that the author created initially. Therefore, the author had decided to conduct 10 semi-structured interviews instead in order to obtain richer data from the participants.

4.1 Research methods

In research there are two main types of data that can be collected, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data collection would be more suitable for mass research that aim to obtain strict numerical values, correlations, often using statistical tools to measure the relationship between the researched variables. The quantitative data is subject to limited interpretation, as it is precise due to its value being numerical. For that reason, large samples of data are needed. Whereas qualitative data collection method is more suitable for descriptive data, interviews and thematic analysis. Moreover, the sample required for qualitative data analysis can be on the smaller scale than for quantitative analysis. (Scribbr, 2021)

Among qualitative data collection methods, there are observation methods (covert and overt), interviews (structured, semi-structured or unstructured), the latter seemed to be the most appropriate method to use for this research. This research was using semi-structured interviews and where needed, follow-up questions were asked.

The interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes in length, depending on how the interviewees expanded on each question. Most of the sessions except 2 were recorded and transcribed. The remaining 2 sessions were recorded in written form of the questionnaire, that can be found in the appendix.

4.2 Data source

The author had decided that the data was to be from people that are CEOs, entrepreneurs or are otherwise relevant to the research by attending business conventions. Therefore the targeting of the participants was done by building a connection through Facebook, LinkedIn and acquaintances. The author would search by title, usually CEO or entrepreneur. The author has obtained data from 8 CEOs in Hungary and 2 CEOs and 1 director from Finland. The author has gained consent from all participants of the interviews to be part of the research. Although the consent regarding name disclosure was obtained as well, the author decided to anonymise the participants of the research.

Table 1. Demographics

Respondent	Role	Age	Country
Interviewee 1	CEO	32	Hungary
Interviewee 2	CEO	31	Hungary
Interviewee 3	CEO	47	Hungary
Interviewee 4	Owner	62	Hungary/USA
Interviewee 5	CEO	52	Hungary
Interviewee 6	CEO	41	Hungary
Interviewee 7	CTO	23	Hungary
Interviewee 8	CEO	63	Finland
Interviewee 9	CEO	44	Finland
Interviewee 10	CEO	32	Finland
Interviewee 11	Director	27	Finland

Originally the author intended to interview only CEOs from the Hungarian business industries, but later on it was decided that including people representing the Finnish businesses would increase diversity of the responses, as the event experiences may vary between those countries. There was no targeting by age, only by their professional role, the target participant being in a high decision-making position, as business events are generally of importance for entrepreneurs and CEOs to meet potential clients and investors. According to Factory 360 (2020), 95% of business owners state that live events are a great way to expose and engage the potential consumers.

The author is aware that for the purpose of the thesis the consumers and investors at business events could have been targeted as well, however it seemed more challenging to find out whether a person with a non- decision-making role actively attends business conventions. For that reason, it was decided to target mainly people with entrepreneurial backgrounds, or those holding high influence roles within a company, as they are the ones

more likely to attend business events. Thusly, after sending over 250 interview invitations via LinkedIn Premium, the author managed to obtain data from 11 individuals.

Theoretical part of the thesis is collected using existing sources such as the university online library, existing event policies, statistical data, credible articles, Google Scholar as well as other theses and research articles.

4.3 Data collection and data analysis period

The data collection period was held in the end of October until mid-November 2021. Based on the collected data, descriptive and exploratory data analysis was deployed for a detailed predictive analysis. The collected data will serve as a standing point to try to predict future trends in a post-covid event industry and to have a better understanding of future attendees in business-related events. The findings of the research are expected to be applied locally, as my commissioner is a marketing company based in Hungary, Budapest.

The interview questions consisted of a total of 31 questions divided into 3 themes - ticket purchasing, health-related topics and experience improvement. The purpose of each part was to obtain an idea of how each participant has experienced the business events during the pandemic, what kind of expectations or concerns they may have towards business conventions in the post-covid world. After the completion of the data collection, the interviews would be analysed by thematic analysis.

Demographic- general questions
1. The participant's name and professional role and company
2. How old are you?
Theme 1. Ticket-purchasing.
1. Have you ever attended a public business event in-person before the COVID-19 pandemic? (in Hungary/Finland or in other countries)
2. What kind of expectations do you have towards health regulations at events after the pandemic?
3. Have you attended a business event in the past 6 months/ this year?
4. How much in total did you spend on the tickets for business events per year before the pandemic?
5. As of now, how much approximately did you spend on business event tickets during COVID-19 pandemic?

6. Would you pay an extra fee for the language interpretation to your native language? (simultaneous, subtitles etc.)
7. How much do you usually spend on a single ticket to a business event?
8. How large events were the business events you have attended before COVID-19? (etc. by the number of attendees, venue, duration)
Theme 2. Health regulations.
1. Have you yourself or anyone from your social circle have been affected by contracting Covid-19?
2. What kind of expectations do you have towards health regulations at events after the pandemic?
3. After the pandemic, what is your opinion towards business events for vaccinated only attendees?
4. If the event will provide easily available safety measures etc. disposable masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, how will it affect your decision towards purchasing a ticket to that event?
Theme 3. Event experience.
1. Have you ever attended online events?
2. What do you dislike the most about online or hybrid events or seminars?
3. For a better experience of an online (or hybrid) event, would you pay to access the recording of the event?
4. Would you be interested to use a function (in an event app) where you can talk to other attendees during an event?
5. In an online event stream, would you rather purchase access to all the streaming seminars, or only a selection of your choice?
6. At an online event, would you purchase a priority option to ask a question to a speaker, that would guarantee an answer to your question?
7. Would you pay an extra fee for the language interpretation to your native language? (simultaneous, subtitles etc.)
8. Would you want to attend business events in the future?
9. What would you want to see at online or offline business events in the future, how can they be more exciting and valuable?
10. What kind of content at business events do you consider important?
11. What kind of elements, experiences from a business event or forum (in-person or online) would make you more likely to remember it and consider going again?
12. What kind of interactivity would you prefer at online events? (Etc. breakout rooms, open discussion, workshops)

13. How important to you is entertainment at business events? (etc. show elements, music concerts, games)
14. If anything was possible, which parts of in-person business events would you want to implement into online events to make them better?
15. What is your opinion towards using Virtual Reality elements in an online business event?
16. If you happen to have access to a VR headset and if a business event happened to have a VR related programme in addition to the event, how would it affect your decision-making towards attending such event?

The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured way, all of the questions were asked, and where needed, follow-up questions were asked to clarify certain ideas. The author architected the questions based on the questions of the thesis, which were the following:

1. *How has covid-19 affected people's attendance to large or small events?*
2. *How can online events be more immersive, as close to in-person events as possible and how can they go beyond that standard?*
3. *What do business event attendees miss having about online events?*

The answers to these questions were diverse and complex, which can be seen from the presentation of each question further on in the thesis. Prior to the research the concerns of validity and reliability were considered. This research reflects qualitative data in the form of opinions from a selected few 11 individuals. The biases that may have occurred within the interviews, were reduced by the neutral position of the interviewer, the author. The author encouraged individuals to elaborate with their opinions by asking follow-up questions or clarifications, in order for the data to be as clearly represented as possible.

5 Presentation of the results

The research was conducted using qualitative data collection. The analysis method for the interviews was a thematic data analysis. For that purpose, the data has been transcribed into textual form, and recurring themes were found and analysed. There were 10 interviews, and this chapter will outline and expand on each theme that was prevalent in the interview questions. The interviews were divided into 3 parts with some pre-determined themes and topics for discussion. Upon completion of the interviews, the author transcribed the interviews with the help of Microsoft's new AI software, Azure Video Analyzer. The accuracy of the transcription depended on factors such as the quality of the call recorded, however, those occurrences were collated with the original recording when needed. Afterwards the author summarised each respondent's statements according to each part of the interview.

The goals of the interviews were to find out the interviewees' consumer behaviour through their opinions in relation to business events. There was a degree of diversity within the responses, as some of the topics discussed sparked philosophical questions, strong opinions and raised questions of free will and personal responsibility towards the health of the society. The detailed review of the results is presented in the subchapters below.

5.1 Ticket-purchasing

In the first part of the interview the questions were related to ticket-purchasing behaviour and the amount of times the respondents had attended business conventions over the past years. Having attended business event in any form was a pre-requisite to participating in the research, which was a starting question in the interview, hence why the table below starts with Question 2.

Table 2. Question 2. How many times a year have you attended business events in total before Covid-19 pandemic?

Respondents	Q2. Attendance per year before covid
Interviewee 1	2-3
Interviewee 2	1-5
Interviewee 3	2-3
Interviewee 4	8

Interviewee 5	20+
Interviewee 6	2
Interviewee 7	3
Interviewee 8	20
Interviewee 9	2-4
Interviewee 10	2-3
Interviewee 11	10-20

Attendance before the pandemic:

6/11 attend business events 2-3 times a year, and including one 2-4 times a year

3/11 attend up to 10 times per year

2/11 attend 10-20 times a year

1/11 attend 20 or more times a year

The attendees were asked to tell an estimate on average how often they attended business events per year. Some of the participants fit into both categories by their higher attendance limit, as it can vary. 6 out of 11 of the participants have attended business events on average less than 5 times per year. 3 out of 11 of the participants attended more than 4 but less than or equal to 10 times a year. Two of the participants has attended between 10-20 times and lastly 1 person attended more than 20 times a year.

Table 3. Question 3. Have you attended a business event in the past 6 months or year?

Respondents	Q3. Attendance this year
Interviewee 1	No
Interviewee 2	Yes
Interviewee 3	No
Interviewee 4	Yes, moderator, speaker
Interviewee 5	Yes, online
Interviewee 6	No
Interviewee 7	No
Interviewee 8	Yes, online
Interviewee 9	No
Interviewee 10	Yes

Interviewee 11	Yes
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Attendance this year (2021) during the pandemic:

6/11 attended business events this year

5/11 have not attended any business events in the past year

From the attendances during the pandemic, the slight majority have attended business events in some form, live, online or hybrid.

Table 4. Question 4. How much in total did you spend on the tickets for business events per year before the pandemic?

Respondents	Q4. Ticket spending before covid
Interviewee 1	400-500 000 HUF 1000-1300 eur
Interviewee 2	500 000huf 1353 eur
Interviewee 3	10 000 USD /yr
Interviewee 4	600usd/yr
Interviewee 5	0 or 3000e membership
Interviewee 6	0
Interviewee 7	1500 eur
Interviewee 8	0
Interviewee 9	500-2000 eur
Interviewee 10	0, usually free
Interviewee 11	996

Some participants stated that they do not spend anything on the business events because they either seek out content free of charge, or they receive a company invitation to be present at a business event.

4/11 usually do not spend on the event tickets.

6/11 spent 1000-1300 eur/ per year on business event tickets before covid.

Table 5. Question 5. As of now, how much approximately did you spend on business event tickets during COVID-19 pandemic?

Respondents	Q5. Ticket spending during covid
Interviewee 1	0 EUR
Interviewee 2	0, if not free/ not attend
Interviewee 3	0
Interviewee 4	0
Interviewee 5	1500e
Interviewee 6	0
Interviewee 7	0
Interviewee 8	0
Interviewee 9	Couple hundred-several thou- sands
Interviewee 10	0
Interviewee 11	0

For this question many of the participants stated that they have attended many free online events during the covid-19 pandemic.

Table 6. Question 6. How much do you usually spend on a **single** ticket to a business event?

Respondents	Q6. Price per ticket
Interviewee 1	15-50 000 (huf) 40-137 (eur)
Interviewee 2	Up to 40000 (huf) 100 (eur)
Interviewee 3	2000 (eur)
Interviewee 4	100 USD

Interviewee 5	50-100 (eur)
Interviewee 6	0
Interviewee 7	500-1000 (eur)
Interviewee 8	0
Interviewee 9	Less than 1000e
Interviewee 10	0
Interviewee 11	100-2000eur

9/11 spent 0 on events during covid

2/11 spent 1500-2000 eur on events during the pandemic.

4/11 typically spend around 100eur on a ticket

5/11 typically spend 100 or more on a ticket.

Most of the interviewees did not purchase any business event tickets during the pandemic and instead attending mostly free online events, or small-scale events. Only 2 of the participants have spent as much as 1500-2000 euros on business event tickets during the pandemic, within the past 2 years.

Table 7. Question 7. How large events were the business events you have attended before COVID-19? (etc. by the number of attendees, venue, duration)

Respondents	Q7. Size of event on average
Interviewee 1	20-300
Interviewee 2	100
Interviewee 3	2-3 days, 100
Interviewee 4	10 to 700
Interviewee 5	Up to 10 000
Interviewee 6	20-5000 1-7day
Interviewee 7	Around 2-3000
Interviewee 8	50-20 000
Interviewee 9	20 000
Interviewee 10	N/a, Up to 3hrs
Interviewee 11	20 000

4/11 attended 100-700-people events **before** covid

3/11 attended up to 20 000-people events **before** covid

2/11 attended 5-10 000-people events **before** covid

1/11 attended up to 3000-people events **before covid**

Table 8. Question 8. How large were the business events you have attended after the start of the pandemic?

Respondents	Q8. Size of event during covid (people)
Interviewee 1	N/a
Interviewee 2	50 or unknown
Interviewee 3	N/a
Interviewee 4	Up to 50
Interviewee 5	100-300
Interviewee 6	N/a
Interviewee 7	N/a
Interviewee 8	Up to 50
Interviewee 9	4000 online
Interviewee 10	Up to 50
Interviewee 11	200-40 000

4/11 didn't attend business events **during covid**.

4/11 attended events with around 50 attendees **during covid**

1/11 attended events with 200+ attendees **during covid**

1/11 attended events with 4000 attendees, **online**, during covid

1/11 attended a 40 000 people event this year, **during low restrictions**

In the last part it can be seen that 4 of the participants did not attend any business events in the past 2 years, another 4 attended small events with up to 50 attendees. Lastly, 1 of the participants attended events with more than few hundred attendees during the past 2 years. One participant attended a large online event during the pandemic. These numbers are as expectedly lower than the pre-covid data values.

5.2 Health safety measures

This section of the interview aimed to obtain opinions and expectations of the interviewees towards business conventions with regard to health safety and post-covid regulations. The

participants were asked 4 questions regarding their expectations on healthy safety regulations at events. The results are demonstrated by the following brief data points.

4. Have you yourself or anyone from your social circle have been affected by contracting Covid-19?

Out of 11 respondents, 3 claimed neither them nor people from their social circle have been ill with covid-19. The other 8 have been ill with covid-19 either themselves or people from their social circle were.

5. What kind of expectations do you have towards health regulations at events after the pandemic?

Majority of the participants (7 out of 11) are expecting some sort of health safety regulations at business conventions after the pandemic. The minority (4 out of 11) have either no expectations or would be against regulations after the pandemic is over. There were many reasons behind it which included people simply not wanting to wear masks at social gatherings, or believing that it is a disadvantage to an event. Some participants have expressed that they would like the restrictions to ease, although they expect people to be still cautious at the events.

6. After the pandemic, what is your opinion towards business events for vaccinated only attendees?

3/11 - are strictly against events for only vaccinated attendees

5/11 - are in favour of events for only vaccinated attendees

3/11 – believe in the freedom of choice, but may also believe such measures would be justified

In the past two years, Covid-19 has prevented people from attending large gatherings, if any. In the past year most countries in the EU have successfully vaccinated at least 50% of their population, therefore lowering the covid-19 numbers for a while and making a safer environment for the more vulnerable part of the population who have not been vaccinated yet. Among many other questions, the author was interested in the opinions of the participant on events that could be held only for the vaccinated attendees. Five of the participants strongly supported the notion due to several reasons revealed in their interviews,

that often included having been personally afflicted by covid-19, or having people from their social circle affected by it.

“I am positive about vaccinated-only events, I believe it’s the only way to go forward” – Interviewee 9.

Several others seemed to stand by a neutral position of personal choice whether or not to get vaccinated, and therefore be admitted to events. The neutral views on the topic were in the form of belief that carrying out an event only for vaccinated people is justified and understandable, however they stand by the notion of freedom of personal choice on that matter, and acceptance of consequences of such choice.

“I am not a fan of segregating events only for certain people, it’s a difficult question. I think it’s better to allow everyone to join but somehow keeping track of everyone who joins, who gets sick. Of course, if it’s a big event it will be difficult to track and monitor, so then it could be smart to allow vaccinated people alone to join.” – Interviewee 11.

Lastly, there were those who strongly opposed the idea of mandatory covid-19 vaccination certificates for participation at a business convention. Two participants voiced out that they feel the “vaccinated-only” as a form of segregation and something that could easily lead into discrimination based on cultural or racial factors, and therefore should not be practiced.

One Hungarian CEO expanded on his belief that a person’s medical record is that person’s knowledge only and it is unnecessary to question whether a person has been vaccinated or not, prior to their admittance to an event. Furthermore, he stated that if an event had any restrictions or mandatory safety measures he would not attend. That respondent also did not think that mask wearing protected anyone in a public space. A conclusion to draw from that statement is debatable, and the vaccination topic on its own had been a source of opposing views. The interviewee provided a unique set of data that differs from the majority collected, thusly showing a diversity within the participants’ views and beliefs. It also sheds light on the lower percentage of people that oppose the mandatory use of vaccines and their consumer mentality.

7. If the event will provide easily available safety measures etc. disposable masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, how will it affect your decision towards purchasing a ticket to that event?

7/11 - would go more likely

2/11 - are against mandatory safety measures

2/11 - neutral, will not affect their decision

When it comes to events that provide easily available safety measures, the majority of the participants have claimed to have a positive impact on their decision towards attending such an event. For two of the participants the mandatory safety measures are a disadvantage or they are neutral towards them, claiming it will not affect their decision towards attending that event.

5.3 Experience improvement

Everyone has experienced the realities that came with the pandemic in their own way. The purpose of this part of the interview was to obtain the pains, needs and ideas from the participants that could help improve business events. This part had brought many lengthy discussions around the topic of events, technology, covid-19 and human connection. The interview data from this part had numerous recurring topics and concerns that the participants shared, demonstrated by the answers and quotations below.

1. Have you ever attended online events?

3/11 – haven't attended online events

8/11 – have attended online and/or hybrid events

In this case the author decided not to exclude the participants that have not attended online events, as the experiences can be similar due to long periods of working from home for the majority of people. The online version of social meetings, seminars, is something most working people have had some experience with and are able to have opinions about by now.

2. What do you dislike the most about online or hybrid events or seminars?

10/11 – dislike interpersonal, social aspects of online side of events

2/11 – dislikes people's behavior in online meetings

1/11 – dislikes the crowd in hybrid, prefers online

Majority of the interviewees commented that they do not like the networking possibilities in the online version of the events. According to majority of the respondents' opinions, the virtual space is not suitable to make the same personal impact, to connect with other peo-

ple as in real life. Some participants felt that the heavy and sudden online shift (as compared to pre-covid) is destructive to the society's future generations due to a escapism mindset, it is incredibly easy to withdraw from the reality and lack practice in real life communication.

Some commentary included the online etiquette of people and overall preparedness when it comes to online meetings and events. Interviewee 10 commented that it is common that people are careless in terms of their tech during the online meetings, leaving their mics on.

One of the most recurring themes during the interviews were the quality of the speakers, *who they are, how good they are*. For many participants the content by the speakers were also the reason to attend an event, and depending on the public figure, the price of an event becomes an unimportant factor. The speakers were part of the pull factors.

“What I find is that people are not prepared. And many of the people who present, whether they speak or give a Powerpoint presentation – they’re horrible. And today, in this environment, we need to be extra damn good, because I’m talking to somebody in their livingroom or bedroom or in their kitchen, and they have 20 times as many distractions as they would, if we would be all together in a ballroom of a hotel. And the same poor ability to communicate and to present, most people don’t speak well anyway, but that is a major disadvantage in an online environment.” – Interviewee 4.

On the other hand, some people do not mind the online shift. For instance, when asked about the things he dislikes at online or hybrid events, Interviewee 8 replied that it is the crowd at in-person events, and he prefers to watch the event streams online from home. *“From the business side, I get all that I need through the net, I don’t have to go anywhere. I could sit nicely at home, if I feel dizzy or sleepy, I can sleep and snore here.”* The reasons behind such preferences he attributed to his introverted personality.

“When doing business I like to be in touch with the person or group because that’s what makes it human. If the communication is via screens, it’s not human. I don’t want to leave this kind of world for my children. I believe that it’s not good to live in fear of covid, with suspicion. Even if at events I have to listen to sometimes uninteresting things, at least I get to meet people, and make connections. But in online event it’s not personal. I believe it’s not the way to approach future. I believe the way of future for people is to let go of the fear because fear is poisoning everyone’s life. Fear is in racism and political hate. That’s not how humans naturally are, and it’s The System that’s controlling the people. How they

want the people to be. I want to live life without fear, without restrictions, without COVID.”

– Interviewee 3

3. For a better experience of an online (or hybrid) event, would you pay to access the recording of the event?

3/11 – No, wouldn't pay

3/11 – Yes

5/11 – Depends on the content, speakers

The majority of the interviewees were open to the idea of purchasing access to the recording of the event, given that the speakers or the content is valuable to them. The ones who openly stated that they would not be interested in such an option, either stated that they would not rewatch the recorded content, or simply are avoiding paid events.

4. Would you be interested to use a function (in an event app) where you can talk to other attendees during an event?

8/11 – would use it or has used before

3/11 – would not use it

The majority have used the event's own platform and the communication tools that the event provided. The ones who said they would not be interested in it, claimed that the interaction is not the same there, or they do not support these kinds of ideas.

5. In an online event stream, would you rather purchase access to all the streaming seminars, or only a selection of your choice?

1/11 – would pay to access all the streaming seminars

10/11 – would pay to access only a selection of their choice

The majority stated that they would rather choose which seminars to purchase access to, as it saves time and they would be receiving the content they are actually interested in. The possibility to choose which content to consume at an event rather than having to sit through all of it, seems to be of high value to people.

6. At an online event, would you purchase a priority option to ask a question to a speaker, that would guarantee an answer to your question?

4/11 – would pay for a monetized question that would guarantee an answer to their question

5/11 – wouldn't pay for various reasons, some included being against segregation that entails "priority"

2/11 – depends, on what speaker it is

The goal of this question was to find out how people perceive or value the opportunity of interaction with a speaker. Within the gaming community it is common practice to donate some monetary value with a message to a streamer. The author wanted to find out how the participant would perceive it in a business event setting. Five of the respondents saw it as an unfair practice and pointed out various issues with that kind of practice that could make it more challenging to apply in a business event setting. For instance, some participants said that if an event is paid, then the opportunity for questions should be free.

"I won't pay for a priority or vip pass, not because I can't or I can't afford it, but because I don't like that kind of segregation where you're making other people not able to ask questions to the speaker because they are not able to purchase that. For me buying that kind of pass means I support the segregation of people who can purchase a priority pass and making other people not able to ask a question. If it's a free event it might work, maybe it makes sense. If it's not a free event it wouldn't be nice to pay for that." - Chikezie, K., Director at Startup Grind.

For some interviewees, depending on the speaker they would be willing to pay for such an option.

"Why the priority to ask a question if everyone has paid to be on the event? Unless it's a speaker like Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos then I would definitely pay. But if it's a motivational speaker then sorry." – Interviewee 10.

One interviewee expanded his supportive view on paid Q&A opportunity. Paying for the questions to be answered – it depends on the speaker or business phase you are in, if the speaker is the kind of person you want an appointment with. If it has immediate effect on your business. *"If you put a price tag on all your services – you have to scale the option of acquiring it or not. Price related – 5-10% of the normal pricing. If it would be a 1000 euros to attend, then the price could be 100-200e to be more interactive."* – Interviewee 9.

7. Would you pay an extra fee for the language interpretation to your native language? (simultaneous, subtitles etc.)

All of the interviewees have said that they would not use the language interpretation option, due to being fluent in English. Unless the speaker is giving a speech in a language other than English.

8. Would you want to attend business events in the future?

All, 11 out of 11 of the interviewees replied affirmative.

For Questions 9, 10, 11 there have been similar themes and topics that were brought up. Therefore, the analysis of the topics was merged.

9. What would you want to see at online or offline business events in the future, how can they be more exciting and valuable?
10. What kind of content at business events do you consider important?
11. What kind of elements, experiences from a business event or forum (in-person or online) would make you more likely to remember it and consider going again?

Table 9. Part 3. Questions 9,10,11

Themes mentioned	Nº of people (x/11)
Business growth, clients, more revenue	7
Networking, relevant connections	11
Innovation	2
Relevant statistics	3
Success stories	1
Workshops	1
Finance technology	1
AI	1
Audience participation, interactivity	2
Confident, prepared speakers	4
Opinionated professionals that defend their point	3
Event-sponsored gifts	2
Good event hosts	1
News	1
Side events	1

The issue of networking opportunities were the most recurring theme from all the interviews. It was followed by the importance of business growth as a content at events, and quality speakers.

Sending presents as a way of paying for attention will work until everyone starts doing that. – Interviewee 5.

A complimentary gift during an online event seemed to impress Interviewee . Event organisers could consider it to add a touch of human element to a virtual occurrence. Until a certain point that this trend is popularised, that could make an event stand out from the rest.

“Something that will make me go again – impressive and inspirational speakers, if you get the big names, and in Slush I’ll be playing ice hockey, founders vs investors, Hartwall Arena booked for that side event. Gotta keep the main track of the major event but you still want to have something extra. But its questionable. Because sometimes you got big events that are too wide-spread, they’ve got too much, so from our perspective we’d like to have more narrow, more specific program, it’s a dilemma. But of course you’d like to have a wide programme to attract lots of people.” – Interviewee 9.

12. What kind of interactivity would you prefer at online events? (Etc. breakout rooms, open discussion, workshops)

6/11 – prefer good interactivity with the attendees, audience

5/11 – do not prefer interactivity

In this part the views differed due to the same customer pain. Half of the participants stated that they would like more interactivity with the audience to bring it closer to in-person networking. The other half of the respondents was against online interactivity for the reason that it will not be the same as in-person networking either way. Some participants preferred passively consuming the online seminars. Some were self-conscious if suddenly called upon at a seminar, some preferred to limit their online time and purposefully avoid online classes, as a large part of life already requires one to be online and available.

13. How important to you is entertainment at business events? (etc. show elements, music concerts, games)

7/11 – important

3/11 – unimportant

For many participants the entertainment side of the business events was important due to its value of relaxation, comedic, excitement. Many shared an opinion that comedic elements upkeep their interest during the speaker sessions, making the information be more

memorable. Otherwise, music was considered a nice addition, although not heavy type of music, so that the crowd does not get too excited. All in all, for those in support of entertainment at business events, its presence makes the overall experience be more enjoyable and memorable.

For those finding entertainment to be unimportant, they state so as they see it as a distraction and something out of place. They see celebrity guests as part of entertainment, nothing more than a marketing stunt. *“Boring. If I attend a conference, Im there for that purpose, if I wanted to entertain myself, I would go somewhere else.”* – Interviewee 8

14. If anything was possible, which parts of in-person business events would you want to implement into online events to make them better?

The following topics were the most prevalent in the discussions.

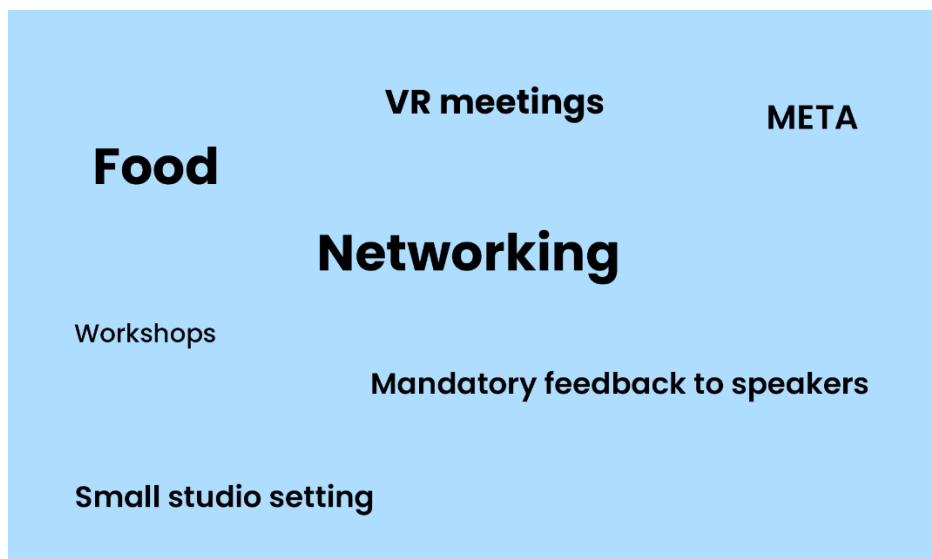


Figure 1. Recurring themes. (Romanovska, 2021)

Several individuals mentioned META and the metaverse, as the upcoming virtual reality space project from Mark Zuckerberg. The networking issue and VR were interconnected topics. Many people believed that a VR element could bring video conferences closer to life or at least make them more interactive. However the current state of VR is not on that level yet, and as several interviewees pointed out, if that could be solved, they would be willing to try it out.

Interestingly, Food as a topic was mentioned numerous times. Including the chocolate box delivery from event sponsors. If an event organiser had a partnership with a restaurant, for instance through Wolt or Door Dash, it would be possible to upsell food and beverages during a virtual event as well. As in menu recommendations for the attendee to purchase

from, as a free inclusion to the event ticket's price. That could engage more of the sensory experience of the virtual event, the sense of taste, leaving a pleasant associative memory with the event. These types of elements are often overlooked when constructing virtual events.

Regarding both questions about VR, the majority supports the idea of it being implemented at business events. It is considered a new, possible way to make virtual meetings and events more realistic, to bring them closer to in-person networking.

15. What is your opinion towards using Virtual Reality elements in an online business event?

16. If you happen to have access to a VR headset and if a business event happened to have a VR related programme in addition to the event, how would it affect your decision-making towards attending such event?

6/11 – support idea of VR

3/11 – skeptical of its current tech level but open to try

2/11 – uncertain/against it due to escapism culture.

1/11 – sceptical because of its current tech level

There was a large variety of opinions on how VR technology will be present in the events industry. Many interviewees supported the idea because they enjoy exploring new technological trends. Some of the concerns towards VR stemmed from the current state of technology, but others saw a deeper societal issue with it. That if the VR trend was popularized and widely adapted, the in-person communication skills of the individuals could worsen and they would develop severe escapism habits.

"I support the idea of VR in events. I would a 100% attend, but I don't know how my body language and communication would be affected. I'm not sure if I can act the same as in real life." – Interviewee 1.

"There's a problem [with VR glasses] when you're sitting. You're moving, but you might get dizzy because of sensory disruptions. Your eyes, vision are moving but the body isn't. Your brain believes you're poisoned, and you start vomiting. There's two different inputs from your body. Feeling nauseous in VR glasses, it's hard to solve that. Some people are sensitive to this input." – Interviewee 2.

"Maybe I would be open once to just have the [VR] experience but I don't wanna be only for that, its just not what I believe. There are just some things, created between people."

Like look we can talk to each other online and its very nice, we just met online, its interesting, but it doesn't feel like, you know, it would be much better to sit somewhere in a coffee shop and talk about these kinds of things. " – Interviewee 3.

"About VR – it's exciting and I'd have a good chance to attend if the event topic is also interesting". – Interviewee 6.

I think that VR will create an alternative life or alternative world for people, and there are a lot of people out there who are suffering there alone. They don't have the ability to talk to people, meet friends, create relationships. In these soft skill areas I feel we're going in the wrong direction. And you see unbelievable number of very frustrated people.

End of the day, we're still human beings and we, people, still need to be able to connect with other people and in a very real way, in a person to person. And I've got fears I've got weaknesses I've got challenges and I need to be able to address those problems and move on. And not get stuck. With a pair of VR headsets. – Interviewee 4.

Apart from METAverse, there are other companies currently working on personalising virtual space, and one of these companies is Anata, a German company based in Budapest. They are working on a 3D social media where a person can have a customizable avatar, bringing people and brands together. (Anata World, 2021)

5.4 Reliability and validity

Assessing a research's credibility requires analysing the reliability and validity of that research, which is often more challenging to perform when it comes to qualitative research versus a quantitative one. The latter is considered more credible due to measurability of the variables and replicability of the results. (Noble & Smith, 2015) When research involves human behaviour and opinions, it can become more challenging to assess how valid the results of the study are, because the qualitative research results sometimes cannot be generalised towards a wider population group. The validity of qualitative research, being synonymous for the "soundness" or the truth of the research, is complex and questionable.

To reason the validity and reliability of this research, the research was performed on a specific target group, people with CEO job titles, decision-makers, leaders who are active in their respective business fields, which requires them to attend networking events. The reasoning behind choosing this specific group of people, is that the CEO position a high responsibility type of role. The author hypothesized that the company leaders would have very specific needs and ideas when it comes to choosing to purchase a 1000 EUR ticket

for an event that can directly impact their business. Based on that and the fact that business conventions are aimed towards bringing together clients and investors to companies, it was decided that the people with the higher affect from the events, would hold the most valuable opinions.

Moreover, due to the location of the author, the study was originally aimed to obtain data from local Hungarian CEOs only. However, later the author attempted to make the research more inclusive, to increase generalisation by interviewing Finnish CEOs as well as Hungarian ones. This caused the number of interviews to reach 11 instead of the originally planned 7, which demanded more in-depth analysis of the data obtained, as well as being more time-consuming to transcribe. The gender factor did not play a role in targeting the participants of the research, although it would have been desirable to increase both cultural and gender diversities. In order to achieve that, the time assigned into finding the target participants would have had to double or triple, taking possibly months, instead of weeks. Furthermore, it is difficult to state how the cultural factors affected the experiences and results of the thesis. The participants may have visited international conferences, where the event scene, and the country's regulations can vary as well.

All of the interviews were recorded digitally using OBS software and transcribed using Microsoft Azure online software, which in turn uses Google Cloud API for voice recognition. Moreover, in cases of inaccurate transcriptions, the author relistened to interview fragments and manually edited the answers into verbally accurate fragments.

Lastly, the author aimed to have high transparency in the results of the research, for that reason, prior to the start of the interviews, the author obtained recorded verbal consent from the interviewees that their names and the data from the interview will be used for educational purposes and it will be only accessed by the teachers and students of Haaga-Helia university. In case of data privacy issues, the thesis should be published anonymised. The respondents showed an interest to know the results of the study, which will be summarised and shared with them once the thesis process is fully complete.

6 Discussion

In this chapter the results are reflected upon through a review of the research questions and how the most recurrent themes of the interviews answered them. Moreover, the limitations of the study are stated as well.

1. *How has covid-19 affected people's attendance to large or small events?*
2. *How can online events be more immersive, as close to in-person events as possible and how can they go beyond that standard?*
3. *What do business event attendees miss having about online events?*

The results of the research were recurring themes revolving around the sensory and social factors of the events. The consumer needs were recurring when it comes to networking, although polar opposites when it came to sensory aspect of virtual reality, and ethical questions around it.

Based on the data from the *Part 1. Purchasing behaviour* of the interviews, in the past 2 years the participants of the research have attended smaller scale events with an average of up to 50 attendees. That was mainly due to local events being prevented by governmental laws, as well as personal preferences of the attendees when it comes to mandatory safety measures at an event. Due to most countries cancelling all the large, international business conventions, it is known that people did not attend business forums in the same way as before the pandemic. Some of the events offered online alternatives and platforms like Hopin, Eventcube, vFairs and others flourish and expand the virtual event market. The virtual event industry size is valued at 57,715 million USD in 2019 and is expected to reach 701,392.4 million by 2028 (Allied Market Research, 2021).

Based on the data from the interviews, the participants in this research indeed spend less on event tickets. Not entirely due to covid-19, as many participants either had corporate invitations or they consciously avoided paid-entry events.

At the current point in time, the participants expressed a need for the events to go back to pre-covid state. That an online version does not provide an opportunity for organic networking. Therefore, it can be said that the participants did not have personal health concerns that would affect their preference towards a particular event. Most of the participants expressed that they would like to attend live events without restrictions, although they expect the restrictions to remain for some months or years.

Upon reflecting on the answers of the attendees, it seemed that there were two sides of the perspective when it comes to improving business events in their current reality of online and hybrid version. Both stem from the need of networking, need of creating connections with potential clients, buyers, investors, media, and other people one wants to meet. There can be at least two possible paths that event organizers might consider taking.

6.1 Proposal 1. Consumer-oriented creativity

The first solution would depend on the event organizers investing into their own creativity and improve the quality of the online content, mainly the speaker presentations. They need to be confident, stand by their opinion no matter how unpopular it may be, and they need to know how to communicate their speech well. It would also include early adaptation of the AR and VR technology into the event, as the majority of the participants expressed positive attitude towards trying it out.

A creative idea that an event company in Hungary made, was renting a TV studio for their needs, setting up some space for the audience and conducting it in a half show, half hybrid way. According to Interviewee 5, it was immersive and entertaining to consume as an online event.

Moreover, the gifts provided by the event organizers could bring an online event closer to the audience. A box of chocolates, or any other item, could be provided by the sponsors and sent to the attendees' home addresses with delivery timing prior to the start of the event. Given that the attendees fill out the needed data that can ensure of allergies and diets being taken into account, as well as their addresses. If planned out carefully, it could make a pleasant sensory association with the event, despite one happening online.

Another side of creativity to improve the online state of events is to embrace the gamification trends. Virtual reality side is developing with METAverse. Before the announcement from Facebook, implementing the VR trend in the events industry was more of an exploratory point of view the author considered to discuss. However, with that type of company, virtual space and events have a large chance to be applied as widely as Facebook currently is. From the business perspective, if there is balance between the right kind of entertainment, reaction-inducing experiences, that cause more attention to be generated around the event, in the long run it means higher revenue for the events industry. People tend to have strong reactions towards any new and revolutionary technological advancements.

Furthermore, depending on whether it is a paid event or free, making some services of the event paid services could have a beneficial effect on the ROI of the event. For instance, asking a monetized question to the speaker as one of the options, in case the speaker is someone known within the industry.

To summarize, - if the event's budget allows it – it would be refreshing to receive a physical gift from the online event sponsors', attendee lunch could be preordered via partnership of the event organizer and a food delivery company, and accessible VR could make online events more immersive. Interactivity in the event can be brought on via professional speakers and games, as well as discussions that interest people.

6.2 Proposal 2. Preserving the human side of connections

Many participants have voiced out that they are concerned with how the virtual side of everyday life is taking over the real life. In particular when it comes to future generations. In the current world, it is easy to drop into escapism culture. Many people are concerned how excessive virtual exposure is distorting people's ability to form real-life connections, causing many young adults struggle with communication skills and being overdependent on easy dopamine intakes from social media (Centre For Mental Health, 2021).

With VR tech becoming a place of space for meet-and-greets, for several participants it was mildly alarming how the society will be affected within the psycho-social relations. Aside from the fact that prolonged usage of VR glasses can cause dizziness in people, it may not be the best path to take as a society on an ethical level. Currently the technology is expensive as well, but it is uncertain how that will change if META popularizes VR and augmented reality in the events industry.

Therefore, focusing on the health-related aspects of the business events industry could be the better option for those wishing to upkeep the human side of their working life. As mentioned earlier, the events could have on-site PCR tests for a small fee, temperature checks, medical staff, and all the mask-wearing social distancing. Whether those would be inclusive events or only for vaccinated attendees - is up to the event organizers and national laws. Allowing only vaccinated attendees can result in loss of revenue, due to many people considering covid vaccinations to be matter of choice.

On the other hand, conducting events only for vaccinated attendees has already been a practice in several countries and vaccinated individuals can diminish the need for such di-

vision in the events industry. In the longer run it will ease the necessity for such restrictions, even though it may have a temporary downside in the meantime, for those strictly against the vaccinations and mandatory disclosure of the medical records.

The participant groups could be split into smaller meetings so that the social distancing could be possible during the seminars. These seminars could have more entertainment elements and be streamed online as well. The importance of a professional event host and speaker is high with the shorter attention span of the online viewers. The speakers can engage with the audience more by having a list of some names from the audience, and aiming the questions at specific people in the audience, in order to increase interaction. Moreover, the side events, small games or optional entertainment within an event could help with introductions and ease communication between the attendees.

6.3 Limitations

After numerous discussions with the supervisor for improvement of this thesis, the author states her awareness of the limitations of this study. The number of interviewees may have been insufficient for this study to hold broad market value. Even management companies or event industry players that do complete market research of this topic, do so with sufficient funding, several employed researchers, within longer time periods.

For a small company with 5 million USD yearly revenue, it can take 20 000 USD to complete a market research. The costs can grow up to 60 000 USD and more, depending on the size of the company, number of participants, qualitative or quantitative data, transcriptions and other factors. For that reason, the upper limit cost of market research cannot be easily defined. Market research is often outsourced to industry experts and can cost starting from 300USD per participant in qualitative research. (The Fansworth Group, 2021) For a company the size of Haaga-Helia with revenue of 76.23 million USD in 2020, (Dun&Bradstreet, 2021), this type of market research could cost at least 30 000 USD or more, depending on the complexity of the industry researched and research goals, which is an unavoidable cost in order to produce quality ground for predictions.

The said market players and researchers would have access to the right type of data providers, and they would hold decades of experience within their field (which the author currently lacks) to draw the right conclusions from this research in order to make viable future predictions. Based on the qualitative data analysis from the interviewees' opinions, the results can be held valid within this research, considering the limitations of an educative setting.

6.4 Conclusion

The objective of this research was to gain an understanding of how the consumer trends were affected by covid-19. The event trends that were explored within this research, have given insight into the aspects of business events that could be improved if appropriate budget and creativity was to be applied. The particular wishes of the people could be taken as ideas of what could increase customer satisfaction at events. Moreover, the technological possibilities that could become a near, future reality has split the opinions of the participants over whether VR and gamification is something that will enhance or take away from the networking world.

In terms of covid-19, the research demonstrated the division of opinions on whether the health measures should be upheld for the next few years, or if there should be events only for the vaccinated population. In many countries including Hungary, even outdoor events require presenting a covid vaccine certificate in card form or paper. It is not too different from outwardly marketing an event being for vaccinated-only attendees. In order to be more inclusive, most countries and event organizers require only a PCR test certificate.

This research could be improved by being expanded over each idea for enhancement of many business events. Primarily, but not limited to: delivering food and sponsored goods for virtual events, a better venue for the speakers in case of event restrictions, professional event hosts and speakers that are able to communicate confidently and leave a valuable impact. During the writing of the thesis, the author faced a challenging find that the business conventions sector of events, do not have as much extensive research written about them, in contrast to music festivals or cultural events. It would be beneficial to test these types of ideas for how the presence, the quality, or absence of factors mentioned (the food deliveries, sponsored gifts, VR) can affect the ticket sales and customer satisfaction.

As a reflection of own's learning, this thesis project was an interesting learning experience to conduct. From a personal perspective, interview discussions were very thought-provoking, it was inspiring to hear the diversity of opinions regarding the technological and societal trends and concerns. In certain situations, it was necessary to stay neutral when an interviewee might express an unpopular opinion over a topic, when asking follow-up questions. In some cases, the participants helped me by linking me various sources of relevant information after an interview. Many of these interviews left a good impression on me. However, it turned out to be a complex topic, where additional research would need to be done, in order to produce more informative results.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Hello!

I am Evelina Romanovska, a student of Haaga-Helia university in Finland. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research for my Bachelor's degree. It is focused around how ticket purchasing behaviour in the business events industry were affected by covid-19. To see what kind of expectations people have towards business events (both online and in-person) and what kinds of trends there may be emerging.

The data from this questionnaire will be used in written form in my research paper, and that thesis will be published on my school's website where mainly the university students and the teachers will have access to it. If you are giving your consent to how the data will be used, we can proceed with the interview.

General questions

1. Please state your full name and your professional role and company, to cite you as a data source.
2. How old are you?

Part 1. Ticket purchasing

1. Have you ever attended a public business event **in-person** before the COVID-19 pandemic? (in Hungary or in other countries)
2. How many times a year have you attended business events in total before Covid-19 pandemic?
3. Have you attended a business event in the past 6 months or year?
4. How much in total did you spend on the tickets for business events per year before the pandemic?
5. As of now, how much approximately did you spend on business event tickets during COVID-19 pandemic?
6. How much do you usually spend on a **single** ticket to a business event?
7. How large events were the business events you have attended before COVID-19? (etc. by the number of attendees, venue, duration)
8. How large were the business events you have attended after the start of the pandemic?

Part 2. Health related

The next part of the questionnaire concerns safety regulations at business events, to find out their effect on ticket purchasing behaviour after/during COVID-19.

1. Have you yourself or anyone from your social circle have been affected by contracting Covid-19?
2. What kind of expectations do you have towards health regulations at events after the pandemic?
3. After the pandemic, what is your opinion towards business events for vaccinated only attendees?
4. If the event will provide easily available safety measures etc. disposable masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, how will it affect your decision towards purchasing a ticket to that event?

Part. 3. Experience improvement. The purpose of this part of the questionnaire is to obtain ideas and data that could help improve business events.

1. Have you ever attended online events?
2. What do you dislike the most about online or hybrid events or seminars?
3. For a better experience of an online (or hybrid) event, would you pay to access the recording of the event?
4. Would you be interested to use a function (in an event app) where you can talk to other attendees during an event?
5. In an online event stream, would you rather purchase access to all the streaming seminars, or only a selection of your choice?
6. At an online event, would you purchase a priority option to ask a question to a speaker, that would guarantee an answer to your question?
7. Would you pay an extra fee for the language interpretation to your native language? (simultaneous, subtitles etc.)
8. Would you want to attend business events in the future?
9. What would you want to see at online or offline business events in the future, how can they be more exciting and valuable?

10. What kind of content at business events do you consider important?
11. What kind of elements, experiences from a business event or forum (in-person or online) would make you more likely to remember it and consider going again?
12. What kind of interactivity would you prefer at online events? (Etc. breakout rooms, open discussion, workshops)
13. How important to you is entertainment at business events? (etc. show elements, music concerts, games)
14. If anything was possible, which parts of in-person business events would you want to implement into online events to make them better?
15. What is your opinion towards using Virtual Reality elements in an online business event?
16. If you happen to have access to a VR headset and if a business event happened to have a VR related programme in addition to the event, how would it affect your decision-making towards attending such event?