

# **The Role of the Keynote Speaker in the Finnish Event Industry**

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## Abstract

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Title of the thesis <b>The Role of the Keynote Speaker in the Finnish Event Industry</b>		
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Abstract <p>This thesis examines the role of the keynote speaker in Finnish event production as both a strategic and experiential influencer. The aim was to explore how a keynote speaker can enhance the success of an event through the participant experience.</p> <p>The theoretical framework introduces a multidimensional model that examines the speaker's impact from seven perspectives: experiential, social, philosophical, cultural, productional, economic, and technological. The empirical part was conducted as a qualitative case study, based on semi-structured interviews with professionals in the Finnish event industry. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis.</p> <p>The findings indicate that the keynote speaker is an experiential mediator, with influence materialising through the participant's inner experience. The study provides new insights into the speaker's role in participant-centred event design and contributes to developing event strategies, particularly in virtual and hybrid contexts.</p>		
Keywords Event industry, keynote, speaker, event management, phenomenon, experience		

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## 1 Introduction

Event production has entered a new phase, where technological development, the increasing prevalence of digital and hybrid events, and the growing demands of audiences for experiences have changed the focus areas of content design. Expert and business events will provide more impactful, meaningful, and participant-oriented content solutions. At the same time, the strategic importance of individual program elements as part of the overall planning of the event has been further emphasised.

Traditionally, the keynote speech has been seen as the opening or culminating performance of the programme. However, this study examines the keynote speaker as a broader phenomenon. The speaker is approached holistically as a builder of the event's identity, a communicative influencer, and an enabler of experiential interaction. As virtual and hybrid events become more common, the speaker's role as an interpreter of content and a mediator of the audience experience becomes more and more concrete.

Previous Finnish event research has mainly focused on presentation skills, programme planning or the content themes of individual speeches. However, the impact of the keynote speaker on the strategic, experiential and production success of the event has not been systematically discussed. This study aims to fill this research gap by examining the keynote speaker from a multidisciplinary perspective. They are approached as a key event resource and an enabler of the participant experience, the impact of which is concretised as an individual experience.

The research is built on a qualitative and phenomenon-based approach, combining theoretical analysis and empirical research data. The aim is to produce an academically based and practical understanding of the significance of the keynote speaker in contemporary event production.

## 1.1 Definition of the research problem

This study examines how the keynote speaker can be used as a key success factor in events. The study is necessary, as the impact of keynote speakers on the success of events has not yet been sufficiently discussed in the Finnish research literature from an experiential perspective.

A keynote speaker is often the most visible figure at an event. However, their real impact on the event's experiential and strategic success is usually not addressed other than through their speech and presentation. A keynote speaker is not only a content provider or speaker, but they can significantly shape the participants' experience and the overall meaningfulness of the event. Their influence extends not only to the content of the speech, but also to production, event setting, communication and the participants' personal experience.

In this study, the role of the keynote speaker is approached holistically, combining practical event production perspectives with a broader experiential and philosophical analysis.

## 1.2 Research questions

The following main question guides the research:

- How can a keynote speaker be utilised to support the strategic and experiential success of the event?

The following sub-questions clarify this main question:

- What kind of production, experiential and cultural dimensions are associated with using a keynote speaker in event planning?
- How does the role of a keynote speaker differ in physical and virtual events?
- In what ways can a keynote speaker act as an enabler of the event's significance from the participant's point of view?

These questions support the qualitative and interpretive approach of the study and form the basis for the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and empirical analysis (Chapters 4–5).

Other related perspectives include:

- How does the keynote speaker-based event business work and what success factors can be found?
- How can a keynote speaker be used to support the success and experiential nature of events in Finland?

### 1.3 Objectives of the investigation

The study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the use of keynote speakers in the event industry and their impact on the success of events. The results can help develop new business models and improve event planning and execution. In addition, the goal is to produce an in-depth overview of the significance a keynote speaker can have for the success of events. The goal is to identify the elements through which the keynote speaker affects the participant experience, the event's appearance, production solutions and economic value.

In addition, the study examines how the speaker's impact is constructed in different event environments, especially in virtual spaces, where experiences of presence and interaction are mediated by technology. It also examines whether a keynote speech can be understood as an event that enables the participant to have an experiential or meaningful moment. In this way, this study combines a practical and philosophical perspective on interpreting the event phenomenon.

### 1.4 Previous studies and research gap

The development of the event industry in Finland has been studied extensively, but the impact of keynote speakers on the success of events has received less attention. Previous studies have examined the development prospects of the event industry, changes in services and increasing awareness of the industry. (Kylänpää 2024; Köri 2021) In addition, studies have identified the importance of speakers in the participant experience of fairs and events and the attractiveness of content. (Suomela 2022; Vainio 2024)

Speakers' presentation skills and impact have previously been studied, especially concerning sales work and educational speeches. Previous studies (Jaakkola 2016; Jyrkynen 2021; Kivistö 2013; Ylä-Rautio 2017) have emphasised the importance of communication skills, interaction, and visual and content clarity for the participants' experience and impact.

Studies on the challenges of event production have found the challenges of communication and scheduling to be key factors for the success of events. (Björklund & Polari 2024) In addition, the growing importance of sustainability and responsible practices has been identified as an essential part of the development of event production. (Kyönsaari 2012; Veteli 2024)

Although previous international research on the event industry has been accumulated from several perspectives (Berridge 2015; Getz & Page 2016a), the role of keynote speakers in the multidimensional context of the event has been poorly explored in terms of research. Previous research has focused on individual areas, such as presentation skills or the structure of the program content. Still, the significance of the speaker for the experiential, production, and strategic success of the event has not been analysed interdisciplinarily. This study addresses this research gap by looking at the keynote speaker in a multidisciplinary way as part of the overall structure and meaningful experience of the event. This phenomenon-based research aims to answer this identified research gap and deepen the understanding of the significance of the keynote speaker in contemporary event production.

### 1.5 Research approach

This study relies on a qualitative, phenomenon-based approach, particularly suitable for understanding complex and meaningful phenomena constructed in social and cultural contexts. The event is viewed as a holistic process that combines experiential, philosophical, production, technological and economic dimensions. (Eskola 2019; Rahman & Mehnaz 2024; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2019)

The qualitative research method enables the interpretation of such phenomena as they manifest themselves in the individual's expression, cultural practices, attitudes, beliefs, ideas, mental images and intentions. The starting point is understanding subjective meanings and comprehensively interpreting the context. The impact of the keynote speaker on the experience of space and presence, in a virtual event environment, has not been systematically discussed in the academic literature. Similarly, there is a lack of a broader analysis of how the speaker's role is combined with the practices of event management, experience planning and the experience economy, as well as a philosophical and interpretative understanding of the event's significance. The study responds to this research gap by presenting a multi-level theoretical analytical framework in which the keynote speaker is simultaneously seen as a productive actor, an experiential enabler, and a strategic influencer of the event.

Below is a description of the stages and sequence of the work implementation.

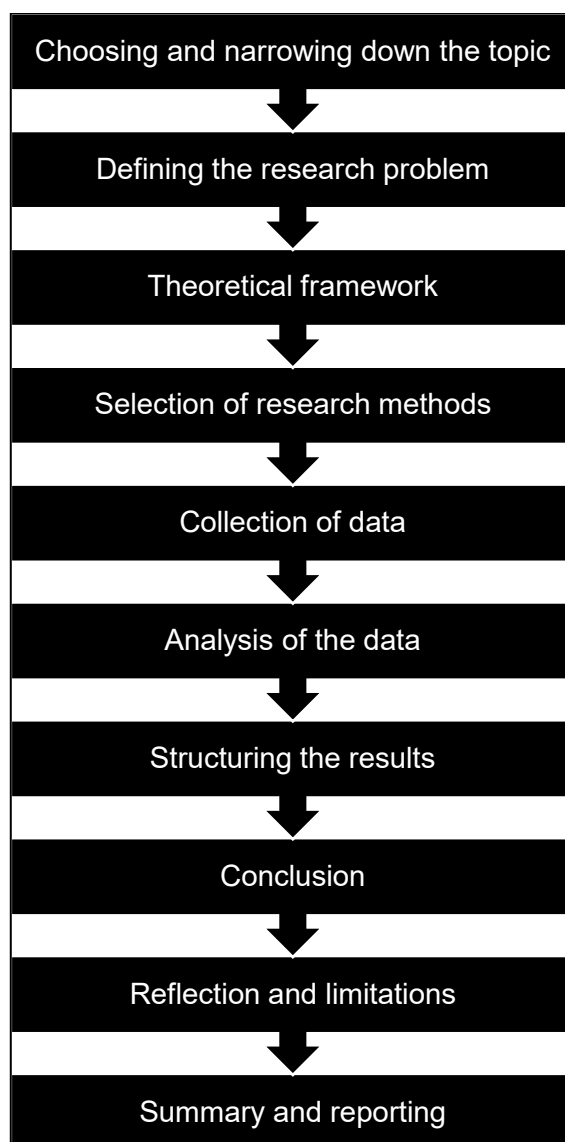


Figure 1. Stages of the research process from topic selection to reporting

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis follows a logical structure, progressing through distinct phases: a theoretical background, empirical research and a practical part. The structure of the thesis follows the thesis guidelines of LAB University of Applied Sciences and forms a structured report entity.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study. It defines the research problem and questions, sets goals, and justifies the topicality of the topic and its scientific and practical significance.

Chapters 2 and 3 form a theoretical framework that combines previous research and perspectives on the role of keynote speakers in the event industry. The framework is built

multidimensionally from experiential, philosophical, cultural, strategic and techno-economic dimensions.

Chapter 4 presents the research methods, including a qualitative research approach, a semi-structured interview method, the construction of themes and the data analysis process. In addition, the reliability of the research, ethical principles and the researcher's reflection are discussed.

Chapter 5 describes the practical implementation of the study in stages: planning and conducting interviews, transcribing, structuring and preparing the analysis.

Chapter 6 presents the research results through five main themes. The results are presented by qualitative content analysis, combining generalisations, direct quotes, the researcher's interpretation and theoretical contextualisation.

Chapter 7 brings together the key observations and answers to the research questions. In addition, development proposals for the event industry and a research-based planning tool for keynote speakers are presented. The chapter also examines the researcher's learning process and presents ideas for further research.

Chapter 8 provides a concise and easy-to-understand summary of the work's background, implementation and key results.

Finally, the appendices and bibliography of the thesis complete the whole. They support the transparency, reproducibility and academic reliability of the work.

In this work, assistive digital tools, such as ChatGPT and the SciSpace service, have been utilised, primarily to support the writing and outlining of the structure. However, all content, analyses and interpretations are produced by the author, and the work follows the thesis guidelines of LAB University of Applied Sciences.

## 2 The event industry in Finland and the importance of a keynote speaker

This chapter presents the definition of the event industry and its economic and social significance in Finland. In addition, the role of the keynote speaker as a content and strategic resource for events is examined, and the different types of speakers and their use in different event contexts are introduced.

### 2.1 Definition of an event

According to Tapahtumateollisuus ry (2025), an event can be defined as follows: an event is a planned and goal-oriented event that takes place at a specific time and place. It is aimed at the target group for whom the event represents a break from everyday routines. Events can be one-time or recurring and take place in a physical or virtual environment.

The event industry consists of about 3200 companies nationwide. The sector's economic importance is considerable; in 2019, the total value of the event industry was EUR 2.35 billion, and the estimated total value in 2022 was approximately EUR 2.6 billion. The industry employs nearly 200,000 people and accounts for approximately 1.2 per cent of Finland's GDP, generating an annual value added of EUR 800 - 1,200 million. Before the interruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the event industry was in a strong and profitable growth phase for a long time; The turnover of the sector doubled over the previous seven years, and more than a hundred new companies and more than a thousand permanent jobs were created in the sector every year. In addition, the event industry has significant indirect economic impacts, especially in the hospitality, transport, and retail sectors. Events also serve as a tool for promoting business and trade and strengthening public welfare and democracy. (Tapahtumateollisuus ry 2025)

### 2.2 Classification of industries and the structure of the event industry

The official industry classification does not recognise the event industry as independent. In the Trade and Associations Register, companies and operators in the sector are listed in several different sectors, covering a wide range from industry to administrative and support services, and from the information and communications sectors to arts, entertainment and recreational activities. However, the official industry classifications fail to describe the special characteristics of the event industry comprehensively, and they do not provide a sufficiently clear overall picture of the event industry. (Tapahtumateollisuus ry 2025)

The event industry can be examined from three complementary perspectives:

- Business-oriented, in which case the focus is, for example, production, program and technology services.
- Content-oriented, in which case the focus is on the theme and purpose of the event, such as education, entertainment or social discussion.
- From the perspective of formats, emphasis is placed on how the event is carried out, such as physical, virtual or hybrid formats. (Tapahtumateollisuus ry 2025)

The following table illustrates how different event content and formats are linked to business service forms and speaker roles.

Table 1. Event Industry Content Areas, Formats and Business Services (Kielikello 2020; Tapahtumateollisuus ry 2025)

<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>FORMATS</b>	<b>BUSINESS SERVICES</b>
Business	Business Congresses, conferences	Event management
Science and education	Trainings, lectures, workshops	Performer and programme services
Political, governmental, municipal	Seminars, meetings, symposiums	Event technology services
Arts, culture, entertainment	Parties, galas, soirées	Planning and consulting
Cultural celebrations	Openings, launch events	Digital event services

### 2.3 Definition of a keynote speaker

A keynote speaker is a person who plays a vital role in an event and whose presentation or speech is seen as the highlight of the event. The speaker's task is often to attract the audience to the event, arouse interest and inspire participants, and create exceptional value and visibility for the event. (Cambridge dictionary 2025; Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2025) Makkonen-Craig (2020) states that suitable Finnish terms for keynote speakers at scientific conferences include, for example, keynote speaker, plenary speaker, or plenum speaker (kutsupuhuja, juhlapuhuja, pääpuhujaja, plenaaripuhujaja tai plenumpuhujaja). Of these, plenary speakers and plenum speakers are common, especially in scientific communities, while keynote speakers and keynote speakers are more easily understood in general language. The term plenary presentation refers to a presentation that brings together the conference

attendees without other concurrent events. The term keynote speaker is recommended when it concerns, for example, a jubilee celebration or a jubilee seminar. (Kielikello 2020)

It can be noted that the types of speakers differ from each other in terms of their contexts, roles, and definitions. The following table summarises the differences between words and their meanings.

Table 2. Definitions of speaker types, adapted and translated (Kielikello 2020)

<b>Speaker type</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Invited speaker (Kutsupuhuja)	A person who is invited to speak at an event on a specific topic. They often have expertise or authority in the subject area in question. (Kielikello 2020)
Keynote speaker (Juhlapuhuja)	A speaker who attends formal events such as an anniversary, graduation, or Independence Day celebration. The purpose of the speech is to inspire and emphasise the importance of the occasion. (Kielikello 2020)
Plenary speaker (Plenaaripuhuja)	A speaker who appears in the plenary session of a conference or other event. Their presentation is often a central part of the event and addresses broad themes of interest to all participants. (Kielikello 2020)
Keynote speaker (Pääpuhujaja)	A person who plays a vital role in the event and whose presentation is seen as the event's highlight. A keynote speaker attracts the audience, arouses interest, inspires participants, and creates added value and visibility for the event. (Cambridge dictionary 2025)

From the event management perspective, the keynote speaker is a key part of the event's content strategy and value proposition (Foley et. al 2014; Getz 2008). The keynote speaker is not merely a performer, but also part of the event's brand, communications, and experiential whole, which influences the participant experience, the appeal of the event, and the strategic success of the event. (Clark & Sousa 2018)

#### 2.4 Keynote speaker roles and characteristics

The keynote speaker is a key figure in the content and communication of the event, which can have a significant impact on the success of the event, the participant experience, the communication strategy of the event and its overall success. CapCity Speakers Bureau

(2023) stresses that a successful event depends not only on logistical arrangements but especially on the key role of the keynote speaker in terms of the experience and engagement they provide to the audience.

#### 2.4.1 Expertise and credibility

The expertise of the keynote speaker gives the event informative depth and increases its credibility. In an academic context, the role of the keynote speaker is often aimed at strengthening the participants' knowledge base and highlighting current issues in the scientific community (Murray & Bickford 2019). In addition, expertise combined with clear communication can help with learning and internalising information (Reynolds 2019).

#### 2.4.2 Awakening inspiration and motivation

An inspiring keynote speaker can motivate attendees, create meaningfulness, and reinforce the emotional value of an event. A study of TED talks found that charismatic communication, such as gestures, emphases, and storytelling, is correlated with the inspiration and engagement experienced by the audience (Tur et al. 2022). Such effects can extend beyond the event and lead to a long-term change in behaviour or action.

#### 2.4.3 Visuality and aesthetic experience

Pettit & Karageorghis (2020) showed that audiovisual elements such as music and video can improve participants' motivation and self-efficacy. Utilising these elements in a keynote speech supports not only informational but also emotional engagement.

#### 2.4.4 Building brand value and media visibility

Choosing a keynote speaker is an important part of event planning. A well-chosen speaker can strengthen the event's brand, support its communication and attract the right target audience. A speaker who fits the values and style of the event increases the credibility and visibility of the event. In contrast, the wrong choice of speaker can weaken the reputation of the event and reduce the interest of the participants. (Christian Dragin-Jensen et. al 2018; Clark & Sousa 2018; Getz & Page 2016a)

Nowadays, the importance of the keynote speaker can also be seen in the digital world. For example, a speaker with a wide presence on social media can bring more attention and participants to the event. The impact of social media is a factor that should be considered when choosing a speaker.

### 2.4.5 Strategic communication and event alignment

The keynote speaker's task is often to open the event's theme, lead the participants to its goals and act as a trendsetter in the entire event narrative (Capcityspeaker 2023) This requires verbal clarity and the ability to structure even complex content into an easily approachable entity (Reynolds 2019).

## 2.5 Typologies of keynote speakers at events

The selection of speakers is a key part of the strategic planning of the event. Different types of speakers can support different event goals, such as sharing expertise, providing entertainment, building interaction or enhancing brand communication. Speakers Agency (P.Speakers 2025) offers a breakdown of different types of speakers that can be used for strategic planning of events. Different types of speakers support different goals, such as sharing expertise, entertaining or brand communication.

Table 3. Speaker categories at events, Adapted (P.Speakers 2025)

<b>Speaker category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Conference keynote speakers	Leading experts in the field will deliver speeches that outline the event's theme and inspire the audience.
Topical speakers	Influencers who appear in the public eye have a relevant theme and have a current message.
Moderators and event hosts	Interaction administrators who control the flow of the program and conversations.
Influencers and brand ambassadors	Well-known people who support the visibility and brand communication of the event.

The definitions, tasks and roles of the keynote speaker presented in this chapter form the basis for the multidimensional analytical framework presented in the next chapter, in which the keynote speaker is examined from an experiential, communicative, productive and cultural perspective. Therefore, the role of the keynote speaker cannot be seen only as a presentation. Still, it is more broadly linked to the planning of the event, communication, the participant experience and the building of the event brand. The next chapter delves into these dimensions through a research-based analysis.

### **3 Multidimensional analytical framework for the keynote speaker**

The framework of this study is partly based on the theory of event tourism presented by Getz (2008; 2012) in which the nature of events is approached through parallel perspectives. The model emphasises the experiential, meaningful, organisational and impact-based dimensions of the events, which also provides a sustainable basis for the analytical framework of this study. According to Getz, the effects of events extend not only to individual participant experiences but also to broader social, cultural and economic structures. (Getz 2008; Getz 2012; Getz & Page 2016a; Getz & Page 2016b)

This study examines the role of the keynote speaker in an interdisciplinary manner from several research fields. The starting point for the analysis is a theoretical framework that builds on previous research literature in the areas of event management, experience design, communication and philosophical thinking (Getz 2008; Silvers 2009; Pine & Gilmore 2013; Mazza 2024). Also, Bladen and Kennellin (2014) state that the professionalisation of the event industry requires a deeper understanding of content impact and reflective planning, which supports the need to develop this framework.

The primary purpose of the framework is to structure the role and effects of the keynote speaker in the context of the event industry in a systematic and versatile way. The framework can be used to examine and analyse what kind of meanings and functional dimensions the keynote speaker has as part of the event. This theoretical framework serves as the basis for the entire analysis of the figures.

The analysis model consists of seven complementary dimensions that bring together key perspectives related to the keynote speaker's activities. These dimensions are:

- cultural dimension
- economic
- experiential
- philosophical
- production
- social
- technical.

The dimensions are built on the insights presented in the previous study, but in this study, they have been further combined, developed and applied to the analytical framework. The following table presents the dimensions included in the framework, the key concepts describing them, the perspective of the analysis and the terminology that describes the

dimension in question. The framework also serves as a structural basis for the more detailed theories presented in Chapter 3.

Table 4. The keynote speaker's multidimensional frame of influence at the event, based on the author's own adaptation (Getz 2008; Silvers 2009; Pine & Gilmore 2013; Kotler & Keller 2016; Estien et. al 2021; Mazza 2024)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Cultural	Language, diversity, accessibility, sensitivity	Cultural awareness in communication.	Culturality	The speaker needs to consider audience diversity, language, culture, and accessibility.
Economic	Economic impact, attractiveness, revenue, sponsors	The speaker's contribution to economic success and event value.	Economic value	The speaker can increase ticket sales, sponsors, and visibility.
Experiential	Participant experience, memory, emotions, atmosphere	How the speaker shapes the participant's experience.	Experientiality	Events create memories and emotions – the speaker helps to build this experience.
Philosophical	Meaning, presence, being, moment	How can the event and the speaker be understood as a moment of being?	Philosophical dimension	The speaker enables a moment where meaning emerges beyond information.
Productional	Planning, resources, strategy, implementation	The speaker is part of the event production and strategic planning.	Productionality	The speaker is a strategic resource and a planned element of the event.
Social	Interaction, engagement, networking, community	The speaker's role in interaction and building a community.	Sociality	The speaker enables interaction, networking, and shared experience.
Technological	Technology, virtual events, hybrid, digital communication	The speaker's role in technical and virtual environments.	Technological dimension	The speaker must master digital tools and remote performance.

### 3.1 Experiential dimension and speaker's impact on the participant experience

One of the most important tasks of a keynote speaker at an event is to build the participant experience. Events are often remembered first and foremost through emotions and experiences, not just based on information. The speaker supports the creation of the knowledge and strengthens the overall impression of the event (Getz & Page 2016b; Pine & Gilmore 2013).

An experiential event is created when the participant feels the situation is meaningful, personal and memorable. According to research, such an experience is formed by the combined effect of emotions, senses and thinking (Hosany et. al 2022; Mossberg 2008; Lindberg & Mossberg 2023; Wang et. al 2023). The speaker can influence this through their stories, the way they perform, and by activating the audience's emotional level and participation (Wood & Kenyon 2018).

Emotions are a key part of the memorable experience. They strengthen the memory and make the event meaningful. Both positive and negative emotions can increase the weight of the experience when the situation is perceived as important and impactful. (Godovykh et. al 2022; Hosany et. al 2022; Kim 2016) The speaker can create an emotional connection with the audience and provide a shared experience that will be remembered (Wang et. al 2023)

Storytelling is an important way for the speaker to create a meaningful experience for the participant. A good story evokes emotions, creates a surface for identification and makes the performance more personal (Mossberg, 2007; Wood & Kenyon, 2018). The speaker's gestures, movement, eye contact and example stories also affect the experience as a whole (Bladen & Kennel 2014).

The speaker is part of the event's experience planning. Experiential design does not arise by chance, but requires planning, such as spatial solutions, atmosphere and audience involvement. (Estien et. al 2021; Getz & Page 2016b) In this case, the speaker acts as an enabler of the experience, shaping the participant's memory and reinforcing the significance of the event.

Key perspectives:

- The speaker creates experiences, emotions and memory traces
- Emotional engagement and storytelling are at the core of the participant experience

- Shared experience reinforces the memory imprint
- Experience design defines the speaker's role in the event.

### 3.2 Social dimension and the speaker's role in interaction and community

A keynote speaker is not only a transmitter of information at an event, but often also a trigger for interaction and a sense of community. The social dimension of events is built especially from the moments when the participants feel that they belong to the common space, through the speaker, the other participants or the atmosphere of the entire event (Foley et. al 2014, 53).

The speaker can act as a catalyst for discussion and networking in many ways. Creating interaction does not always require direct dialogue, but indirect means, such as raising themes, asking questions or storytelling, can activate the audience to share their thoughts and experiences. In this case, the speaker's role expands from mere knowledge transfer to supporting interaction and collective experience between participants (Foley et. al 2014, 54).

The way the speaker uses physical space and bodily communication has a key impact on constructing a sense of community. Edward T. Hall's (1966) classical theory of proxemics divides physical distance into four zones: intimate, personal, social, and public. Social distance (approx. 1.2 - 3.6 m) supports polite but non-intensive interaction, for example, in networking or discussion situations, while public distance (over 3.6 m) creates a formal role for the presenter and emphasises the one-way nature of the message (Hall 1966, 119–124). The speaker's placement in the space directly impacts whether the audience perceives him or her as inclusive or distant. This experience is also influenced by nonverbal messages such as eye contact, gestures, and movement, which can reinforce the feeling of interaction regardless of physical distance.

The social dimension is also related to the participants' emotional well-being and the event experience's meaningfulness. According to studies, shared experiences and positive interaction can increase the sense of belonging, support the well-being of the participants and leave a stronger memory of the event (Foley et. al 2014; Kawakubo & Oguchi 2023, 14). Godovykh and Hahm (2020) show, in particular, that peak emotional experiences at the end of the conference have a strong impact on participants' loyalty and recollection of the event.

Especially in business events and seminars, the speaker's interactive and participatory presentation style supports networking and the participants' motivation. In these contexts, the speaker's actions can contribute to the activity of the participants, the formation of

contacts and the collectivity of the experience, which in turn increases the memorability of the event and the commitment of the participants (Nicholson & Pearce 2001).

Key perspectives:

- The speaker acts as a promoter of interaction and community
- Indirect interactions, such as storytelling, encourage participants to share experiences
- The use of space and bodily communication affects the sense of participation and community
- The social dimension promotes the participants' well-being, sense of belonging, and memory strengthening.

### 3.3 Philosophical dimension and the speaker's role in meaning and being

The role of a keynote speaker is not limited to sharing expert information or giving presentations. From an experiential point of view, the speaker can at best create a situation where the participant stops and encounters themselves and their environment in a new way. This creates a so-called moment of being, a situation in which the continuity of everyday life is interrupted and meaning is built in a new way (Backman & Luoto 2006, 184–188; Varto 1995, 33–35).

Heidegger (Backman & Luoto 2006, 184) , such an experience originates from actual life experience, not mere knowledge or thinking. A basic philosophical experience refers to a moment of presence in which a person acts as a caring and participating being. In this case, the speaker can influence the listener with voice, rhythm or physicality, for example, and thus open up space to experience a new meaning.

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic view, meaning is not created in a ready-made way but is constructed through interaction and linguistics. Therefore, the speaker's role is to convey information and enable understanding through an interpretative process (Backman & Luoto 2006, 185).

Juha Varto (1995) emphasises that experience is built through previous meaning structures. When a familiar structural element is interrupted, an opportunity opens up for a new kind of encounter. Such an experience can arise precisely under the guidance of the speaker.

In addition, according to Heidegger, moods affect how public space is experienced. The speaker can influence the mood of the situation – evoke hope, fear or courage – and thus influence how the participant understands themselves and the world (Backman & Luoto 2006, 104).

A pragmatic research perspective (Dewey 1938; Kaushik & Walsh 2019; Shan 2022) highlights the consequence-based nature of experience. Experience only acquires meaning when it is reflected in the individual's life. Thus, the impact of a keynote speaker is not limited to the content of the speech, but to what the participant does, thinks, or feels as a result.

Key perspectives:

- The speaker can create a moment of being where the participant meets themselves and their world in a new way
- Experiential nature does not only come from verbal content, but also from the speaker's bodily, rhythm and presence
- Meaning is built through interaction, language
- Philosophical experience is related to meaningfulness
- The pragmatic perspective focuses on the consequences of a person's experience.

### 3.4 Multicultural dimension and the speaker's role in inclusive communication

In multicultural and multilingual events, the role of the keynote speaker goes beyond simply conveying information. The speaker must understand that communication is always culturally and linguistically charged: the same gestures, humour, stories, or visual messages can take on completely different meanings in different cultural contexts (Clark & Sousa 2018, 2; Hall 1966). This places special demands on the speaker regarding cultural awareness, language awareness and accessibility.

Cultural awareness refers to the speaker's readiness to recognise and respect the cultural diversity of the audience and to adapt their communication accordingly. For example, the use of humour or symbolic storytelling can cause misunderstandings if the audience's cultural frames of reference differ from those of the speaker. (Clark & Sousa 2018, 1; Foley et. al 2014) In this case, the speaker acts as an interpreter and mediator of meanings, building a bridge between different worlds of experience (Mazza 2024, 23).

Language awareness is emphasised, especially in international events, where the language used is not the mother tongue of all participants. Aririguzoh (2022) points out that clear articulation, simple language and concept contextualisation support the message's comprehensibility. Visual support elements (e.g. diagrams and symbols), plain language and interpreting services strengthen communication accessibility (Estien et al. 2021). This

refers to the emotional and cognitive components of the experience that the speaker must support in different audience groups (Godovykh & Hahm 2020, 4).

Accessibility is linked not only to linguistic but also to cultural issues. Inclusive event planning is not limited to physical accessibility, but also includes cognitive and cultural accessibility - i.e. communication that is understandable and inclusive for as many people as possible (Estien et al. 2021). A good speaker creates a space where participants feel heard and appreciated emotionally and through participatory practices (Godovykh & Hahm 2020, 13).

The speaker's cultural background has a significant impact on how the messages are constructed and how they are interpreted. The holistic view of humanity presented by Rauhala (2007) underlines the importance of cultural and experiential factors in the individual's actions. According to Heidegger (1977), language is intrinsically linked to being and identity. Thus, the speaker's words carry a deeper symbolic and experiential meaning. Mazza (2024, 23) emphasises that the keynote speaker always has a symbolic role. They act as a cultural mediator who builds meanings in the audience's world of experience.

Key perspectives:

- Cultural awareness and adaptation of communication to the public
- Language awareness and accessibility in a multilingual environment
- Cultural differences in humour, gestures, and storytelling
- Taking diversity and inclusion into account at the event.

### 3.5 Production dimension and the speaker's role in event integration

A keynote speaker is not a separate element from the event's content, but a core production resource, the selection, preparation and placement of which are an essential part of the strategic and operational planning of the event. The role of the speaker is intrinsically linked to the dramaturgy of the event, its goals and the design of the audience experience (Allen 2011, 90–102; Getz & Page 2016b).

In practice, the production dimension means that the integration of the speaker into the event is carefully planned: programmatic placement, technical preparation, background briefing and consideration of the audience's profile form a whole in which the speaker's input is maximised. The role of the keynote speech can serve as an opening stimulus, a culmination or a unifying thematic node in the event, and its impact extends to the rhythm and goal-orientation of the entire event experience (Mazza 2024, 40,65-66).

The production perspective also requires the speaker to be able to place themselves as part of a larger context. An impactful speaker identifies the event's technical constraints, schedules, audience structures, and communication goals and adapts their presentation accordingly. In this case, the speaker is not just a content producer, but a part of the event's overall communication, mood building and meaningful interaction. (Berridge 2015, 29)

From the event organiser's point of view, the speaker is also an investment and a risk. The acquisition of a speaker involves contract negotiations, financial investments, communication coordination and preparedness for possible exceptional situations. Planning also covers technical and logistical implementation, including presentation technology, schedule, material deliveries, and contingency plans (Allen 2011, 102--114).

An effective keynote speech is not created in a vacuum, but as part of a carefully planned, consistently produced entity that supports the event's goals. The production dimension highlights the speaker's central role as an enabler of the event's success and how much this position requires preparation, cooperation, and risk management.

Key perspectives:

- Speaker as a strategic investment
- Selection, preparation and briefing as part of the production process
- Dramaturgy of the program and speaker placement at the event
- Risk management, technical preparation and overall management.

### 3.6 Economic dimension and the speaker's impact on appeal and value

A keynote speaker is not only a performer or programmatic filler but also an actor who creates multidimensional value for the event. The speaker's impact extends from the event's appeal and brand to the participant experience, media visibility and long-term image, both from the participants' and organisers' perspectives. In addition, the speaker's position is linked to the awareness and symbolic value of the event.

The speaker's awareness, expertise and communication skills are key factors that influence participation decisions. The experiential appeal of an event is primarily built on the speaker's ability to evoke emotions, provide meaningful content, and create a personal connection with the audience (Erhan & Bangun, 2024). In other words, the speaker not only conveys information but also influences how the event is remembered and how it guides the participants' actions after the event.

A keynote speaker is often the core of an event's audience engagement. Commitment is created on both a cognitive and emotional level, and effective speech can leave a lasting

memory mark. This increases the event's aftermath and strengthens attendee loyalty, which is especially important in recurring event concepts (Donlan 2010; Setiawan et. al 2022).

The choice of speaker reflects the values and strategic positioning of the organiser. When the theme of the event and the speaker are image-compatible, the so-called brand transfer effect occurs: the meanings and values of the event are transferred to the participants through the speaker (Gwinner & Eaton 1999). In this way, the speaker acts as the event's strategic figurehead and brand ambassador.

A well-known speaker can strengthen the event's media and stakeholder visibility and generate extensive social discussion. On the other hand, media visibility increases the audience base and supports the attraction of partners and sponsors (Setiawan et. al 2022). Social media sharing, visual documentation and personal stories of the participants build narrative value around the event that the speaker can reinforce.

The impact is not limited to the event itself, but the speaker's performance can create an emotional bond that lasts long after the event. This bond influences re-entry willingness, recommendation, and adoption of the event's values (Erhan & Bangun 2024). In this way, the speaker supports the long-term significance of the event and its social heritage value.

A well-known and relevant speaker can increase ticket sales, improve sponsorship opportunities, and increase the event's media coverage, which in turn enhances the event's revenue potential (Donlan 2010; Gwinner & Eaton 1999).

Key perspectives:

- A well-known speaker increases the event's attractiveness and the number of visitors
- A respected speaker enhances visibility and attracts sponsors
- The speaking fee is an investment, not just an expense item
- The speaker increases the financial return of the event both directly and indirectly.

### 3.7 Technical dimension and the speaker's performance in a digital environment

In a traditional event, the speaker's presence, use of space and bodily expression build a connection with the audience. In a virtual environment, this interaction occurs through technological tools, such as a camera, microphone, lighting and an image produced on the screen (Berridge 2015, 71–72; Getz & Page 2016a, 10–13). Managing these factors directly affects the speaker's credibility and the reception of the message (Bladen & Kennel 2014).

Virtual and hybrid events have significantly changed how events are organised and the operating environment of speakers. The role of a keynote speaker is subject to new expectations related to the technical implementation of presentations, the design of communication, and keeping the audience's attention in the digital environment (Meyer et al. 2021). Technology is not just a means of communication; it forms a structure through which interaction, performance, and participant experience are conveyed (Chodor 2020, 11–21; Sihvonon 2020, 176).

In a virtual space, the speaker is required to adapt. Eye contact with the camera, the rhythm of speech, the clarity of gestures and visual appearance are key factors in effectiveness (Meyer et al. 2021). In addition, the content must be concise, visually explicit and structurally planned so that the participant's concentration is maintained. The success of virtual keynote presentations requires a carefully constructed entity that combines a consistent introduction, a concise factual part and an interactive decision, such as a question section. This tripartite division has proven to work mainly in academic and online events in the publishing industry (Stileman & Nyren 2020).

In a hybrid event circumstance, the keynote speaker is actively required to pay attention to not only the physical audience but also the virtual audience. This requires that technical recording and transmission tools are considered part of planning the performance situation and that communication is designed so that both audiences feel they are active and valuable participants. Technical functionality alone is not enough for an event, as the presentation structure must also be included in practice through participation opportunities and question sections. (Mazza 2024; Meyer et al. 2021)

In virtual events, audience engagement can be supported by interactive solutions such as live polls, chat functions or question platforms. With the help of these tools, the speaker can activate the participants and support the delivery of the message. (Bladen & Kennel 2014) The technical instructions given to the participants, the opportunity for interaction and the subsequent sharing of the content increase the accessibility and long-term impact of the virtual event. For the event to be successful, it is important to build a communal meaning that connects the performer and the audience to a shared area of interest, also in the digital space. (Stileman & Nyren 2020)

Although technical mediation may limit spontaneous interaction, it does not exclude the possibility of a sense of community. Foley, Edwards, and Schlenker (2014) point out that it is also possible to support social interaction in a virtual event if technical solutions, such as chats, question pads or small group activities, are designed to promote participation.

The technical dimension is not limited to the management of technical solutions. Still, it is closely related to the impact of the speaker, the overall structure of the event and the experience of the participants. A keynote speaker must be able to combine the requirements of presentation, communication, and technology so that the experiential expertise can be communicated as clearly and meaningfully as possible, also in a digital environment.

Key perspectives:

- Technology changes performance and requires expertise
- Impact is created through image, sound and interaction
- In a hybrid situation, both audiences must be taken into account
- Technology affects the structure and experience of the performance.

### 3.8 Cultural dimension and the speaker's role in inclusive communication

The presentation of a keynote speaker is not only about sharing information, but also about culturally constructed interaction. The comprehensibility, receptiveness and effectiveness of the message are built on the speaker's ability to recognise and respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the audience and to adapt their communication style to suit the situation. Cultural awareness, language awareness, accessibility and communicative sensitivity form the basis for an equal participant experience. (Aririguzoh 2022)

In particular, the cultural dimension emphasises the speaker's ability to adapt their communication to cultural factors such as values, communication styles, and social expectations. According to Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions, the form and receptiveness of communication can vary greatly depending on, for example, power distance, individualism or tolerance of uncertainty. (De Mooij & Hofstede 2010) The speaker must consider how the message is constructed and presented in an interculturally accessible way, which means, for example, the clarity of the messages, the management of contextuality, and the cultural meanings of non-verbal communication. According to Aririguzohin (2022), such adaptability is part of the core competencies of communication, which promote understanding and participation in multicultural events.

According to Edward T. Hall (1966) a large part of cultural meanings are unconscious and conveyed above all through non-verbal communication, gestures, rhythm and context. Recognising these non-linguistic, but culturally specific elements is essential when the speaker performs for a multinational or multilingual audience. In this case, the speaker's communication can act as a factor that builds a sense of community, through which the participants experience inclusion, meaningfulness and cultural cohesion.

Language awareness, on the other hand, means that the speaker uses clear, contextual and culturally accessible language. According to Aririguzoh (2022) effective communication in a multilingual environment requires consciously adapting word choice, rhythm, and visual expression to the audience's expectations.

Inclusive communication is built not only on technical accessibility but also on the speaker's attitude, which reflects an appreciation for the diversity of the audience. The accessibility of communication and cultural empathy support the construction of a space where the participant can feel that the message is meaningful from their starting point (Heinzman et. al 2023).

A good keynote speaker strives to build a common space where each participant feels that they are the message's recipient, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background. In this case, the speaker not only acts as a distributor of information but also as an interpreter of meanings and a community builder that connects several different cultural realities. Cultural frameworks can affect, for example, what kind of gestures, presentations or narrative structures are considered credible and understandable. In particular, non-verbal forms of communication, such as (use of space, gestures and eye contact), can take different meanings depending on the culture (Miller 2020).

Key perspectives:

- Cultural awareness is about knowing the audience's background and ways of communicating
- Language awareness is the use of clear and accessible language
- Inclusivity is accessibility and appreciation of diversity
- Interpretive sensitivity is the noticing of cultural and non-verbal messages.

### 3.9 Previous research on keynote speakers

The role of keynote speakers in events has only been studied to a limited extent from a systematic and multidisciplinary perspective. Earlier scientific studies have focused primarily on the performer's personal communicative qualities, such as charisma, speaking style and interaction skills. Whitney and Barkin (1978) effects of a performer's charisma and presentation style on the audience's perceived credibility and the effectiveness of the message. In a more recent study, Michalsky, Niebuhr, and Penke (2020) elaborate on this perspective by showing that charismatic speech is associated with the speaker's personality factors and the prosodic characteristics of the voice, which affect communicative receptivity.

Although individual studies highlight the effects of speakers on a personal level, the comprehensive role of the keynote speaker in the event context, as a strategic, experiential, cultural and productive actor, has received little attention in research. For example, Foley, Edwards, and Schlenker (2014) show that a speaker's presentation not only conveys information but can promote the formation of social relationships, a sense of community, and even the future engagement of participants in networks in the field. This suggests that a keynote speaker can have significant social and experiential value at the event.

In practical discussions in the industry, the keynote speaker is often seen as the attraction of the event or the embodiment of the brand. According to professional media, expert blogs, and organisations' websites, the speaker's role is particularly emphasised in inspiring participants and building the event's profile. (Manage Hr Magazine 2025a; Manage Hr Magazine 2025b; Speakers 2023; 2025) These views provide up-to-date information but do not have a theoretically structured framework.

This study responds to an existing research gap by examining the keynote speaker as a holistic phenomenon linked to the shaping of the event experience, the strategic goals of event production, and the communicative and cultural value of the event. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the keynote speaker acts as a connecting factor between the event's content, meaningfulness, and participant experience.

Table 5. Summary of what was known, shortcomings and contributions of this study

What is known	What is missing	Contribution of this study
Keynote speakers have identified strategic, experiential, and communicative tasks at events. (Foley et. al 2014; Getz 2008; Mossberg 2008; Pine & Gilmore 2013)	A unified model that would combine dimensions with the speaker's overall role in the event.	Develops a seven-dimensional analytical framework for examining the keynote speaker from the perspective of event planning, execution and experience.
Audience engagement and event experience are related to the speaker's charisma, presentation style, and presence. (Wood & Kenyon 2018)	The participants' experience has not previously been examined from a phenomenological or interpretive perspective.	It uses the philosophical approaches of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Varto to understand experiential and meaningfulness.
Virtual events have become more common, but their effects on the speaker's interaction and presentation have been scarcely studied. (Chodor 2020; Meyer et. al 2021)	The technological environment and the requirements of the hybrid format for keynote speakers remain fragmented in the previous literature.	Introduces a technical dimension addressing the speaker's digital competence, virtual impact, and strategies for audience engagement.
The cultural and economic significance of the speaker has been discussed in individual studies. (Aririguzoh 2022; Donlan 2010; Gwinner & Eaton 1999; Hall 1966)	There is a lack of a combined examination in which cultural accessibility and the productive value of the speaker are understood as part of event communication and the construction of a value proposition.	To integrate cultural and linguistic awareness, as well as economic value, into the keynote speaker's role as a supporter of the event brand and participant experience.

### 3.10 Theoretical framework

This chapter aims to build a theoretical framework for the research that can be used to examine the keynote speaker in a multidimensional way as part of the event. The study is based on the assumption that a keynote speaker is not just a performer or a program element, but an enabler of the event's experiential, communicative, strategic, and cultural value (Getz 2008; Pine & Gilmore 2013; Varto 1995; Varto 1992). Therefore, the speaker's role must be understood as a whole, as well as the event experience and the impact on the participants.

The keynote speaker has several key tasks at the event, from setting the tone and theme to activating attendees and strategically communicating the event.

These tasks can be structured as follows:

- Set the tone and theme
- Setting the mood
- Inspiration and motivation
- Emphasising sustainable leadership
- Engage attendees
- Effective and clear communication
- Planning and preparation of the performance.

The multidisciplinary research approach combines the theoretical starting points of event management, experience planning, cultural studies, and philosophical and interpretive thinking (Backman & Luoto 2006; Bladen & Kennel 2014; Heidegger et. al 2012; Mazza 2024; Silvers 2009). Combining perspectives makes it possible to examine the event and the keynote speaker on practical action and experiential meaning. The approach also supports the goal of the study to understand the event as a phenomenon that is not just a technical or programmatic entity, but a meaningful moment as part of the participant's experience.

When outlining the multidimensional nature of the event, it is essential to combine perspectives offered by different disciplines. Since no established model in the literature combines experiential, productional, philosophical and cultural examination, this study has formed a theoretical synthesis based on several sources, developed by the author.

The framework developed in the study forms the theoretical basis of the research and at the same time serves as an analytical structure for the interpretation of the interview data. The developed structure supports understanding the keynote speaker's role in the event's

overall experience. The diagram template visualises what the role of a keynote speaker can entail and what kind of dimensions it has.

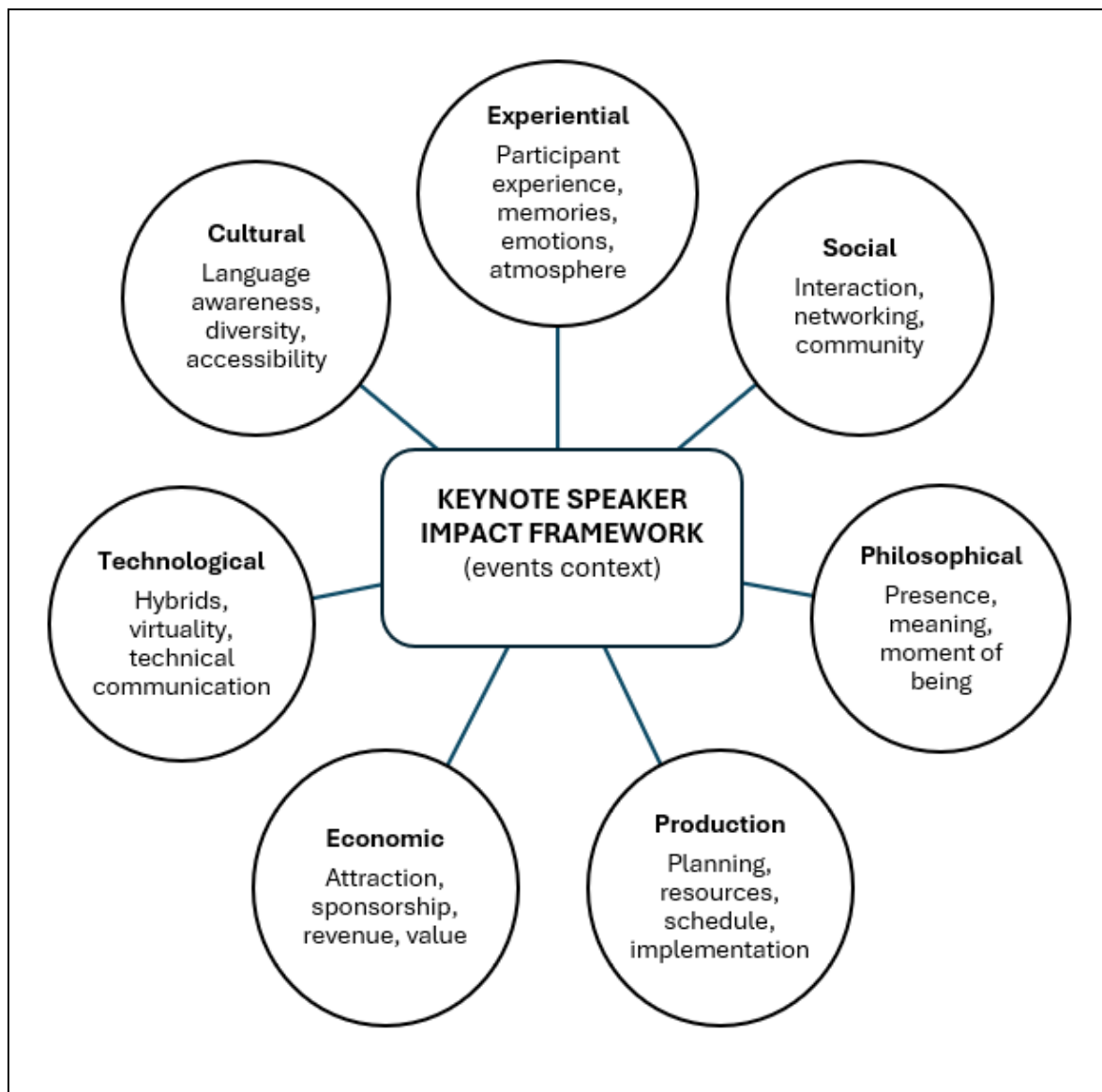


Figure 2. Keynote speaker's frame of influence at the event, author's own adaptation, based on sources (Estien et. al 2021; Getz 2008; Kotler & Keller 2016; Mazza 2024; Pine & Gilmore 2013)

## 4 Research methods and implementation

This chapter describes the methodological implementation of the study. The research approach, data collection method, interview themes, analysis method, and the connection between the research questions and the theoretical framework are introduced. In addition, the research's reliability and ethics and the researcher's role as part of the research process are examined.

The chapter aims to give the reader a clear overall picture of how the study has been planned and carried out, what kind of choices have been made during the research process and on what grounds. The methodological solutions are based on a qualitative approach applicable to this study's goal to understand the role of keynote speakers in the event context in a deep and multifaceted way.

### 4.1 Qualitative research approach

This study utilises a qualitative research approach, which is particularly appropriate when the goal is to understand complex phenomena deeply and examine them in their context (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2019). Qualitative research aims to describe and interpret phenomena in their natural environment instead of looking for quantitative causal relationships. This research approach is characterised in particular by its phenomenon-based approach, the appreciation of subjectivity, and the ability to accept ambiguity and contextualisation as part of the research as a whole (Juhila 2021).

The qualitative approach is well-suited to this study's subject, which examines keynote speakers' roles in the Finnish event industry. Particular attention will be paid to how the speakers' communication style, cultural background and presentation affect the participant experience and the strategic success of the event.

### 4.2 Data-driven perspective

The study is based on a data-driven approach, in which the phenomenon is approached without ready-made hypotheses. The aim is to understand the phenomenon under study through open research questions, enabling new perspectives to emerge as the data collection and analysis progress (Eskola 2019, 18–19). Such an approach supports the study's attempt to question the usual and self-evident assumptions associated with the phenomenon under study, such as the role of speakers. (Vuori 2021)

### 4.3 Research method: semi-structured interview

The research method chosen is a semi-structured interview, which makes it possible to bring up the experiences and meanings of the research subjects without a strict question framework. The thematic interview combines pre-defined topics and the subject's narrative, supporting a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, pp. 43–45). The interview themes are built on research questions and previous literature and guide data collection in a way that enables the impact of keynote speakers to be examined from a strategic, experiential and cultural perspective.

### 4.4 Analysis of the data: content analysis and theming

The interview material is analysed with the help of content analysis and theming. Both deductive and inductive approaches are used in the analysis, which means that the researcher both relies on previous theory and gives room for new perspectives that emerge from the data. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, pp. 96–100) Deductive analysis starts from existing concepts, such as branding, participant experience or cultural communication. Inductive examination, on the other hand, enables the emergence of themes that have not been pre-defined in theory, for example, the impact of the speaker's personality on the audience's experience.

In accordance with the nature of qualitative analysis, the study accepts the multi-level and ambiguous nature of phenomena, and no attempt is made to reduce the interpretation to simplistic conclusions. Analysis is seen as a process of knowledge formation, in which the researcher's reflective role is central. They are aware of their preconceptions and their impact on interpretation. (Juhila 2021)

### 4.5 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the study and the research questions interact closely with each other. The questions are derived from existing literature and research data and serve as data analysis guidelines. This way, the research is built into a theoretically grounded and data-driven open entity, increasing its scientific credibility and practical relevance (Juhila 2021).

#### 4.6 Semi-structured interview method

This study uses a semi-structured (thematic) interview method, one of the key data collection methods in qualitative research. The process is particularly suitable for situations where the goal is to understand the phenomenon being studied from the participants' point of view, through their experiences and meanings they assign to them (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2019). The study's topic, the keynote speaker's role in the event context, is multifaceted, partly abstract and linked to experiential and communicative dimensions that cannot be exhaustively mapped with the help of structured surveys (Tohmola & Kääriäinen 2022).

A semi-structured interview is in the middle ground between an open and a fully structured interview. It uses pre-planned themes but does not precisely define the order in which the questions are presented or the wording. This allows the researcher to adapt the interview situation to each interviewee and deepen the discussion. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2019) This flexibility makes the method particularly suitable for studies that aim to capture meanings, phenomena and interpretations in their natural context.

The interview framework has been built on the study's theoretical framework and the research questions. The themes cover the keynote speaker's impact on the event's strategic success, the experiential dimension, communication, the specifics of virtual events, and cultural and linguistic issues. Another advantage of a thematic interview is that it allows new, unpredictable observations to appear in the interview situation.

The interviews were conducted individually, and Finnish professionals in the event industry participated. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The use of the interview method made it possible to document contextual and subjective experiences, which is essential in the interpretive approach of this study (Juhila 2021).

#### 4.7 Interview themes and theoretical basis

The interview themes of this study were derived from earlier literature, theoretical frameworks, and the practical context of the Finnish event industry. The themes form the core of the semi-structured interview framework of the study and serve as both the background structure of the questions and the category basis for the analysis. This approach is based on theory-bound or abductive logic, which combines theoretical understanding and empirical data in a dynamic dialogue (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017, 98–99).

The process of creating themes proceeded in stages. At first, the key concepts were identified based on the research problem and questions. The primary theoretical sources are Getz's (2008) event typologies and the strategic framework of event management, in which events' experiential, symbolic and economic dimensions are emphasised. In addition, Mossberg's (2007) perspectives on experience marketing, Hall's (1966) and Aririguzoh (2022) views on cultural communication, and Foley's, Edwards and Schlenker (2014) research on the social meanings of events and the role of speakers in building a sense of community were utilised. Based on these, five main themes were formed:

**Speaker selection and strategic suitability:**

- How does the speaker's choice support the event's goals, theme and audience?

**Speaker's brand and event identity:**

- In what ways does the speaker's personality and recognition build the brand value of the event?

**Participant experience and mood building:**

- How does a keynote speaker affect the audience's emotional engagement and the event's atmosphere?

**Virtual platform and message transmission:**

- How does virtuality change the reception of the speaker's message and audience participation?

**Cultural and linguistic appropriateness:**

- How do the speaker's background, language and cultural context affect the comprehensibility and acceptability of the message?

The choice of themes reflects the researcher's interpretive approach. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008, 66–67) and Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka (2006) emphasise, in thematic interviews, the researcher's presuppositions and theoretical understanding inevitably affect the construction of the interview framework. For this reason, transparency in the selection of themes is central to the reliability of qualitative research. The themes chosen in this study reflect not only the study's goals but also the attempt to understand the role of the keynote speaker as a multidimensional phenomenon in which experiential and strategic perspectives are intertwined. These dimensions are structured in more detail in the study's theoretical framework (see chapter 3.10).

## 4.8 Method of analysis of the data

This study used qualitative content analysis, particularly suitable for studying ambiguous and context-specific phenomena. The method enabled a systematic approach to the material of semi-structured interviews and helped structure keynote speakers' roles in events (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Tohmola & Kääriäinen 2022, 215). The analysis combined a data-driven (inductive) and theory-based (deductive) approach, also known as abductive analysis. This made it possible to utilise the framework based on previous research as well as to take into account the new meanings that emerged from the data. (Tohmola & Kääriäinen 2022, 215–216; Vehkalahti 2019)

The research material consisted of interviews with event industry experts and participants, which examined the effects of keynote speakers on creating an atmosphere, participant experience, event brand, communications and virtual implementations, among other things. The analysis of the data proceeded in four stages:

### 1. Preparation and transcription of the material

The interviews were transcribed and anonymised for analysis. The material was studied by reading all the interviews several times to form an overall picture of the content and meaningful expressions (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006).

### 2. Coding and simplifying meaningful expressions

Expressions corresponding to the research questions were extracted from the material, which were simplified and coded while preserving the original meaning. The coding was based on theoretical concepts and observations from the data (Tohmola & Kääriäinen 2022, 219–220).

### 3. Thematic grouping and classification

The codes were grouped into themes and categories according to the research questions. The themes were based on the content of the material and the research questions. Different categories were formed in the grouping, which helped to perceive the key meanings of the data (Tohmola & Kääriäinen 2022, 220–221; Vehkalahti 2019).

### 4. Interpretation and contextualisation

The themes were examined using the study's theoretical framework, previous literature, and research questions. The interpretation emphasised the researcher's reflective reflection. The significance of the speakers' choices and presentations in different event environments

and how they affected the participants' experiences was analysed. This phase deepened the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006).

As a result of the analysis, an overall picture was formed of the significance of keynote speakers as factors affecting the event experience. The results showed that the speaker's role is not limited to just performing, but is centrally related to the participant experience, mood building, communication and the event's brand in different event environments. The analysis was not just a technical phase; it included continuous interpretation and reasoning that combined data, theory, and the researcher's thinking.

#### 4.9 The connection between research questions and the theoretical framework

The research questions are based on previous theoretical discussion about the role of keynote speakers in the event industry, especially from the perspectives of participant experience, communication, cultural fit, and the event's goals. The study aims to understand how keynote speakers affect the event's success and how the effects are reflected in the planning and implementation. The formulation of the questions is based on sources that deal with the significance of events (Getz 2008) the impact of speakers on the participants' experience (Foley et. al 2014) and cultural sensitivity and contextual communication (Aririguzoh 2022; Hall 1966). These form the basis for both data collection and analysis and theoretical examination.

The framework of the study is built on seven complementary perspectives:

1. The philosophical perspective examines the significance of the speaker as a builder of the essence and experiential nature of the event
2. The experiential perspective focuses on the mood and experiential nature of the participant
3. The strategic perspective emphasises the speaker's position as a supporter of the event's goals and attractiveness
4. The production perspective is related to the speaker's role in the planning and implementation of the event
5. The communicative perspective emphasises the way of presenting and interacting with the audience
6. The cultural perspective examines the speaker's suitability for the audience's cultural background and language choices

7. The financial and technical aspects consider the proposal's costs and technical implementation.

These perspectives are not separate from each other, but they are intertwined through research questions and interview themes. This also reflects the methodological logic of the study: the questions have been derived from the existing theoretical framework, but they continue to take shape as the data collection progresses. This approach can be described as abductive, in which theory and empirical data engage in a continuous dialogue. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017)

The main themes of the study are:

- Speaker selection and strategic suitability
- The speaker's impact on the identity of the event
- Participant experience and mood building
- The impact of the virtual platform on the speaker's message
- Cultural and linguistic appropriateness.

The questions are mainly about how and why, typical of qualitative research. This kind of questioning supports an ambiguous examination of the phenomenon in its operating environment, and does not aim at an unambiguous explanation of causal relationships (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006, 13).

#### 4.10 Reliability and ethics of research

The reliability of qualitative research is understood through the transparency of the research process, the credibility of interpretations, and the researcher's ability to be reflective. This study considered reliability throughout the research process, from the research topic and its boundaries to data analysis and reporting.

The responsible conduct of research and research guidelines of LAB University of Applied Sciences has conducted the study. Since the research did not focus on LAB's personnel or activities, it did not require a separate research permit. Triangulation was carried out by combining literature, the researcher's practical expertise and semi-structured thematic interviews from the event industry, by examining the phenomenon from a strategic, experiential and cultural perspective, which increases the credibility of interpretations (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017).

This study was carried out reflectively, and the researcher critically considered their actions and decisions. The researcher has consciously examined their expertise and its impact on the research design. Reflectivity supports openness in interview situations and enables the

interpretation of the material, without pre-set assumptions (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006).

The ethics of the study were based on respect for the participants and careful implementation of data protection. Consent was collected from all participants and they were informed of the study's objectives, implementation, data processing and anonymity in advance. The data was stored in protected systems and used only for this research. The study complied with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The interviewees were offered the opportunity to check their statements. Participant validation strengthens the correctness of the interpretations and ensures that the meanings constructed by the researcher correspond to the interviewees' perceptions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008) As Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka (2006) state, the results of qualitative research are always tied to time, place and the researcher's perspectives. Therefore, they should never be seen as generalisable truths, but as contextual interpretations.

## 5 Practical research implementation

This chapter describes the practical implementation of the study: the planning and implementation of the interviews, the transcription process, and the technical preparation of the analysis phase.

This stage is an essential part of qualitative research, as it ensures that the data is collected ethically, systematically and in a way that is appropriate for analysis (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). At this stage, no interpretations or conclusions are presented. Instead, the focus is only on a transparent description of the practical implementation of the data collection and analysis, which creates a basis for later substantive analysis.

The study's material consisted of thematic interviews. The participants were selected based on purposive sampling, which aimed to include people in different professional roles, e.g., event producers, event planners and event visitors. The aim was to reach a diverse perspective on the role of keynote speakers in events. The people were selected based on different professions, as the research topic required views based on experience and expertise. The sampling aimed to ensure that the new interviews would no longer produce substantially new information (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017, 90).

The interviews were conducted in spring 2025, mainly remotely (Teams), partly face-to-face, and lasted an average of 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded and later extracted for analysis. The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach, in which all participants were asked the same questions, but the course of the interview was flexible, allowing for individual emphases and freer discussion (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 43–45; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006).

The interviews were transcribed, and the principles of anonymisation were followed: the names of the interviewees and identifiable information were removed or encoded. Each interview was given a code ID, such as H1, H2, H3, so it would be possible to refer to the data in the analysis without being identifiable. The transcription was done programmatically and facilitated by various technical solutions (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006).

The analysis of the interview data was structured into five main themes, which were derived from the research questions and the previously presented seven-dimensional theoretical framework (see Chapter 3). The framework combines philosophical, experiential, production, communicative and cultural perspectives that form the basis of the research analysis. The theoretical model guided the selection of interview themes and the structure of the analysis.

The main themes are based on previous literature and empirical and theoretical discussion about the event industry and the role of keynote speakers. The main themes prepared based on these guided the design of the interview framework and served as the starting point for the structuring of the analysis.

The transcribed interview material was transferred to a word processor and Excel for analysis. In the study's first phase, preliminary coding was carried out, utilising both data-driven (inductive) and theory-based (deductive) approaches. This makes it possible to examine the literature's themes and the material's emergence in parallel (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017, 15).

## 6 Findings and thematic analysis

This chapter presents the key findings of the study through five main themes. The aim is to highlight not only the experiences and views of the participants, but also to form connections with previous theory and the conceptual framework of the research. The analysis systematically combines generalisations, participant citations and interpretations, which supports the reliability of the study and the ambiguous understanding of the findings.

The material has been examined on three levels:

- Generalisations describe phenomena at the level of the entire dataset
- Quotes illustrate direct excerpts from interviews
- The interpretations link the findings to the literature and the theoretical framework.

The analysis was conducted as a content analysis combining data-based and theory-based features. The coding was done in Excel by theme and based on type features (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Sarajärvi & Tuomi 2017).

### 6.1 Speaker selection and strategic suitability

**Generalisation:** At the level of the entire material, the choice of speaker was seen as a strategic decision that directly affects the achievement of the event's goals, brand building and audience expectations. The choice was not random, but a planned part of the overall concept of the event.

**Context:** In the field of events, the role of a keynote speaker is often equated with the position of a brand ambassador: they not only bring content to the event, but also represent its values, theme and image. In addition to the suitability of the content in the selection process, the speaker's profile about the event's target audience was emphasised.

*Quote1: "The speaker is chosen according to the message you want to send...it is never just a name". (H1)*

*Comparative quote 2: "Sometimes the speaker's name can attract people, but if the content does not meet the audience's expectations, it will turn against itself". (H3)*

**Interpretation:** This observation supports Getz's (2008) view of strategic planning of events, in which program content, including speakers, forms a key part of engaging the target group. The choice of speaker can be seen as a point in decision-making where content strategy, marketing, and the participant experience are intertwined.

## 6.2 Participant experience and mood building

Generalisation: The keynote speaker has a key impact on the emotional atmosphere of the event and the attendees' experience of meaningfulness. The speaker's presentation can trigger the experience, combining the content and emotional dimensions.

Contextualisation: The participant experience is built on several components, but the keynote speaker has a unique position in how the meaning of the event is conveyed. A well-chosen speaker can create subjective experiences that remain in the participants' minds and shape the event's memory. This is especially important in events where the speaker's message and way of performing coincide with the audience's expectation horizon. Such a moment often serves as a memory trace of the entire event.

*Quote 1: "A good speaker is memorable. It can be the moment for which the whole event is remembered". (H1)*

*Comparative quote 2: "If the speaker doesn't succeed, the whole atmosphere can be flattened... [like a balloon deflates]". (H2)*

Interpretation: A speaker's impact is not only created by the content, but their ability to connect with the audience is crucial. This connection is often built on emotional, narrative and experiential factors. Pine & Gilmore (2013) describe the memorability of an event experience as being based on the experiential nature that arises through emotions and meanings. On the other hand, Berridge (2015, 61–63) emphasises the speaker's role in building emotional memory traces through which the event can be experienced as meaningful and individual.

## 6.3 The impact of the virtual platform on the speaker's message

Generalisation: In virtual events, the effect of the speaker's message often depends on the technical environment, presentation readiness and the interaction enabled by the platform. The speech may remain distant and ineffective without sufficient technical and visual presentation skills.

Contextualisation: Virtual communication requires different preparation and presentation techniques than operating in a physical space. Lack of eye contact, limited reactions of participants, and possible technical disruptions can weaken the speaker's effectiveness. At the same time, technology enables new forms of presentation, such as visual representations and interactive elements, which can strengthen the delivery of the message.

*Quote 1: "A successful virtual speaker is a rarity". (H3)*

*Comparative quote 2: "If the connection is choppy or the sound doesn't work... then the content also loses its meaning". (H2)*

Interpretation: The impact of virtual events is based on technical performance and how the speaker's message evokes emotions, interaction, and experiential presence in the participants. Mazza (2024, 40) emphasises that the event experience is built on a combination of cognitive, emotional, and sensory factors shaped by physical or virtual interactions in social and cultural contexts. Even if the visual appeal of the event is low, the experience can still be meaningful if it allows for symbol-sharing, discussion, and emotional participation.

#### 6.4 Cultural and linguistic appropriateness

Generalisation: The speaker's cultural background, language choices, and knowledge of the context significantly impact how accessible and meaningful the audience perceives the presentation. Communication can fail if cultural nuances or linguistic expression do not meet the audience's expectations and language skills.

Contextualisation: Events where the audience consists of international or multilingual participants place special demands on the speaker regarding cultural sensitivity and clear communication. Plain language and the cultural context of the performance can support or weaken the delivery of the message. Therefore, cultural and linguistic fit is key to the event's inclusivity and the participant experience's success.

*Quote 1: "Language can exclude if the speaker does not understand the [Finnish] audience or uses [English] that is too difficult". (H3)*

*Comparative quote 2: "When the speaker can take into account the culture of the audience and communicate in a way that suits it... Then we are in the same space, even though we are online". (H4)*

Interpretation: Cultural and linguistic appropriateness is not just a technical or linguistic issue, but an essential part of a message's emotional and social reception. Hall's (1966) high- and low-context communication theory helps to understand why cultural background differences affect the message's interpretation. According to Aririguzoh (2022), cultural communication requires the speaker to have the competence to adapt to the recipient's way of communicating so that the participants feel that they have been noticed and appreciated.

## 6.5 Summary of analysis

The study analysis showed that the role of keynote speakers in events is strategically significant and multi-level as a phenomenon. The speaker's profile, presentation, and ability to adapt to the target audience's expectations greatly influence how participants interpret the content of the message and its emotional side. The themes of experiential and atmospheric construction emphasised this view. Therefore, the keynote speaker plays a significant role in shaping the attendee experience and can ensure that the event will be memorable or cause an emotional response.

When implementing online events, the technical environment and how it is implemented are essential in conveying the message; a good implementation enables the engagement of the audience and simultaneously conveys the event's message. The visuals and technical support cannot be ignored as they can dilute the event's impact.

A culturally and linguistically appropriate message emerged, and linguistic features describe the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Cultural contexts, explicit language, and understanding of the context affect the accessibility of the message's recipient and the formation of the participants' experiences and, thus, the overall value of the event.

In conclusion, a keynote speaker is more than just a content speaker or a communicator of information. The speaker represents the interpreter of the event's meanings and a bridge that connects the event's strategic goals, audience expectations, and experiential core. The overall feeling of an event can be formed through the experience caused by the keynote speaker.

## 7 Conclusions and development suggestions

This chapter presents the study's conclusions and answers the research questions based on the analysis and theoretical framework. In addition, the key findings are described, development proposals for event industry professionals are presented, and the limitations of the research, the researcher's reflection and further research opportunities are examined. The structure of the chapter is consistent with the objectives and question formulation of the study (Chapters 1–2).

The development suggestions and the presented planning tool provide event organisers with a practical and systematic way to evaluate the use of keynote speakers at events. The speaker is not just a content producer, but a comprehensive influencer whose choice is reflected in the event's goals, participant experience, and communication's impact. The tool can be part of production planning, speaker contracts, briefings and quality management.

### 7.1 Answers to research questions

The main question of this study was: How can a keynote speaker be used to support an event's strategic and experiential success? The answer was approached with the help of a multidimensional theoretical framework and qualitative analysis, in which the keynote speaker was seen as a productive actor, an experiential enabler, and a mediator of the event's significance.

Based on the study, a keynote speaker affects the success of an event, especially when their role is planned strategically and in line with the goals of the event and the expectations of the audience. The speaker not only acts as a content producer, but their significance extends to the event's spatial, communicative, cultural and technical implementation. The speaker's impact is built on their communication style, situational awareness and ability to produce an experiential or meaningful moment in the participant, either physically present or through technology in a virtual environment.

The first sub-question dealt with the production and experiential dimensions of the keynote speaker. According to the results, the speaker's choice influences the event's production process at an early stage, and their presentation can act as an enabler of experiential intensity. This supports the idea of an event as a meaningful moment (Heidegger et. al 2012; Varto 1992) in which the speaker's presence is part of the participant's emotional and cognitive experience (Pine & Gilmore 2013).

The second sub-question concerned the differences between physical and virtual events. The results confirm that in virtual events, the speaker's impact is based more on technical and communication solutions, such as the skill of looking at the camera, pacing and digital interaction. In physical events, the emphasis is on non-verbal messages and the use of space. This shows the impact of the technological dimension on the participant's experience. (Silvers 2009)

The third sub-question examined cultural and linguistic suitability. According to the study, the speaker's ability to consider the audience's diversity in language choices, examples and communication style supports the participants' accessibility and experiential commitment to the event. Cultural literacy proved essential, especially in international contexts. (Aririguzoh 2022; Hall 1966)

In conclusion, using a keynote speaker in an event's strategic and experiential development requires multi-level planning. Speaker selection, preparation, and communication are built in interaction with the event's goals, technological context, and audience expectations. A keynote speaker can act as an enabler of the event's significance, especially when their presentation resonates with the participants' personal values and experiential expectations.

## 7.2 Development suggestions for event organisers

The analysis of the study shows that the impact of a keynote speaker does not consist of a single presentation, but of a comprehensively planned participation in the event. The following development proposals are based on the study's empirical observations and theoretical framework. They provide event organisers and production teams with tools to use speakers appropriately in planning and implementing events.

**Strategic alignment:** The choice of speaker is part of the strategic planning of the event. The objectives of the event influence the choice, the profile of the target audience and the communicative context (Getz 2008) The speaker is not a separate program element, but part of the content and meaning structure of the event.

**Supporting interaction:** The speaker's ability to build an interactive and participant-oriented presentation should be considered at the selection stage. Communication style, situational awareness, and eliciting emotional commitment are key factors (Pine & Gilmore 2013). Pre-rehearsals can support the speaker's presentation readiness.

**Preparation for virtual implementation:** In a digital event environment, the speaker must have technical presentation skills and the ability to build an experience of presence without

physical contact (Clark & Sousa 2018) Organisers should support this competence with training and instructions.

Cultural and linguistic considerations: In international or multilingual events, the speaker's artistic sensitivity and linguistic clarity support accessibility and comprehensibility of the message (Aririguzoh 2022; Hall 1966) Briefing materials should include information about the audience's background and expectations.

Coordination of preparation: The speaker's preparation can be supported by sharing information about the event's objectives, audience, and programmatic context (Mazza 2024) This enables appropriate presentation in terms of content and communication.

Ex-post evaluation and feedback: To support development, a systematic evaluation process should be created that combines participant feedback, the speaker's self-assessment and the observations of the production team. This promotes continuous quality management and learning for future events.

### 7.3 Recommendation-based design tool

Based on this study, a seven-dimensional checklist has been created to support the selection and planning of keynote speakers in the event context. The tool aims to structure the key perspectives related to the speaker's impact from a strategic, experiential, cultural and technological perspective. The tool is based on the empirical observations of the study (Chapter 5), the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) and design-based research thinking, in which research data is converted into an applicable form (Anderson & Shattuck 2012; Eskola 2019).

The tool provides event organisers with a structured way to assess the suitability of a keynote speaker as part of an event. Each dimension corresponds to one of the impact areas identified in the study and includes three parts: what is being evaluated, why it is essential, and what measures are recommended.

<b>Strategic view</b>
Does the speaker support the goals and overall context of the event? -Align the speaker profile with the event strategy and attendee expectations
<b>Credibility of content</b>
Does the speaker have expertise and credibility in the subject area? -Choose speakers with topical authority and communicative clarity
<b>Experiential impact</b>
Does the speaker have the ability to evoke emotions and create a memory imprint? -Evaluate presentation style, storytelling, and feedback from previous appearances
<b>Virtual presentation ability</b>
Is the speaker proficient in digital presentation? -Provide technical support for virtual situations
<b>Cultural and linguistic appropriateness</b>
Is the speaker culturally and sensitively appropriate? -Brief the speaker's background and communication style
<b>Preparation support</b>
Is there enough information about the event and the audience? -Provide structured briefing and co-design capability

Figure 3. Development tool, keynote speaker planning checklist for event organisers

The checklist can support speakers' systematic selection and preparation, increase impact and respond to the event's communicative, participatory and technological goals. The tool is suitable for both physical and virtual or hybrid environments.

#### 7.4 Researcher's reflection

This study's implementation allowed the researcher to examine the role of the keynote speaker in the event industry in a multidimensional and phenomenon-based way. The process required continuous critical examination regarding the research design, themes and analysis methods. It is like qualitative research where the role of the researcher is not seen as a passive observer, but as an active interpreter who influences the construction of knowledge through their choices and interpretations.

The researcher's previous experience in event production influenced the formation of the research questions and the kinds of phenomena that emerged during the analysis. The aim was to manage this attachment using a reflective approach. A continuous dialogue between the data and the theory was applied to develop the interview framework and analysis categories. The key methodological goals were transparency and authentic presentation of

the participants' perspectives, which were supported by anonymisation and analysis using direct interview quotes.

### 7.5 Limitations of the study

Although the study produces new and diverse information on the role of the keynote speaker in the Finnish event context, it also involves several limitations that should be identified when assessing the generalizability and applicability of the research. Firstly, the sample size of the data was limited and consisted of targeted Finnish actors and participants. Thus, the results are context-specific and cannot be directly generalised to other events, cultures or international event environments.

Secondly, the perspective of the study focused primarily on the participants' experiences, leaving the speakers' expertise secondary and open to interpretation. Although the study produced valuable observations on the relevance of the speaker, the participants' experiences were not explicitly examined through empirical data. This limitation narrows the understanding of how the speakers experience their roles, preparations and audience interactions.

Thirdly, the rapid development of virtual events and technological change makes the topic dynamic. The perspectives discussed in this study reflect a specific temporal context, and the results cannot be automatically applied to all technical solutions or future formats.

Fourthly, the study emphasised a phenomenon-based and interpretative approach, which means that the data analysis was based on the researcher's understanding and theoretical interpretations. The aim was to balance the interpretative nature with theoretical structuring and a transparent analysis process.

### 7.6 Proposals for further research

The study's results open up several paths of interest for further research, which can deepen the understanding of the significance of the keynote speaker in the event context and broaden the perspective towards the participants, speakers and different cultural environments.

Participant-oriented perspective: In the future, it would be essential to examine the significance of the keynote speaker directly through the experiences of the event participants. Empirical research could shed light on how the speaker's performance affects the participants' emotional experiences, commitment and the memory of the event.

Speakers' self-assessment and reflection: A study in which keynote speakers evaluate their roles and experiences at events would provide valuable information about the speakers' preparation, goals, and interaction with the audience.

Cross-cultural comparison: An international comparative study would help to understand how the role of the keynote speaker is constructed in different cultural, communicative and event types. This perspective could bring added value to the planning of multicultural events.

Speaker-brand-audience dynamics: A separate study could examine how the choice of speaker affects the construction of the event brand, audience expectations, and stakeholder relations.

Presentation modes in virtual environments: In the context of digital and hybrid events, it is necessary to explore new forms of presentation, such as visuality, participatory means and the possibilities of technology to strengthen the speaker effect.

## 7.7 Concluding remarks

This study has produced a new understanding of the role of the keynote speaker in the strategic and experiential entirety of events. The study concludes that a keynote speaker is not just a content producer or program number, but a multi-level influencer whose choices and presentations can significantly shape the event's relevance, brand value, and participant experience.

The theoretical framework and empirical observations support the view that the speaker's role is linked to production, communication, cultural and technological dimensions. Thus, the speaker is not a separate element in the event programme, but a key actor whose impact extends from the event's planning to its experiential outcome.

The seven-syllable theoretical framework developed in the study proved to be a functional tool for systematically structuring the speaker's role. The framework made it possible to examine the speaker's tasks from several perspectives, strategic, production, emotional and contextual. In addition, the planning tool created in the study concretises these observations and provides event organisers with a practical tool to support speaker selection and preparation.

The role of keynote speakers is emphasised in the current event environment, where hybrid formats and participant-oriented planning play a key role. This study has achieved its goal of deepening the understanding of the strategic and experiential significance of the speaker and providing practical tools to support the planning and development of events. At the

same time, it forms the basis for further research, which can combine the perspectives of event communication, experience planning and strategic management.

The speaker's impact is built above all on experiential design solutions and the quality of interaction. Factors that support event planning, where the participant's experience, content and goals are balanced.

From the perspective of working life orientation, the study offers concrete tools for using event producers, programme planners and educational organisations. The developed tools support the appropriate use of speakers in the strategic construction and impact of events. In this way, the study responds to the need of the practical field to identify and manage the multidimensional role of speakers more consciously than before.

In further development, it would be helpful to deepen the research into analysing the participants' experiences, the speakers' perspective on preparation and role, and to compare the results with international and multicultural event environments. At the same time, it could be assessed how the developed planning tool works in different practical contexts and how it could be integrated into professional practices or training content in the event industry.

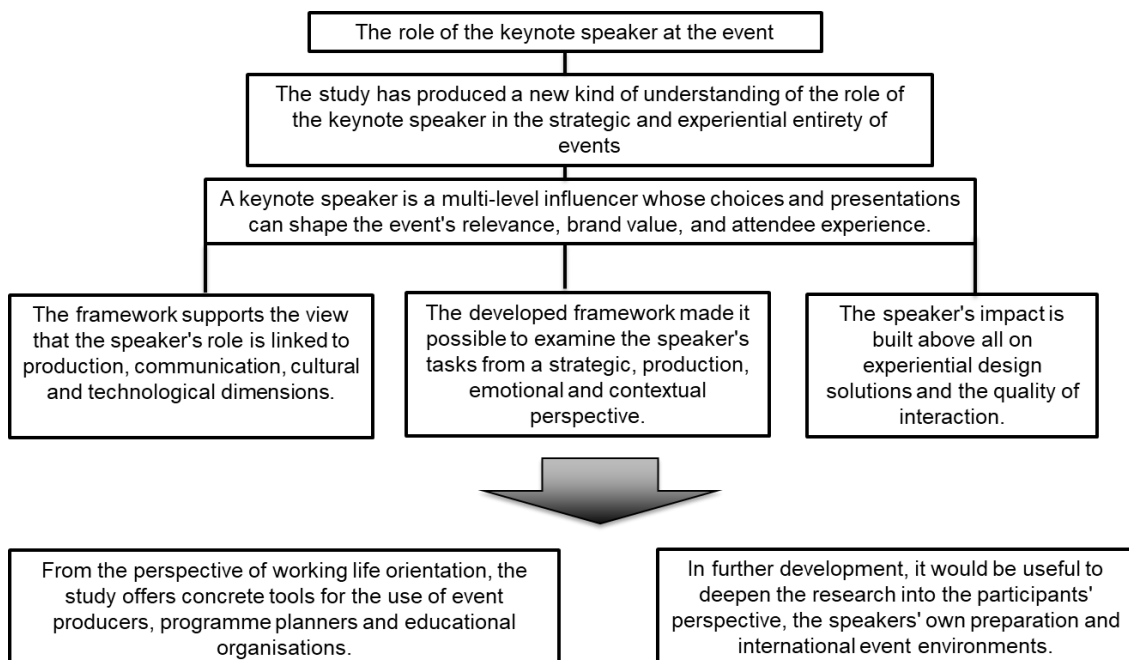


Figure 4. The keynote speaker role at the event

## 8 Summary

### 8.1 Background and purpose of the study

This study examines the role of the keynote speaker in the Finnish event context as a strategic and experiential influencer. The study's starting point was the need to deepen the understanding of the speaker's impact on the significance of the event, especially from the perspective of how the speaker can support the event's success through the participant's experience. The topic is topical, as previous research has mainly dealt with speakers as content producers, not as part of a larger experiential and productive entity. The goal was to produce new information on how keynote speakers can be harnessed as part of event planning that takes into account both strategic goals and experiential impact.

### 8.2 Methods

The study was carried out as a qualitative case study using an interpretive approach. The material was collected through semi-structured thematic interviews aimed at event industry professionals, especially people with experience in event planning. The data analysis was carried out using deductive inductive content analysis, in which the theoretical framework guided the formation of the analysis themes. The study focused on experiential, philosophical, cultural and technological dimensions, through which the speaker's role was assessed in a multidimensional way.

### 8.3 Key findings

The study showed that the choice of keynote speaker is a strategic decision that directly affects the event's identity and the target audience's engagement. The relationship between the speaker and the participant experience is emotionally charged: the speaker's way of communicating, their situational awareness and ability to evoke emotions shape the event's atmosphere and leave a lasting memory imprint. The experience is built individually in the participant's internal meaning-making process, but the speaker can act as an enabler or catalyst for this process.

In virtual events, the speaker's impact is created in different ways than in a physical space. The participant often lacks the opportunity to experience sharing space, the presence of others and the emotional impressions associated with it. The digital environment requires a special ability from the speaker to evoke emotions and create a connection through technology. This changes the rhythm and emotional depth of the experience.

In addition, the study highlighted the central importance of cultural and situational compatibility in the speaker's experiential impact. The speaker's language skills, clarity of expression and ability to understand the audience's cultural background support the accessibility and meaningfulness of the experience.

#### 8.4 Applicability and significance

The results of the study can be used in the selection processes of keynote speakers, in the program planning of events and in the development of production teams. The developed checklists and analysis models provide concrete tools to support speakers' selection, preparation and evaluation. In addition, the study opens up opportunities for further research, such as examining the participant experience, self-assessment of speakers, and special questions of multicultural events.

#### 8.5 Reflection and the limits of work

The implementation of the study provided an opportunity to combine a theoretical approach with practical knowledge of the event industry. The researcher's previous experience influenced the formation of research interests and interpretations, so the research process emphasised a reflective approach and analytical transparency.

The study's limitations are related to the material's targeting of Finnish event contexts and the participant perspective. The results cannot be directly generalised to other cultural environments or to the speakers' perspectives, which remained secondary in the study. Despite this, the study produces valuable and applicable information about the role of the keynote speaker in event planning. It highlights key factors that can be used to develop the impact of the event in the future.

Based on the results, the speaker's impact is primarily built on experiential design solutions and the quality of interaction. These are factors that support participant-oriented, purposeful and balanced event planning.

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## Appendix 1. Interview outline

Interview invitation: The role of the keynote speaker in the event industry

Dear,

As part of my thesis, I studied the role and impact of the keynote speaker in the event industry. My research focuses on how keynote speakers affect the event's attractiveness, brand and participant experience, and the criteria on which speakers are selected.

I am looking for professionals and participants who have been involved in events where there has been a keynote speaker. The interview aims to understand the keynote speaker's importance to the event's success and their impact on the audience.

The interview will be conducted (remotely / face-to-face) and will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview is recorded, and the recordings are extracted into text format for analysis. All interviews are handled confidentially and using good research practices, and individual respondents cannot be identified from the research report. The collected data will be used in the thesis.

If you are interested in participating, we can arrange an interview time that suits you best.

Thank you in advance for your time and valuable contribution to the research!

Regards

## Appendix 2. Consent form

The purpose is to discuss the topics informally and deepen them according to the interviewee's point of view. Below are the themes and example questions.

### 1. Background information and experience

- Tell us a little about yourself and your role in the events.
- What kind of events have you been involved in organising or participating in?
- What kind of keynote speakers have you encountered in your work?

### 2. The role and influence of the keynote speaker at events

- How do you see the role of the keynote speaker at the event?
- How does a good keynote speaker affect the event as a whole and the audience experience?
- Do you remember an event where the keynote speaker significantly impacted the attendees' experience?

### 3. Inspiration and motivation

- In what ways can a keynote speaker inspire and motivate the audience?
- Do you have an example of a speaker whose message has particularly stuck in your mind?

### 4. Branding and Marketing

- How can a keynote speaker affect the event's appeal and brand?
- Have you used a keynote speaker as part of marketing? If yes, how?

### 5. Keynote Speaker Selection Criteria

- What factors do you consider important in choosing a keynote speaker?
- How vital is the speaker's reputation and previous experience in the selection process?
- How do you assess a speaker's presentation and communication skills?

### 6. Psychological influence and involvement

- How can a keynote speaker influence the mood or behaviour of attendees during an event?
- Have you noticed that some speaker styles elicit more participant reactions than others?

#### 7. Keynote speakers at virtual events

- Has the speaker's role changed in virtual and physical events?
- What are the biggest challenges in giving a keynote speech online?
- How can participant engagement and interaction be improved in a virtual environment?

#### 8. The financial perspective and the speaker's influence on the success of the event

- Does the keynote speaker financially impact the event's ticket sales or sponsorship deals?
- Do you have an example of an event where the choice of keynote speaker had a significant impact on the event's financial success?

#### 9. Summary and open-ended observations

- What other factors do you consider important when choosing a keynote speaker?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about the importance of a keynote speaker at events?

## Appendix 3. Database

<b>Description of the implementation of the study:</b>			
<b>Name of the material</b>	The Role of Keynote Speakers in the Event Industry		
<b>Quality of the data</b>	Qualitative data		
<b>Time of data collection</b>	Spring 2025		
<b>License</b>	For the thesis, not to be shared.		
<b>Observation/data unit type</b>	Person		
<b>Observation/selection of data units</b>	Non-probability sampling, discretionary sampling		
<b>Data collection technology</b>	Face-to-face interview or via TEAMS		
<b>Language</b>	Qualitative data are only available in the original language; they are not translated.		
<b>Dataset:</b>			
<b>Interview ID</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Date</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Profession / role in the event</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Duration of the interview</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>The role of the keynote speaker at the event</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Inspiration and motivation</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Branding and marketing</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Psychological behavior</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Participation</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Keynote speaker selection criteria</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Expertise and experience</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Communication skills</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Speaker feedback</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx
<b>Public speaking</b>	xxx	xxx	xxx

## Appendix 4: Processing of data

<b>Processing of the data:</b>	The research material consists of semi-structured interviews with event industry experts, such as event organisers, participants, and keynote speakers.
	The data collection aims to find out the keynote speakers' role in the event's success and their impact on the participant experience, branding and financial success.
<b>Principles of data collection and storage:</b>	The interviews have been conducted face-to-face or remotely, and they have been recorded with the consent of the interviewees.
	The recorded interviews have been transcribed for analysis.
	The transcription process has been carried out carefully, and any unclear points have been checked from the original recordings.
<b>Anonymisation and data protection:</b>	The interview data has been anonymised by removing all identifiable personal data, such as the names of the interviewees, the names of the organisations and the exact locations of the events.
	Identifiable information has been replaced with generic terms, such as "Event Organiser" or "Keynote Speaker".
	If conversations mention specific events or their recognisable details, they have been modified to a more general level to remove recognizability while maintaining context.
<b>Recording and storage of data:</b>	The original recordings will only be stored securely for the duration of the study. They will be disposed of after the study has been completed, in accordance with the privacy policy.
	Anonymised material is stored in digital format in a secure storage environment.
	When publishing the research results, it is ensured that the reported quotes and examples do not enable the identification of the interviewees.
<b>Use and further use of the data:</b>	The collected data will only be used for this study and processed using the principles of responsible research conduct.
	The material may not be used in further research or disclosed.
	Data protection and research ethics guidelines are followed during disposal.