Measuring the impact of transitioning from physical to virtual events for Finnish companies & organizations

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Abstract

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During the recent year, ever since the Covid-19 outbreak, many events and happenings are switching from physical to online version. Surely this pandemic changed lots companies and organizations across all industries in many ways.

The purpose of this thesis is to measure the impact of transitioning from physical events to virtual events for Finnish companies & organizations. Despite the Covid-19 potentially being just a booster for transitioning from physical events towards more digital format in the event industry globally. The author conducted research regarding the impact on Finnish companies and organizations from the technological, sociological and economic factors.

The thesis is conducted in a tradtional way, which including literature review as studying foundation on the event industry from the past, current and future. Qualitative research is the chosen thesis study method. Focused interviews with eight Finnish companies and organizations were conducted via face to face, online and phone call formats.

The study found out that the impact of transitioning from phsical event to virtual event does indeed manifest itself. For more than half of the companies and organizations studied the economic situation was adversely affected. Some are forced to seek out new business revenue stream. People's overall attitudes and feelings are conflicting between preferring virtual formats of events and happenings, yet they tend to miss being in physical contact with others for meetings. It is true that the usage of technology is increasing and becoming more in demand.

In conclusion, the author believes that hybrid events are a major part of the future as they provide both alternatives of medium, which are physical and virtual. This is very much still dependent on the content and goal of the events, as well as other event characteristics. However, the online/virtual alternatives proved to be more sustainable for the organizations as opposed to their counterparts and resulted in greater outreach to audiences.

Keywords
Physical event, hybrid event, virtual event, transition, impact

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1   Introduction

Thesis author is specialised in event and meeting industry and this is the final work of the Bachelor degree study. After Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, due to the travel restriction, no one was allowed to travel to other international locations to attend events. Event organizers had to react quickly to adapt to the sudden change. Many events and meetings were forced to be held virtually. People had no choice but had to attend events online instead. The author has personally experienced in attending both physical events before Covid-19 and online events after Covid-19. Others working in the meeting industry share the same sentiments. The comments from people are quite different from one individual to the next. However, each person's feelings and experiences as an event attendee cannot be generalized across the whole event & meeting industry. Thus, thesis author chose the thesis topic to focus on measure the impact of the Covid-19 transition on Finnish companies and organizations.

1.1   Objectives, research questions

The objectives of this study are to provide an overview of performance of the Finnish companies and organizations, and to find out how much impact does the transition have on Finnish companies and organizations active within the event industry ecosystem in terms of technology, sociology, and economics. How does it affect the event companies and organizations' monetization strategies? As the changes could either be temporary, or potentially long-term, how have the organizations decided to adapt to the new normal?

Events for the most part have a positive impact to the organizers by generating business revenue, educating its target audiences, and providing a financial boost to the hosting city. However, during recent years there has a transition in the event & meeting industry where the demand for virtual/hybrid events has increased significantly. "Virtual events are up 1000% since Coronavirus, says a virtual platform" (Koetsier,J 2020). How much of an impact did it have on the Finnish companies and organizations? How are the Finnish local companies and organizations active within the ecosystem reacting to these changes while maintaining the same amount of value contributing to their raison d'être? This thesis will be focusing on measuring the impact for the Finnish companies and organizations in relation to technological, sociological, and economic factors.

According to Finland Convention Bureau, 835 international association meetings were held in Finland in 2019 and there were 136,413 delegates recorded to attend the meetings. The number of meetings were doubled by half compared to 2016. (Helsinki Marketing 2020). Between 2016 to 2019 statistics show an increase in the number of events

leading up to the Covid-19 outbreak. The affect was very much notable, as seen in the following statistics of "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international meetings planned worldwide till April 2020" below:

Characteristic	Number of canceled meetings	Number of postponed meetings	Number of meeting places changed to other cities	Total planned sessions in early 2020	Total changed sessions in early 2020
Europe	61	101	6	1,021	168
Asia Pacific (including data from China)	42	111	8	336	161
China	10	32	2	86	44
North America	18	9	1	232	28
Latin America	5	9	1	91	15
Africa	2	18	1	69	21
Worldwide	128	248	17	1,749	393

Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international meetings (adapted from Statista 2020.)

The continuous rise of meeting cancellations appears endless. Covid-19 pandemic is primary trigger for events and meetings becoming more digitalized as time went on. One of the immediate reactions that companies and organizations had was to start shifting predominantly to digital events.

Furthermore, thesis work represents the author's own interests in the specialisation area and as an aspiring event professional as it is highly beneficial to know how in what direction the industry is going to develop. Understanding industry trends and predicting the future skills required to succeed is advantageous for the author before embarking on the career development path.

Thesis research questions are as follow:
- Has there been a transition from physical events to virtual events in Finnish companies?
- How have Finnish companies/ organizations active within the event ecosystem been impacted by the transition?
  - Has the nature of the impact been primarily negative or beneficial?
- Can we quantify this impact by investigating technological, sociological, and economical factors?
- Have the companies been forced to change their monetization strategies and revenue streams?

1.2 Research Method

This thesis is a research-oriented study, which was decided by the nature of the topic, which is to try to understand an emerging phenomenon within the industry. The phenomenon being studied is always one happening in the real world. (Kananen.2011,16) In this thesis the study is regarding the impact on Finnish local companies and organizations' corporate performance when event formats switch from physical to virtual/online. Qualitative methodology is the chosen method as the study is about the change of event from physical to virtual/online, which is the definition of "What." Uncovering findings in relation to the event model is the "How." (Kananen 2011,19)

To measure the impact of the transitioning from physical to virtual/online events for the local organizations simply reading and relying on reports does not suffice. Additional investigation must be conducted via interviews with companies and organizations representatives. The interview questions are being designed around the three chosen factors from PEST analysis, which are technological, sociological, and economic.

1.3 Structure of thesis

This thesis follows the typical structure and is divided into 5 major sections. Thesis starts with the basic introduction, which talks about the background of the thesis, objectives and lists the thesis researching questions. The second section comprises of literature review of event & meeting industry by explaining the event industry from the past- and present trends and their significance. In the third section the author clarifies the chosen methodology of the thesis. Question design, data collection, and data analysis will be further elaborated upon. Fourth section synthesizes the results regarding Finnish companies and organizations that author interviewed in greater detail. Thesis conclusion and authors learning process will also be included and summarized at the end of the section.
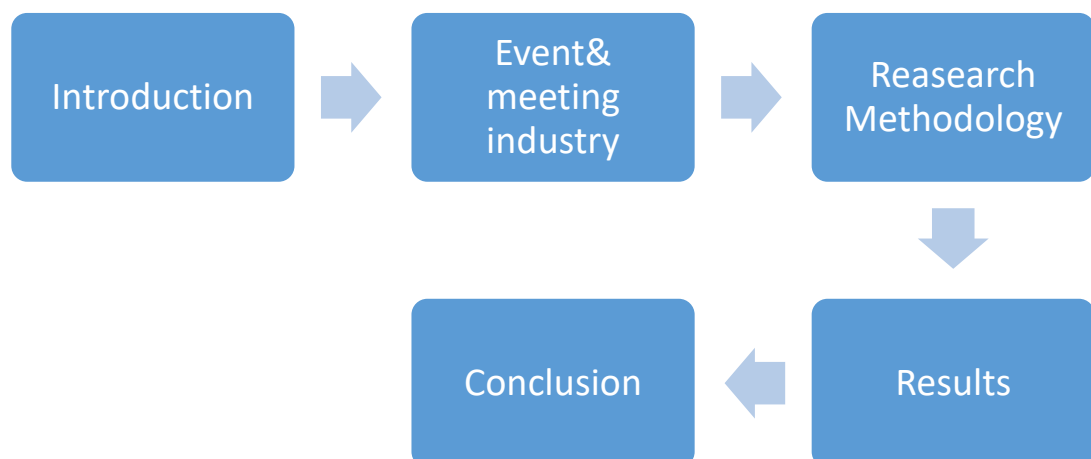

Figure 2: Structure of thesis

This thesis study has its study limitation, as the thesis topic is a new and still ongoing phenomenon that happened within a relatively short time frame compared to other global trends. There has not been sufficient amount of studies or books released on the topic of changes from physical events to virtual/online events. Secondly, the study is focusing on the Finnish companies and organizations mostly on the smaller and medium size. The results are not fully applicable on a larger scale to other foreign cities or countries in the event industry. As mentioned previously, the data information timeline falls mostly between years 2018 - 2021.

2   Event & Meeting Industry

Events have almost always been part of human activity throughout history with different purposes and ways of organizing, which are vastly different from these days. Events are always organized with a particular goal in mind, and the industry as a whole is mainly about interactions between people. Organizer are planning and managing different happenings such as trade fairs, music festival or businesses, ranging from one-person party planning to large companies educational and social event. (Martin 2017)

2.1   What is an event in meeting industry

What is an event? It is an occasion that assembles for certain purposes, it can be organized both privately and publicly and it could be classified on the basis of its size, type and context. (Surve,2019)

> *"Events have been around forever. The word 'event' is derived from the Latin word 'eventus' and was originally used to describe big happening out of the ordinary. Today the concept of events includes a large variety of social gatherings, meetings, sports, shows, and performances. It has become a fashion to use the word 'event' for everything that is happening"* (Damm 2012,1.)

When talking about events on daily basis some people could be prejudiced to think events are weddings, parties and business meetings while the fact is that they all are of these, but not exclusively restricted to them. Depending on the size, type and context, event can be also defined by its purpose. According to Robinson Pete's book in 2010, event covers a multitude of activities, including:

- Concerts
- Charity events
- Sports events
- Festivals
- Theatre performances
- Opera
- Dance and drama performances
- Fundraising

- Product launches
- Conferences
- Trade Fairs and exhibitions
- Celebrations
- Art events
- Weddings
- Family events
- Meetings

(Robinson, Wale & Dickson 2010,13.)

2.2   Event in history

Event as a cultural activity can be traced back to the time when event was not even called such, rather a community gathering. Events were meant for performing rituals or celebrations. When events started to evolve further the venue was one of the most crucial parts during the event planning phase. As past and present comparison for event locations, club

rooms, arenas, exhibition centres, open markets, and auditoriums are functioning the same way as amphitheatres and marketplaces did back then. They were mostly used for various shows and performances while shrines, churches, and temples are used to perform holy acts. These traditions of the events have not been changed much. Roman ruins have plenty of evidence to support the fact of these incidents taking place. (Robinson & al.2010,15)

Looking back into the events in history, event industry also has been through its fair share of difficulties. Behind many of these adversities various diseases were the culprits. As an example, "Lord Mayor's Show" and "Nottingham Goose Fair" in the 13th century are the two famous events that have established local identity and regionality, both of which have influences still relevant today. At the time the bubonic plague was cause of the cancellation on those events, along with many other historic incidents as well. (Robinson & al. 2010, 14-15.)

The industrial revolution first gained momentum during the 18th century as the manufactured products and equipment were being introduced to the world. Correspondingly, world trade has led people to faraway places across borders to attend trade fairs and exhibitions. Accommodations were quietly built according to the business tourism demand. Thus, events and meeting have had a significant role for pushing the world's economic prosperity forward by its influence and non-stop evolution. (Robinson & al.2010,15.)

Allen (2012,10) points out that path to modern event industry has not been smooth, there has always been incidents that interrupt the revolution of event industry. Incidents that include terrorist attacks, virus outbreaks such as SARS in 2002, and major buzz surrounding climate change, which has forced all industry to rethink business sustainability and its true meaning. (Nilsson 2020,2.)

2.3   Event trends

An event technology company conducted a survey in 2019 on whether consumers think the event industry is evolving and moving forward or not. The survey found out that 66% of the survey participants believed that the industry is indeed evolving. People's perceptions are leaning on both technological and economic factors. Event industry needs more robust technological evolution to achieve higher engagement from event participants. (Alford media 2019)

As the event industry is undergoing a growth during the recent years there has been a notable tendency for change. Event organisers are adapting to contemporary trends and improving their costumer experience. In order to do so, all point toward the events need to

embrace technology. These can also be expressed as follows: digitalisation holds a key role of innovation including being part of event marketing; livestreaming to enlarge outreach; VR experiences becoming part of various online events. (Green 2018.)

The fact that technology is playing an important role in the event industry is undeniable. Eventbrite published a report based on 1000 event professionals in November 2017, "The Pulse Report: 2018 Event Industry Trends" where they predicted that in 2018 technology was on the rise in the event industry. Some of the results were a staggering 96% usage rate of live streaming, with 88% of events being incorporated with virtual reality elements. (Eventbrite 2017,18)

2.4   New normal in event industry

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) had a webinar in 2021 to discuss the topic of "The future of global events". The summary of the webinar is that as Covid-19 still having impact on global events, and ongoing event cancelation, brings uncertaity of monetisation for businesses. However, event organisers have adopted new delivery models such as virtu/online event formats as novel business solutions. In addition to these efforts governments also prioritise policies to boost economic recovery. It can be said that widespread adoption of digital technologies is supporting event industry more than ever. Furthermore, sustainability and eco-friendliness are taking a bigger spotlight in future events. (OECD 2021, 2-3.)

It was a challenging time for many industries ever since the Covid-19 outbreak. the world's event industry had to put a pause on all activities due to the healthcare authorities having restricted people from traveling across distances and gathering socially. The Finnish Fair Corporation had only 20.2 million euros operational turnover, consequently the profit was in the minus: -13.4 million euros. Messukeskus is Finnish biggest exhibition center owned by The Finnish Fair Corporation. Like many other businesses, Messukeskus had to adjust its operation model to update their strategies. Messukeskus began providing their services from mainly physical to virtual/online events. To deliver streaming services to its clients, studios space was being build inside the halls to facilitate the changes in business strategy. (The Finnish Fair Corporation. 2021)

"New normal" is a new term being used within many industries as the result of Covid-19 and plenty of organizations also have new ways of managing the business. According to Virtual Event Guide of 2021, there are around 62% of event planners are going for hybrid events as it opens more alternatives for event participants. Online event offers convenience for the attendees in terms of time saving and flexibility. Meanwhile, online format of events aligns fittingly with the industrial sustainability trends. On the other hand, there is

still valid arguments being made to have in-person experiences being offered as options. (Caramuru,T 2021)

Digital events are more accomplished as news are also reporting that many of them have successfully been launched virtually. As an example, the Nasdaq exchange in New York hosted more than 150 ceremonies and Hongkong stock exchange has held at least 140 of these ever since the pandemic started after 2020. Companies are rethinking and converting their office space into more sustainable implementations. Zoom conducted a poll for more than 7000 people in ten countries, asking people's opinions on future meetings. They found out 2/3 of the people would prefer hybrid meetings in the future as it serves different people's needs. (The Economist 2021)

2.5   Significance of the event industry

The existence of event industry has contributed true value globally, such as industry expansion and employment creation. In 2015 the event industry made a $280 billion impact on the economy from which $66.8 billion went to labour wages. The importance of event industry can be seen in local business and non-profit organizations as well, along with local city and companies investing on building the venue, hotels, roads infrastructure for hosting events. (Adam 2016.)

The year 2018 is a good example for demonstrating how the event business looked like in Helsinki city's baggiest exhibition center. Director of Messukeskus Mikko Horppu expressed that 2018 was a record- breaking year for the exhibition business. There was growth in event programme, event development and product launches. According to its annual report 2018, Messukeskus has organized 98 fairs, business events, congresses entertainment events and festivals. These 98 events had attracted 1,214,787 visitors, which resulting in 1.2 million Euros operating profit for Finnish Fair corporation Groups. In comparison to the previous year 2017, there were only 87 fairs and business meeting that were held. (The Finnish Fair Corporation 2018.)

2.5.1   Technology's role in event industry

Technology enables more possibilities in event industry. Additionally, technology facilitates the success of the events for companies and organizations. Technology allows event management teams to improve the effectiveness already ahead of time during the planning phase to promote the event via social media marketing, email marketing and marketing automation. Event management apps are improving event management in terms of time and cost effectiveness, smoother communication across different channels, and empower networking options. (Bronson 2018)

Technology in event management has been a hot topic all over. In Nawn's article series, he listed out more than twenty different emerging technology tools. Several samples are as follow:

- Audience Response Systems (known as ARS). ARS enables huge number of event participants to response to certain topic, questions. ARS is real-time discussion, feedback, and interactive leaning

- Augmented Reality (known as AR), it is a digital content on top of the real world and the most common applications are gaming, wayfinding, interactive signage, site visits etc

- Biometrics, which are being used for body measurements like scans of finger of palm prints, palm veins etc. Common applications are identification and security.

- Mixed reality (known as hybrid reality) which combines virtual reality/artificial reality to intensify attendees experience

- Platform-as-a Service (Paas), allows different software system to have a joint platform to perform and deliver results

(Nawn 2018, Part1& 3)

2.5.2 Events brings economic value

According to Allied Marketing Research a prediction was made for the event industry that by 2028 it will reach $1,552.9 billion. In 2019 the event industry had generated value worth $1,135.4 billion in estimate. However, the predicted worth was based on 2019 estimates, as the corporate event and seminar segment held the majority share reaching 27.7% of the total share. (Thakur, Kadam & Deshmukh 2022)

Event Industry Council published a study in 2018 called "Global Economic Significance of Business Events," which conducted by Oxford Economics. The study explains that economic impacts from events industry are divided as three parts as below:

- **Direct impact:** This speaks for the event direct events spending and jobs that invloed in planning and producing the events. As well as including business traveling costs

- **Indirect impact**: Representing the downstream supplier, such as event facilities, venue, catering services, marketing, equipment, cleaning etc

- **Induced impact**: Including event employee's life spending, rent, food and entertaining

(Event Industry Council 2018,4)

The study also found out that in 2017 the total impact of global business is $2.5 trillion for business sales and 26 million jobs were generated across 180 countries, resulting $1.5 trillion of GDP. (Event Industry Council 2018,5)

The Event Industry Association in Finland released a study, which was conducted by The University of Turku School of Economics. The report revealed that the impact of event industry in Finland is resulting in € 2.35 billion economic value and 200,000 people employment. This equals about 1.2% of Finland's total GDP. (Tapahtumateollissus 2020.)

Event industry plays a significant role in Finnish economics in terms of creating jobs and generate economic value for companies that are within the ecosystem. Finnish event industry, including the year 2019, had approximately 8354-9126 companies hiring 15200-19500 full-time equivalent employees, which corresponds to 0.9-1.2% of the employment needs of all companies. EUR 800-1200 million (including VAT) were generated by the event industry companies and that corresponds to 0.6-0.9% of the value added to all companies. (Ali-Yrkkö.J&Pajarnen. 2019,2)

Helsinki city and Finland have been putting in effort to promote to the world, and successfully become a competitive destination for hosting events. According to Finnish online media "Good news from Finland," Helsinki is ranked 12th out of 1251 as the word top location for international meetings. The benefits from hosting events and meetings are remarkable in many ways. (Teivainen 2020). "Each event delegate spending during business travel are approximately 2000 euros, including accommodation and shopping in the city." said one tourism expert.

2.5.3   Events in sociological aspect

Events and meetings are valuable moments that gather people to connect, to exchange individual points of views, tapping into each other's knowledge base, and coming up with new ideas. Events and meetings are incredibly powerful social moments to have positive influence on activities, such as charities, or promoting sustainable approaches to life. (Insights 2019.)

In Helsinki Roadmap for Events 2019, it mentioned that Helsinki city strategy "Eventness" is categorized as a strategic focus area, in which it would positively affect city dynamism and welfare status. Different events bring people with same interests together, conjointly adding social cohesion and comprehension. (City of Helsinki 2019,4.)

Damm (2012, 12-13. Points out in Nelson's research 2004), regarding workers in special event industry, found out that event industry professions have some common traits.

Firstly, event industry professionals consider themselves lucky to have been chosen for the path of the event industry although they did not plan to go down that track in the first place. Secondly, event industry professionals are happy working on something that impacts others lives and facilitating the likelihood of achieving their dreams and aspirations.

2.6   Hybrid event

Virtual events are referring to real-time meetings that are happening over the internet. Virtual events are utilising technology such, as at the minimum, an audio and video connection. Majority also involve chat tools, live polling, and other interactive applications. Virtual meeting allows participants to join events remotely. (Educause 2006,1).

The term hybrid event refers to any meetings, seminar, conferences or happenings that have people attending both physically and virtually. The virtual part of the event is designed for remote audiences to join to event effectively and seamlessly. (Nazar 2022).

According to Wikipedia, the first university level of hybrid event was held in 1992 between University of Helsinki in Finland and Williams college in US. That was the first global seminar by using teleconferencing technology. The book named "Imagologia" was result of the seminar. (Wikipedia.s.a.)

Hybrid meetings involved technology incorporating traditional physical event practices to create a new form of experiences for meeting participants. Hybrid meetings contain two groups of participants: physical participants and online/virtual participants, online/virtual participants can be attending from multiple locations. Hybrid event is an emerging event type that requires meeting professionals to be creative, strategical, and leverage other skill sets to effectively expand the life of an event. Hybrid event offers the opportunity to add value and to reach larger number of event participants. (Fryatt, Grarriga, Janssen, John& Smith 2012.)

Figure 3: Hybrid Meeting (adapted from MPI 2021.)

During the recent years hybrid event is no longer a brand-new term among the meeting industry lingo. Finnish hybrid event & networking platform company Brella explains that hybrid events are not only about streaming live session. Instead, it is a mix of live and online events. Hybrid events utilize technology to include physical event attendees as well as other event participants to better engage the event agenda regardless of their physical location. Both physical and online parties could have the most similar involvement in terms of experiencing the event programmes. (Brella, 2021)

2.6.1 The benefits of hybrid event:

Online/virtual event is the quick solution when Covid-19 pandemic started as many in per-son events were being subsequently cancelled. Switching to digital had become modus operandi to give attendees the possibilities and necessary access to attending the event. Online/virtual event does offer larger collection of benefits, such as event analytics be-coming more accurate and diverse; providing rescheduling options very quickly without too much hassle; flexibility to attend even when having parental tasks; digitalisation makes use of the eco-friendliness principle; no travel costs for companies to cover; databases going through a process of centralisation. (Forbes 2021)

As hybrid events offers both in-person and online experiences for attendees. The positive views of hosting hybrid event are easy to find:

- Increase number of participants by offering alternatives to attending the event
- More support for environmentally concern individuals
- Push technical tools forwards, there is needs there is improvements
- Time and money saving if attending online and whatever location the partici-pants are (Brella 2021)

Hosting hybrid events enables both in-person delegates and online/virtual audience to participate the same happening at the same time. The pros of hybrid event are easily highlighted: it offers more choices for everyone, both for the ones that can make it there physically and to the ones that prefer to stay behind the computer; reaches greater diver-sity and more inclusive; it is a sustainable solution for major happenings. (EventForce 2021)

2.6.2   The challenges of hybrid event

EventForce is an event technology company founded in 2004 in London. Their poll results in 2021 found out that 70% of event organisers were not considering hybrid event as their 2021 event strategy. (EventForce 2021)

Benefits are clear yet there are still reasons for the event organisers to have the tendency not to have a hybrid model in place. It is complex to deliver as hybrid event is hosting two events from the event production point of view. Managing two events at the same time makes it more challenging to offer to the same experiences for all event participants. Furthermore, it is impossible to give the same level of attention to both live audience and online/virtual participants, as live audiences by default get the biggest portions of care as their present then and there, so are their needs. The last influencing factor would be human nature as the face-to-face connection is something that cannot be replaced or replicated. People get used to physical activity and are not willing to have it changed. (EventForce 2011)

Online format of the hybrid event has forced to develop to maximise the audiences' needs. Hybrid event has potentially become more complex as it has too many variables which are hard to control and predict. On top of the additional coordination and engagement requirements, potential connectivity has presented issues for event organizers. From the sponsor point of view, it is also difficult to do advertisement as virtual event does not offer sufficient exposure. (Nazar 2022)

3   Research methodology

3.1   Qualitative research

This thesis is researching on a phenomenon: the event & meeting transitioning from physical to bigger portion of virtual/online event. To understand a phenomenon, qualitative research shall be conducted as the "what is it all about" needed to be understood. To measure the impact that cause by the transitioning, is answering "how". (Kananen 2011,35-37)

Qualitative research

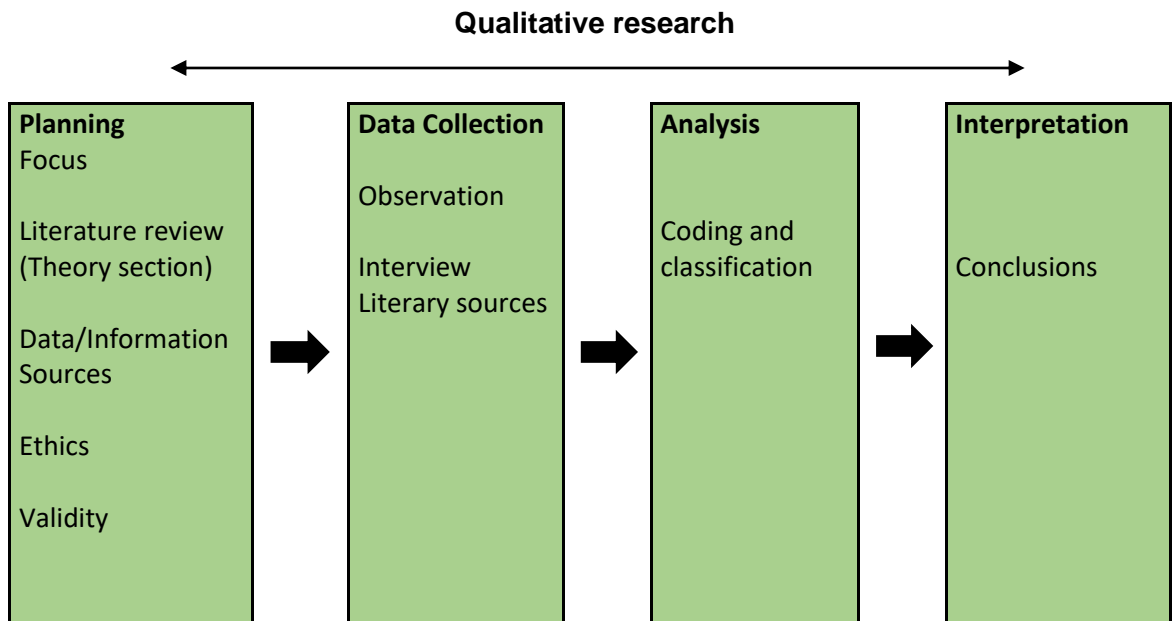| Planning Focus Literature review (Theory section) Data/Information Sources Ethics Validity	Data Collection Observation Interview Literary sources	Analysis Coding and classification	Interpretation Conclusions

Figure 4: Qualitative research flow chart (Adapted from Kananen 2010)

Qualitative research follows the general flow chart, including setting up the objectives for the chosen topic and obtaining relevant information, followed by data collection. Consequently, analysing the data and interpreting the data to its conclusion is the final step. Additionally, to build a solid knowledge foundation for the field so that the classification is understood. However, basic definition of the matter does not present enough evidence as to what the phenomenon is all about. Literature references gives the credibility to the qualitative research as first stage of the process. (Kananen 2011,36-37)

Textbook as a research resource usually presents the basic theories on the topic. As such, reading and referencing textbooks is a commonly used practice in thesis research. However, it should still aim to narrow down latest and most recently published research. Internet browsing and Wikipedia referencing are acceptable to use yet their reliability and credibility should be verified. It is a good habit to combine as much as scientific material as can be reasonably found. (Kananen 2011, 41-47)

As the factors affecting the thesis topic were relatively new, besides the classification found from textbooks, the author had to combine online sources with traditional sources to build up a sufficiently varied and large enough literature foundation.

3.2 Data collection

There are three most frequent approaches for qualitative research: observation, focus interviews and literary sourcing. Observation is used when the phenomenon involves communication barriers. Literary sourcing is based on reading existing articles, books and so forth. However, focus interviews in data collection is about using questions to get the insights. (Kananen 2011,48) Focus interviews as this thesis data collection tool gives this thesis first-hand experience and date to reference during synthesis.

In focused interviews, the interviewees shall be chosen carefully as the interviewees' answers could be affected significantly. Consequently, the study of the phenomenon might not have sufficient enough reliability. (Kananen 2011,52) The author has chosen local companies as interviewees to conduct the interview. However, they are all in close relationships with the global event and meeting industry. Differences between these companies are highlighted by the fact that they represent different functions within the event ecosystem.

Decision was made by the author to learning from other students' thesis work in the same field to make the data collection process more effective and succinct. When reaching out the companies for interview invites it is wise to go for the companies' size between micro (1-9 employees) and small (10-49 employees). Micro size and small size companies have 70% and 26% of despondence rate. (Puustinen 2021,32) It is understandable that bigger companies representatives are far too occupied to handle daily operations instead of answering non-business-related queries. The author of this thesis has sourced sixteen companies which have high potential of fitting in the interview lists out of which twelve interview invitation emails were sent to companies. When selecting companies/organizations, the author looked at the information including size, employee numbers, nature of the business, and other information that could be sourced from www.finder.fi platform.

3.3 Interview question design

Now having better understanding of the phenomenon, the thesis author has to establish what factors that the phenomenon is being research against. Analysing in relation to the chosen factors chosen, the result would give a better overall picture about the phenomenon. (Kananen 2011,41)

PEST is a business performance analyse tool and originally created by a Harvard professor named Francis Aguilar in 1967. PEST is an acronym for four factors including: political, economic, social, and technological. (Post, J.2018) PEST is also a good tool to use for marketing research, drafting business plan and as well as making important business strategies. (The Economic Times s.a.)

PEST analysis is mainly for measuring the business performance that affected by external factors, these external factors could have roles on influencing companies' profitableness. Economic in applying to company's economic growth, supply and demand, inflation, and recession. Social part can be including culture attitude, demographics, lifestyle. Technology is simply meaning the dependence and development needs of the technology with the company. (Kenton 2022)

Considering this thesis is about Finnish local business impact in event industry, the author decided to focus primarily on economic, social, and technological factors, as politics are not as relevant or tangible as others.

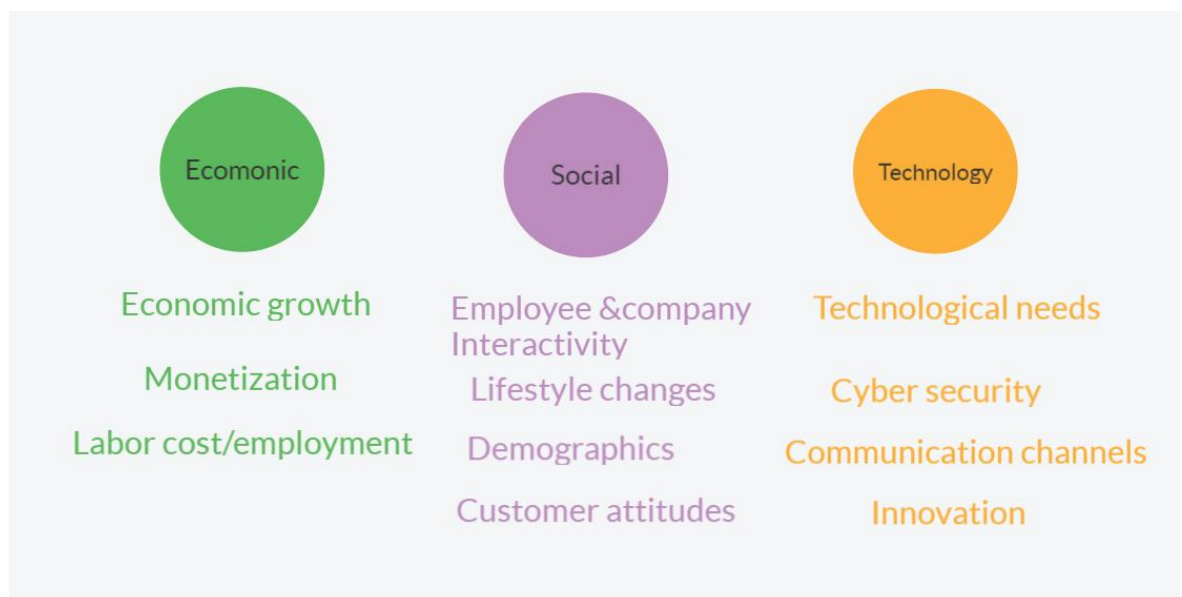The figure below indicates the focus of the questions are being designed.

Figure 5: Interview questions design factors

Focus interview questions is the same as peeling an onion, finding the centre of the onion is the goal. Its popular to start with non-dichotomous questions. (Kananen 2011,54) With each factor's focus the question is leading the interviewees towards the direction that interviewer is seeking for.

This qualitative research therefore leverages semi-structured approach, in which interview questions are designed to have a particular goal to obtain certain type of data. On the general level, questions are divided into linear kind, which are "yes" and "no" type answers and open-ended questions, such as "what" and "how". (Kananen 2011, 55) By designed this way is to have an efficient direction to obtain the desire data.

3.4 Data analysis

The qualitative research material generated by focused interviews could be process by means of a standard Word document. For analysing the saved Word documents there are three stages to go through. Stage one is to transcribe the interview, which means to have the interview translate to text, word by word. Stage two is to divide the text into segments, meaning to have the similar answers sorted into the same paragraph. Stage three is simplifying paragraph into concise sentences. The sentences can be present as a table format. (Kananen 2011,58)

Table 1. Converting the transcribed material of a focused interview into a table format (Adapted from Kananen 2011,58)

This book is a practical step-by-step guide for thesis writers. It explains research concepts and techniques in simple's layman's terms and helps you raft through the thesis process without hitting the worst rocks. The book covers both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Special emphasis is on the criteria of scientific research, reliability and validity, as well as presentation of quantitative material. The thesis is often seen as an insurmountable challenge. Thesis research is, however, no rocket science-except for rocket scientists. Scientific work proceeds according to certain rule, just like any other work that aims at a good end result. This book will help you reach that result.	⇒	This book is a practical step-by-step guide for thesis writers. It explains research concepts and techniques in simple layman's terms and helps you raft through the thesis process without hitting the worst rocks. The book covers both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Special emphasis is on the criteria of scientific research, reliability, and validity, as well as presentation of quantitative material. The thesis is often seen as an insurmountable challenge. Thesis research is, however, no rocket science-except for rocket scientists. Scientific work proceeds according to certain rules, just like any other work that aims at a good end result. This book will help you reach that result.	⇒	This book is a practical guide for thesis writers.	
				It explains research concepts and techniques in simple layman's terms and helps you raft through the thesis process without hitting the worst rocks.	
				This book covers both qualitative and quantitative research methods.	
				Special emphasis is on the criteria of scientific research, reliability and validity, as well as presentation of quantitative material.	
				The thesis is often seen as an insurmountable challenge. Thesis research is, however, no rocket sciences- except for rocket scientists.	

In qualitative research, the research data collected by means including focused interviews aims for reaching an understanding of a phenomenon concerned. After the interview, analysing the collected data is to look for the structures, processes, and models. Analysis of interview material could be sometimes meaning large amount of material. The key is trying to identify what the data is trying to tell. It might require to many times of reading through to find out the message hidden inside the words. (Kananen 2011, 59)

Thematic is often considered as a generic approach when analysing qualitative data, it is systematic yet flexible. The aim of thematic analysis is to find the repeating pattern and common points of interview collected data. In order to do so, the qualitative data should be familiar to researcher and coding the data will help with the process. (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis.2019, 579-581)

In this thesis, the author has documented the data based on each interviewee and cross analysis by three factors plus introduction: introduction question, technology factor, sociological factor, and economic factor questions. Based on answers related to each of the factors from interviewees the author was able to discover the similarities and disparities. As mentioned earlier, thematic approach needs data to be coded to be categorised, however in this thesis is not necessary.

There are two seasons that to add the introduction portion into questions to analyse from. From the interview perspective, it is easier to open the conversation if the interviewee starts to talk about themselves. Secondly, the author is searching for a pattern of each individuals reasoning to choose to work in this field and if there is a change that the impact might have had on the company or organization they work at.

3.5   Research ethics

All the interviewees involved in this study are well informed of the purpose the study. Transparency and honesty need to consider when conducting interviews. There has not been any meeting voice record nor Teams/zoom meeting record. Interview were conducted by informed-consent rules. Every interview is conducted in a respectful manner, regardless the companies' size and business or interviewee's background. Information is well kept without harming companies and interviewee's reputation. However, there has been some interviewee's initiative willing to reveal the organization's name and interviewee's name and direct quotes.

4 Results

The thesis author has sent out twelve interview invitations via emails. There are some follow-up messages, such as LinkedIn messages, second mailing to different contact within the same company and organisations, double contact form on company's website. In three weeks nine of the companies and organizations have replied positively and interviews were arranged. However, eight of the companies and organizations representatives have been interviewed as one could not make it on time. Three email invitations sent were not being answered. Therefore, interview invitation responses rate is 75% and interview success rate is 66.7% as one interviewee could not make it in the end.

The interviews were conducted online, by phone call and physical meeting interview. During online interview, teams and zooms were utilised as preferred online channels. Physical meetings were held at interviewee company's premises. Interviews were conducted in English and interview length was between 15-65 mins. (table 1).

Table 2. Interview information

Date	Interviewee	Channel	Duration
22.4.2022	Interviewee 1	Teams	30 mins
22.4.2022	Interviewee 2	Kamppi office	45 mins
27.4.2022	Interviewee 3	Haaga-Helia (Pasila)	40 mins
5.5.2022	Interviewee 4	Teams	47 mins
5.5.2022	Interviewee 5	Teams	15 mins
5.5.2022	Interviewee 6	Google meet	38 mins
6.5.2022	Interviewee 7	Zoom	65 mins
6.5.2022	Interviewee 8	Phone call	38 mins

4.1 Background information of the companies & organizations

Out of respect for interview companies / organizations' preferences some were comfortable being mentioned and named, while the other half chose to remain undisclosed. However, the interviewed companies and organizations all fit in the research scope. The core business of each individual is different from each other, yet they are providing their services within event industry, including congress & meeting organizer, other event organizer, facility provider, event interior, film production, event platform provider.

In order to obtain successful response from companies, the interview companies & organizations are mainly small size of companies and organizations (table 2).

Table 3. Interview company/organization information

Company/ Organization	No.of employees	Business Nature by product	Company size
Helsinki Partner	48	Service Provider	Small
HeyLook	4	Service Provider	Micro
Messukeskus	249	Service Provider	Medium
XES Helsinki	10	Organizer	Small
Interview company 1	< 50	Organizer	Small
Interview company 2	< 50	Technology	Small
Interview company 3	< 50	Service Provider	Small
Interview company 4	< 50	Service Provider	Small

4.2 Impacts on event industry companies and organizations

This thesis author conducted interview to solicit information from company representatives and individuals who work in the field. All the questions were asked from the standard questions base that was aiming to acquire answers on technology, sociological, and economic factors. The impact is visible from different perspectives, both advantageous and negative. However, it is also expected to receive different answers as each company and organization have different mission and types of business services they provide. The data will be displayed by its categorisation factor.

4.2.1 Intro of the interview

Looking at all the eight interviewees path into the event industry, six of them have minimum of five years relevant experiences, and the longest ones are more than twenty years' worth within the field. When these six of event expert started, their work including in the field of event industry, was about working with people. Some of them have studied as well as worked within cultural management such as museum and theatre. Two interviewees had divergent background as well as relatively short experience in the field. Yet they had the chance to volunteer in either student or music festival. However, they are planning to develop themselves further in this field.

Despite the fact that not all of them started out to become a professional within the event industry. they are all still happy that they had chosen to work in this field. The reasons are more or less similar, as some said that they like to work with people and all of them agreed that event industry it is inspiring, and that their work is meaningful. Furthermore, one mentioned that they are aiming for bigger mission in the field while the other said there is potential with the assistance of technological development.

However, some of the interviewees stated that it has been especially tough during these past two years. One said that "it seems like it is part of the event industry, if there any crisis, financial difficulties, pandemic, or war, we are the one that is being cut out the first." Other experienced interviewees also said: "I don't think there is any new normal for us at event service providers, as the restrictions keep changing, we have to adapting and adapting endlessly."

To sum up the question the final query was if the person is still happy working in the field. The answers are including both "yes" and "no" type responses. The industry is having a positive effect on them while the challenge that the profession brings is tough, especially for business owners.

4.2.2 Technology

The responses from the interviewees were varying, yet some of the answers were identical. The commonality is that there is a greater need and immense use for technology.

Table 4. Most responded answers in technology factor

Most responed answers	No.of interviewees
We use a lot Zoom or Teams or other similar communication tool internally	8
We use communication tools externally	6
We have to seek for other platform for clients	5
We have our own resource; we have streaming and our own media production	6
We are gamifying our event with tools to increase interaction level	4
We are aware of the cyber security, comply with GDPR	6

The new adapted method of communication for both internally and externally has been a switch toward digital communication tools. Before the pandemic most of the internal team meetings were in person or sometimes not happening as people were unable to attend. As the pandemic kicked in technology made things what used to be impossible, possible.

There has been a peak for many companies/organizations to seek for new platforms to adapt to the new changes. Depending on the event themes, content, event goals or their client's needs, various platform were in high demand. As an example: booths for online exhibitions and fairs, the design is far more than just break-out rooms can facilitate. The more these look like the actual booths in real life the better. Yet it is not guaranteeing the same success rate as the in-person exhibition. It is undeniable that further features development and expansion is required.

For other type of events, in order to increase the interaction level with event attendees, event organizers added gamification to event content. Such as using Kahoot, a gaming website and Miro, a visual collaboration platform. Furthermore, using avatar in the morning event so that the event attendees do not have to show their sleepy faces and messy hair.

If event is digital one of the risk managements is cyber security concerns despite majority of companies and organizations complying with GDPR. However, some other disturbances are external and intentional and for these matters, implemented measures for cyber security are necessary.

There are other responses under technology proportion with not so many commonalities among interviewees. The reason is the companies and organizations 'core businesses at the moment are differed from one and another. However, they are still valuable to be listed as it shows the demand level of technology.

Table 5. Less responded answers in technology factor

Less responded answers	No.of inter-viewees
Some event content has designed a way that the participants have to watch certain video to get to the point meet us	1
We expand our technology solution broader	1
We used AI. We keep updating features according to the clients' goal and their needs	1
We did not seek for new solution for technology, but we have a virtual production and not an event per se	1
We did not have the chance to use new technology solution, we will learn and adapt if that is the trend	2
We could not organize any event during pandemic, we attended other events via various platforms	1
We take Cyber security seriously and taking into higher concern, such as high level of SLA, data storing on servers	1

4.2.3 Sociological aspects

How digitalisation is changing the word and changing how people react to life and work routine. The effect on sociological factor has different voices, including appreciation, weariness, opportunities, and hope.

There is similar tendency in interviewees' responses regarding their customers' overall feeling. At least half of the answers were not liking the online format, and they have so much desire to have the physical event back sooner. Or they liked at the beginning of the fast change when Covid-19 came. However, the longer break from physical event, the

more tiresome they have towards online format. These portions of response also mentioned that customer did not feel that they have received the same value compared to if they go face to face events. The could point to that as one example in the exhibition booth, the virtual format does not sell as much as the visitor visiting the actual booth in the exhibition hall.

Although the links were being posted as many times as it could be for the virtual attendees to click to purchase. The repeated answer is that the power of in-person experience is not something that any feature of technology they can be replaced with at this stage. People are demanding something tangible, something they can be proud of posting in Instagram or other social media instead of yet another screenshot, pretending to enjoy the online session, or whatsoever they are attending.

It is undeniable that the people also appreciate the companies and organizations reacting quickly to adapt whatever the situation is requiring them to do so. Until today two years later after Covid-19, more and more events offer both physical and online options for attendee to decide what suits them the most at that moment. On the other hand, online version of the event has bigger outreach to more potential participants. It allows attendees to join the event with just a few clicks. This is something that you could not do when physical was the only event option.

The statistics from one organization was the attendees number rose from 900 to 2000 in one year. Moreover, it is such that online event can provide better and more detailed digital data for event organizer to analyse. It means that event organizers can see what kind of content is more popular among certain type of culture group, female, or other demographic differences. The benefit from it is the data can help to develop in the future similar events to reach better goal through planning.

The attitude for the employees is that remote work does save a lot of commute time, so that people could we from home, it is both more effective and efficient. However, it does not necessarily mean that they have more free time. They are still putting in effort to develop other new business. When it comes to the workload it might seem to the outsiders that organizing online event is easier than physical event. This might not be true as the interviewees mention that there are other set of responsibilities to attend to. The major factor affecting the workload is the content generation for the event.

Physical event has onsite preparation concerning necessary food preparation, of people, and decoration. Online event has software programme to take into account and how are the attendees using the tool and other services. Staff usually need to do a rehearsal as to

ensure a successful event. Furthermore, hybrid event is equivalent to two events to handle, which requires more attention and focus. Another component that affects the workload can be the programmes of the event.

The event industry interviewees like their jobs. As the intro part mention that all the attendees are happy in this feel despite the challenging the event industry has been facing. There are voices also from the old staff who had to leave the job when the Covid-19 hits, and they are looking forward to moving back to the event industry.

Table 6. Most responded answers in social factor

Most responded answers	No.of interviewees
Our customers do not like to meet online	4
Our customers said online did not generate the value that match the expectation	4
Our customers want something more tangible; they want to see actual people	6
Our audiences did have a bigger outreach	4
Costumers like to have options to choose to attend physical event or online	5
We do not have the demographic data	5
We noticed that certain content is more popular among some culture, ages of people	4
Work is busy still we do more on the development side	5
Our old staff still want to come back to work in the filed	4
Remote work saves time	8
Workload is depending on the type of the event, the content etc.	4

There are other responses stating the feelings of interviewees, which is also worth mentioning. The responses vary from each other because the events content is also different. For example, educational content is more suitable to be organized at online session and it could easily reach a broader audience. Educational type of content is not at the same demand level for in-person experience as other type of networking event. However, changeless educational style of event could bore its attendees overtime. That is how the fatigue came after they have experience long enough of online education event. This also resonates with the technology section, gamifying the content will have higher engagement level with the event attendees. Certainly, the educational event topic, and the needs of the attendees, personality or event cultural background also affecting the attitude towards the event itself, regardless the event format being physical or online.

It is also true that having sufficient preparation time for events will increase the satisfaction level. Attendees enjoying the event more increases the chances that they are going to come back to attend next time. During the preparation process, event organizers should do a rehearsal of the event and do it as many as times as time allows. As well as to accommodate situational changes. Managing event from finding problems at preparation

and solve it. Or at least minimise the damage the potential problem might cause. Such as thorough onboarding process for the attendee as they might not be familiar with event tools.

Table 7. Less responded answers in social factor

Less responded answers	No.of inter-viewees
It is harder to make new contact and sign business deals; the trust is challenging	2
Our customers like to at the beginning, but fatigue kicked in later on	3
Our customers have mix feelings, happy to have online and miss the face to face	3
There are other variables, content, needs, personality	3
I like digital event as event organizer, I have better control of stuff. Physical events have to sourcing other staff to do more onsite preparation and greet to people etc. I rather use the time to prepare for event programme, think of some good questions etc.	1
Both physical and online event need to prepare ahead of time, the earlier the better, we can tackle the possible difficulties. Attendee's program onborading etc.	3
Customer like our virtual service as we fulfil their needs	1

4.2.4 Economics

Economics state tells directly about the business performance results. For at least half of the interviewees, they answered that the transitioning from physical event to virtual/online format is having an adverse effect of the economics of the companies/organizations. Having physical event can involve parties throughout event industry including upstream and downstream. There is business correlation in between, as at the customer pay for the physical event the budget is also larger compared to the virtual/online events. Thus, when it changes to a virtual/online event the spending from the client company side is smaller, so are the event company's margin. Moreover, iconic event company in Helsinki is Messukesus, and they are not an event organizer but a service provider. Messukesus' services including venue, audio, and video. When big exhibition or conferences are happening in Helsinki, it attracts huge numbers of visitors from abroad. This means that it brings the revenue not only to the event, but to the airline companies, hotel, restaurants, and the city as well. None of these benefits are being granted if the event is strictly online.

A company needed all functional service staff dedicated to certain events tasks, but when the event is not so much depending on physical, employment also shrunk. It is hard for some companies if their monetization is through that venue like Messukeskus. These types of businesses had to utilise their asset to try to generate revenue to cover their losses more or less. Messkuskus rented their venue for Corona vaccination, as well as for nearby school's entrance exam in 2021.

Despite the struggles, all of the interviewees' companies & organizations are trying their best to hold on to the business and services. Least they can do is to keep engaging their stakeholders in all possible ways. Yet, they are always seeking for other opportunities and developments.

Table 8. Most responded answers in economics

Most responded answers	No.of inter-viewees
The effect on our business is detrimental	4
Our company had to let go of some staff	4
We did not seek for new business stream but hoping the business will be back soon	5
We have planning for the next 5 years, but these also rely on our existing business	4
We are still trying to do what we can do at the moment	8
Yes, we do utilise our asset to bring some revenue to compensate out lost from core business	4
Virtual event comes with smaller budget; thus we are losing money	4
We are developing new opportunities	5

The less common answers see business in a different direction as they get to seize the opportunities to expand their business. They follow the trend of this physical to virtual/online format transitioning, develop what is needed the most for the transition process. If the demand is higher than what the market can supply it is valuable, as they are unquestionably benefitting from this transition.

For the companies/organizations that could not determine if the business is going positively or negatively, it is because of their evolution methods are different. There are many factors to take into consideration, as they are not directly generating revenue from their core services. The way they look at is for instance the number of the event attendees and the short term and long-term impacts on their events. Thus, to have bigger success they need to diversify their main services.

Table 9. Less responded answers in economics

Less responded answers	No.of inter-viewees
We expanded our business, so it is beneficial	3
It is hard to determine, we have different business state holders and evaluation	3
We are still doing ok, but our partners not	2
We diversify our content/service to make more impact.	3

4.3 Findings

The aim of the thesis study was to find out the impact of transitioning from physical event to virtual/online event on Finnish companies & organizations. The author focused the impacts on technological, sociological, and economic factors. The research methodology is focused interviews on eight Finnish event-oriented companies & organizations active within the ecosystem. The findings of research will be also explained by the aforementioned factors.

From the technology proportion, research finds out that the percentage of using technology has increased, particularly in communication tools both internally among team members and externally with clients or partners. However, the technology is far more beyond being a simple communication tool. In fact, the usage of communication tools is a rather basic need for some companies and organizations. Many companies & organizations exploit their own resources to facilitate the heavier digitalisation demands for events.

Furthermore, companies and organizations still had to seek for various platform to match their clients' different requests and goals. Gamifying content and tools also being brought moderately into the process. Technology does play its role heavily in this transition among certain type of companies & organizations. Unfortunately, the ones that have not been able to utilise sufficient technology is because there is a conflict with their core business.

The findings in the social component are a mix feeling which contains positive and negative emotions towards the virtual/online events. As much the companies & organizations clients' appreciation what technology could change impossible to possible, and how efficient that is there is at least half of them clients desire to move back onto physical event.

Additionally, in order to have successful event, event planner should organize the event format depending on the nature of the event, the purpose of the event, as well as know the target audiences well. Networking content type of event is no doubt more suitable for hosting physically. Educational content is manageable for mainly virtual/online variants. As technology is providing part the solution one might as well use it smartly. People are appreciating that event and meetings should have the options either attend physically or remotely.

Economic factor analysis indicates that half of the interviewed companies & organizations are experiencing the transition negatively. The reason behind is that their core business is very much reliant on the physical presence of people. Switching from physical to virtual/online is also affecting companies upstream and downstream partners severely.

Moreover, diversifying business revenue steam seems to be a clever and effective strategy, so that the business does not rely on one single business area. For the most part, technology solution companies appear to be the biggest winners in this transition. Additionally, they have the opportunities to further expand and build upon their existing services. One of the main reason behind benefitting from the transition is because they are not solely focused on offering solutions for physical events, but rather across a spectrum of channels.

In summary, the results from the interviews are not fully corroborated with the literature findings in terms of the technology usage and people's attitude towards the changes. Answering to research questions from chapter one: The transition of the physical event to virtual/hybrid event does exist among the majority of the Finnish companies & organizations. Although at least half of the interview companies & organizations have experienced the impact adversely. However, they are adapting to the trend and adjusting accordingly with their business strategy to manage the fallout.

A portion of the people have voiced concerns against the change to become more virtual/ online focused, at least to some extent. However, looking at the big picture is never one-sided. During this transition from physical event to virtual/online variant, there are positive components as well as some drawbacks. Seeing the entire topic from both sides is more beneficial and invokes optimism required to face difficulties.

As the mention previously technology companies within the event industry seem to be the party reaping the most benefits, at least for the majority of them. However, there is still a significant need to continue evolving and what comes cyber security it should be a more of a concern toward digitalisation as it is a steady and conscious process. Particularly for those businesses not directly tied to technology, as there might be knowledge gaps. People are eager to move back to physical side of things while some are happy to enjoy the convenience that online event/meetings can offer.

Event industry is the one gets affected easily, as is the first one to be cut out from customers budgets. However, employees' are adapting and improving their skills. As well as companies & organizations making business strategic decisions, there are more to things to develop. If not for this transition some of the potential business opportunities and additional revenue streams would not have been discovered.

5 Conclusion

This chapter is for thesis author's overall judgement which combines the literature and focused eight interviews findings, and author's future prediction.

Many materials had evidence pointing toward hybrid events not going to be playing a bigger role in the event industry. It might not seem the same according to the authors research with interviewees. However, Helsinki has been quite a competitive destination city for congresses and meetings, that is understandable the Finnish companies & organizations are wanting their clients back in town. Additionally, they have experienced the changes and needs for technology and the author believes that Finnish companies and organizations managed to pull through well in general, however there have been some struggles on the individual level.

The differentiation between physical event or virtual/online event has always been a controversial topic. There is no right or wrong answer as it is about what is more suitable at the time. The same for events & meeting, there is no one answer that fits it all. When deciding if it is going to be physical event or virtual/online event, think from the perspective of the goal of the event, know the audiences' preferences, needs, background and other necessary factors. Accept that fact that hybrid event is the trend in the industry as it provides more possibilities. Physical event can provide people the power feeling that online cannot, however, virtual/online events can perhaps offer both, and more.

For the companies & organizations that have not had new business streams yet, it would be wise to rethink and adjust to what the global trend is going to be. Do not only rely on what business physical events can bring; expand to other possible areas which are more sustainable as it can be a better solution.

5.1 Reliability and validity of results

The verification of reliability and validity and quality are important. In qualitative research, reliability is referring to the consistency and repeatability of the measurements and research results. (Kananen 2011,66) In this thesis, the repeatability is that all interviewees were asked the same selection of questions. The differences being questions referencing future activities as those depended on the companies' services and products. Furthermore, all the interviewees were from Event industry in Finnish companies and organizations. Validity refers to whether your thesis answers the questions it is intended to answer. (Kananen 2011,66-67) In this thesis case, all the answers from interviewees do have a degree of tendency between them, regardless of the fact that the interviewees are all from

event industry in Finland, each entity still serves in different function within event management ecosystem. However, as the beginning of the thesis mentioned that the limitation of the thesis is that the findings can be applied and expanded to other event industry companies in Finland more reliable

As the first chapter had mentioned that the study has its limitation: the research that the author is focusing is Finnish organizations. Although all the interviewed companies are relating to event some do not strictly categorize themselves fall in event industry. However, from the event management point of view they are event-based organization and belong within the same ecosystem.

5.2   Learning process

It is a long list of learning processes for the thesis author when starting this study in terms of thesis type as different approaches, the steps required to follow to produce the work itself. The personal learning process has been improving throughout the entire time of thesis writing. It will be explained as this thesis workflow order as follow:

First of all, thesis study and writing practice themselves are highly beneficial tasks as the final stage of a degree study. Starting from the basic, then leaning more about specialisation in Event industry and discovering the part that is the most interesting for the thesis author.

Despite that, at the beginning of the work the scope of the topic was quite blurry for author. It took some time until it became clear by referencing to others thesis and locating the gap between the topic around hybrid event. When the scope became clearer, how to search for more relevant study and thesis and see how others were writing about this and from which angle, what books and articles are in the field those others had read. This was rather efficient and helpful to narrow a broad literature database search. Furthermore, learning from others' experiences, what works better and how to implement it for own research.

Secondly, thesis author also learned from thesis planning with a logical thesis structure. Outlining the framework for the thesis is crucial, defining the work and scope would make it clearer for the research. Related literature study is a must, as it provided thesis author or even the thesis reader the foundational understanding of the topic.

Although there are other easier methods of conducting thesis research, such as quantitative, which means survey of a kind. However, this thesis is more suitable for qualitative re-

search, which involves numbers of interview. From searching suitable companies by market research, finding the correct person to contact would result in different response. The author also had a good learning process on designing what kind of questions to ask to solicit the answers the author was looking for. No doubt there are other variables to consider still. It is quite delightful to find out that there are Finnish companies are in the event industry in different functions and providing different services to facilitate event industry to flourish. Both e-meeting and face to face contact and interviewing companies representees/field experts are a great experience for the thesis author. It is also beneficial for the thesis author to expand their network in the event industry. Author will keep in touch with the interviewees and companies' representatives in the future.

Thirdly, the thesis author has never done any sort of research by interviewing company representatives nor individuals, did not know how the conversation is supposed to flow. Theoretically, there is a structure of asking open ending question as to lead to broader range of answers, and thus data. Compare first interview that was conducted to the last, there is clear improvement on how the author approached the task. One should not always stick to the designed questions but rather set a direction and take it further from the first few answers. In this way, it feels more natural and more alike to a proper interview rather than "ask and answer" rigid order. Therefore, the author got to practice interviewing skills and improved on the learnings.

Lastly, career wise it is useful to be in contact with various meeting industry fields, and with people from different companies offering different types of services. Moreover, seeing first-hand that the opportunities are existing in different parts of the meeting industry is uplifting. Modelling the professional' proficiency and reflecting on the author's current skillset, there are still plenty of improvements to be made.

All in all, the whole thesis practice from end-to end has been an excellent experience and learning opportunity for the author academically, professionally, and personally.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. **Degree related research interview - Event Man-agement**

"Measuring the impact of transitioning from physical to virtual events for Finnish organizations"

Intro:
1. How did you get involved in the event industry?
2. For how long have you been working in event industry?
3. In recent times have you been happy working in the industry in general, or do you feel like it has become more challenging?

Technology:
4. Has there been an increase in the number of technological solutions your company uses both internally and externally?
5. Were you forced to seek novel technologies because existing solutions no longer served your needs?
6. Did you have to implement measures or processes to mitigate cyber security related risks?

Social:
7. What are your customers' overall feeling regarding physical event vs online event/hybrid?
8. Any customer demographic differences between physical and online/hybrid events in your experience?
9. How do the physical events and hybrid events affect employee's daily working rhythm and schedules?

Economic:
10. Has the business mainly benefitted or been adversely affected by the transition away from physical events?
11. Have you been forced to seek new revenue streams or business opportunities?