

5 **Virtually green: Sustainability within virtual and hybrid events**

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Introduction

Sustainability is a crucial issue for the future of the planet and is being addressed by governments, corporations, and individuals in many different ways. The global community is working to find solutions to the environmental, social, and economic challenges of our time and to create a more sustainable future for all. In order to contribute to sustainability, the event industry is 'going green', as is the case with many other industries (Boo & Park, 2013). Green events, also known as sustainable events, are those that are planned and executed in an environmentally responsible manner (Laing & Frost, 2010). They aim to minimize the environmental impact of the event and promote sustainability. There are several standards for sustainable event management that event professionals can utilise. One of the leading standards is ISO 20121 Sustainable Event Management, which was developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). ISO 20121 includes a set of requirements and guidance for the management of sustainability issues associated with planning and managing events, including environmental, social, and economic impacts (Jones, 2018). The key elements of ISO 20121 consist of several components such as policy, planning, implementation, monitoring and measurement, evaluation and improvement, communication and documentation, and recording of event activities (ISO, 2012). By implementing sustainable practices, such as ISO 20121, green events can help reduce the environmental impact of events, promote sustainability, and raise awareness about environmental issues among attendees (Jones, 2018).

As is known, events can be organized in three ways: face-to-face, virtual and hybrid. A face-to-face event, also known as an in-person event, is a type where participants gather in the same physical location to participate in a specific activity, such as a conference, exhibition, trade show, or concert (Dowson et al, 2023). A virtual event is one that is held online and does not require participants to be physically present in the same location (Chodor, 2020). Virtual events can take many forms, such as webinars, virtual conferences, virtual trade shows, and virtual meetings (Sá et al., 2019). Virtual events are hosted using technology such

as video conferencing software or dedicated virtual event platforms, and allow participants to join the event from anywhere with an internet connection (Hamm et al., 2018). They typically include live or pre-recorded presentations, interactive elements such as Q&A sessions and networking opportunities, and opportunities for attendees to engage with each other through chat or other means.

Virtual events have gained popularity in recent years as an alternative to in-person events (Sá et al., 2019). However, like any other type, virtual events have their own set of risks. The history of virtual events dates back to the early days of the internet, when early adopters started using the technology for virtual meetings and conferences (Yung et al., 2022). However, virtual events have now evolved into much more sophisticated and interactive experiences (Chodor, 2020). Although virtual events are frequently preferred, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, there are some risks such as technical difficulties, cybersecurity risks, limited engagement, fatigue, lack of physical presence, limited accessibility, and limited networking opportunities (Ho & Sia, 2020). By understanding these risks and taking steps to mitigate them, event organizers can help ensure that their virtual events are successful and provide a positive experience for attendees (Whaley, 2021).

A hybrid event is one that combines both in-person and virtual elements. It allows for a combination of live, in-person participation and online participation through digital platforms (Nechita et al., 2023). This allows attendees to participate in an event from different locations, either in-person or virtually, creating a more inclusive and accessible experience for the audience. Hybrid events can be used to reach a wider audience, as well as to limit the environmental impact of events by reducing the logistical requirements (such as catering, marketing collateral and AV) and especially cutting travel-related emissions (Dowson et al, 2023). They can also offer new opportunities for engagement and interaction, such as virtual breakout rooms and live polls. Hybrid events can be an effective way to balance the benefits of in-person events and the environmental and accessibility benefits of virtual events (Chodor, 2020). Hybrid events have been happening for as long as technology has allowed for remote participation in events. The first hybrid events can be linked to the early use of telephone conferencing, where people from different locations could participate in a meeting or conference call (Disimulacion, 2020). In recent years, with the rise of the internet and the increasing availability of high-speed internet and videoconferencing technology, hybrid events have become more common.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the growth of virtual events, as it forced many events to shift from in-person to virtual or hybrid formats (Firmansyaharani et al., 2022). Virtual events have become increasingly popular as a way to connect with people, share information, and build communities, especially when physical gatherings are not possible (Priyatmoko et al., 2022). Virtual and hybrid events have the potential to offer several environmental opportunities, such as reduced transportation emissions, reduced energy consumption, reduced waste, increased accessibility, increased reach, cost-effective, and carbon offsetting (Mohanty et al., 2022). It's worth noting that while virtual and hybrid events can have some environmental benefits, they are not without environmental impact