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# Events of the Future

## Introduction

Events in their simplest form can be viewed as gatherings of people. Events have always existed as they allow people to gather for one or more of the following reasons:

- To solve problems individuals are not able to solve on their own;
- To celebrate;
- To mourn;
- To mark transitions;
- To make decisions because we need one another;
- To show strength;
- To honour and acknowledge;
- To build companies and schools and neighbourhoods;
- To welcome;
- To say goodbye (Parker, 2018).

Thus, a gathering can be described as the ‘conscious bringing together of people for a reason’ and it ‘shapes the way we think, feel and make sense of our world’ (Parker, 2018: i). This highlights the importance of events in society and confirms that the motivation to attend an event in the future is likely to remain the same because we are likely to continue to have the basic human need for inclusivity and contact (Hari *et al.*, 2015). As human beings, the importance of social interaction is evident in our everyday life, we are shaped by other people and we crave social contact to the extent that ‘isolation is used as punishment and even as torture’ (Hari *et al.*, 2015). Such face-to-face engagement may become more prevalent in the future because we spend ‘more and more time in front of a screen each year’ and so are spending less time engaging in face-to-face contact. As a result, ‘face-to-face time has become a more treasured commodity in our modern world’ (Social Tables, 2019).

The existence of online communities which are designed to facilitate face-to-face engagement between individuals is evidence of the importance of human contact. For example, 'Meetup' is described as an online platform for creating offline gatherings (Parker, 2018). The Meetup webpage explains that the organisation was created in 2002 as a platform to connect with other people in real life, and people use it to coordinate thousands of in-person meetings around the world for a range of purposes. The home page states 'The real world is calling. Attend local events to meet people, try something new, or do more of what you love' (Meetup, 2019).

Another human element that can come into play in relation to the future of events is the concept of FOMO or Fear of Missing Out. If event organisers recognise the existence of FOMO in an event setting, they should try to 'understand the experience from an attendee's perspective' (Alderton, 2019). To determine what kind of event would be satisfying and engaging for potential attendees, the event organiser should use social networks, conduct surveys and focus groups and listen to the event attendees prior to the event. By becoming 'audience-centric', the event organiser can develop stronger relationships with the attendee, build anticipation, give meaning to the event experience, and generate the feeling that if they don't attend, they will miss out on something special (Alderton, 2019).

Thus, the events sector is likely to continue to host gatherings of all sizes and types from birthday parties and weddings to business events, mega events and hallmark events. As well as the human desire for interaction and social engagement, the reason for the continued development of all types of events is that destination managers and governments recognise the importance of events as generating a range of socio-economic benefits (Dwyer *et al.*, 2016). However, event organisers need to reflect on the potential of their event to have negative impacts on the environment and plan accordingly, given the recognised sustainability issues associated with staging an event (Holmes *et al.*, 2015). In the future, mega events are likely to introduce new technology to run the event and to broadcast the event to the world. It may become even more competitive among potential host countries to host mega events in the future so the resources used in the bid process is likely to continue to grow (Greenwell *et al.*, 2019).

Event organisers should recognise that in the future when individuals travel to attend an event they are likely to continue to want to engage in sightseeing and experiences at the destination, to sample the food and learn about the culture and history of the area. Given that often the most memorable events celebrate local surroundings, it would be wise to expose the attendees to the local culture and connect them with the community to increase engagement

(BusinessMirror, 2019). This could be achieved by selecting an appropriate destination that provides high quality local dining experiences, cultural interactions and other activities which can be engaged in before or after the main event to be attended. For example, event organisers could incorporate city tours into the event itinerary or organise a scavenger hunt to encourage participants to explore the city (SpeedNetworking.com, 2018); and to organise authentic experiences in the local area in regards to art, food, attractions and the natural environment (Coppock, 2017).

## Event sustainability and inclusivity

Events in the future will continue to grapple with issues concerning sustainability in such areas as the travel of attendees to and from the event (Jones, 2017), particularly since travel to attend events can generate significant greenhouse gas emissions. Technological advancements may enable conferences and business events to increasingly use distance attendance via video conference software. This may satisfy organisational and government policy on ensuring that staff reduce their carbon footprint. In addition, the event itself should be staged in an environmentally sensitive way (Getz, 2017). The greening of events has led to events introducing such measures as offsetting carbon emissions for event attendees, locally sourced food and drink, and the recycling of packaging and resources (Chirieleison *et al.*, 2019) with these aspects likely to continue to be of paramount importance in the future. Business event attendees will expect the event to be as paperless as possible, with minimal use of plastic, being mindful of food waste and donating what is left to local food banks. In addition to attempts to minimise energy use via turning off lights, switching off equipment, and not leaving projectors and computers running when they're not being used (SpeedNetworking.com, 2018). In addition, to keep the attendees healthy, break times can utilize the outdoors, or include body stretches, with low-carbohydrate options including snacks with less sugar to help attendees to focus throughout the day (Coppock, 2017).

Event attendees in the future are likely to continue to be socially and environmentally aware and so will be interested in learning what the event is doing in relation to these elements to ensure it has had minimal impact on the environment and has made a contribution to social good. For example, an event organiser could incorporate such initiatives as donating the floral centrepieces to a local children's hospital, use locally-sourced ingredients for food, or donating leftover food to food banks and shelters (Hall, 2016). Attendees could be offered healthy food, local and seasonal food to reduce food miles and perhaps individualised small plates to allow them to try a