



**UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG**  
**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW**

# The best of both worlds?

*A study of how hybrid events can create strong experiences*

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## Preface

The idea of this report was born out of our fantasies that took us back to the times with no restrictions and where a pandemic was just something that happened a hundred years ago. When thinking about our new everyday life, we began to envision how new solutions have arisen with the restrictions and asked ourselves the question if these solutions would create enough value to be taken with us into the future. If the solutions found could actually be *the best of both worlds*?

So, who are we, the authors of this report? We met during the “nollning”, and outside of Systembolaget our friendship began to grow. Since none of us had turned 20, the lack of age quickly made us find a common subject, which was the starting point of many more interesting conversations, not at least while making this report.

We want to express our greatest gratitude towards our supervisor Tommy D. Andersson, for your important guidance and support during the process of this study, and to his colleague Erik Lundberg who helped us come in contact with several of the respondents for this report. We would also like to extend a big thank you to our interviewees; Karl, Maria, Rasmus and Olivia who assisted us with invaluable insights from their area of expertise. Thank you for your time and commitment!

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Nina Assadi

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** During times of the pandemic, the world has become more digital, and meetings and interactions are now organized through online devices. Many practitioners have expressed their belief that the digital shift that we have seen during the pandemic is here to stay, but that instead of being only digital or physical, the belief is that they will be combined into a hybrid format. This is especially believed to be true when it comes to event organizing, since combining digital and physical elements to an event is expected to have several advantages. This describes the uprising of hybrid events, which are events that enable stakeholders to participate either physically or digitally, and still being able to take part in the same experiences.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants.

**Methodology:** This study departs from a qualitative approach. To achieve the purpose of this paper, semi structured expert interviews were held with four respondents and a netnography was conducted in order to cross-check the data collected in the interviews.

**Findings:** Our research found that there are three important matters to consider when planning an event; the stimulation of all five senses, interaction possibilities and the attention span of an online audience. If event organizers were to arrange a hybrid event with the three mentioned matters solved, we have found that hybrid events can offer strong experiences for its participants, along with great value for event organizers, since hybrid events increase the availability of the event. With an increased availability, the event can reach a larger population, thereby enabling the event to expand both seen from the number of visitors and the diversified event portfolio.

**Keywords:** Event Design, Event, Experience Economy, Experiential Marketing, Hybrid Events, Marketing

## Glossary

*The glossary presents our definitions of a number of words that are frequently used in this report.*

**Brand:** An intangible concept that helps to identify a company, institution, project, event, or similar.

**Event organizers:** Companies and other associations that organize different types of events.

**Experience:** The process of having a sensation from a personal encounter or happening.

**Fair:** An event that consists of exhibiting companies and/or individuals whose main purpose is to foster business relations, create connections between exhibitors and attendees and offer a meeting place for like-minded people.

**Hybrid event:** A function that takes place in a digital and physical setting simultaneously and offers similar experiences to both physical and online participants.

**Live audience:** The participants of an event, which attend physically.

**Online audience:** The participants of an event, which attend digitally from a distance.

**Stakeholder:** Any individual or organization that has an interest in the events, such as, visitors, exhibitors or industry representatives.

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## 1. Introduction

*This chapter will introduce and problematize the subject of the study. Thereafter, the purpose of the study is presented, along with the research questions that the study intends to answer. Lastly, the limitations of the study will be stated.*

### 1.1 Background

The covid-19 pandemic took us from a social world with physical events to a world filled with distance in every instance. Everyday life things like going to school or work, visiting the doctors, or watching a hockey game live, are now done through digital devices and online meetings. Not only has our everyday life been limited, but events that we otherwise long for, such as conferences, festivals, and fairs are also compromised and held in digital forms. (Vulture, 2021).

It might feel easy to blame the pandemic for pressing pause on our everyday life, but it is also possible to consider the pandemic as a fast-forward button that encouraged companies, institutions, and individuals into years of development. Most individuals already had the devices necessary to stay connected in an online world. The companies could, thanks to the advancements in technology and digitization, transform their businesses to fit the online world quickly. This is a shift that would have been made anyhow but which was forced into fast motion forward due to the pandemic. (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

The strictly online world, which we live in today, should not be seen as the new normal, but rather as a force that has enabled businesses and events to discover new ways of doing business and for people to discover new businesses and events. By combining digital and physical elements, companies can be more versatile, and their offer can reach a larger audience. The phenomenon of combining physical and digital elements is believed to be especially big for event organizers in the form of hybrid events. A hybrid event can be described as an event that takes place both physically and digitally, and therefore has an audience that can participate in either format and still take part of the same content. (Heijkoop, 2014). This can be preferable in many cases; for example, it lowers travel time and thereby costs for participants, and makes it possible for more people to attend than would have been possible in a physical context. (Whitlock, 2021). Nevertheless, several moments and happenings are perceived as hard to recreate in digital format. One example of this is fairs in different forms where the main goal is for the participants to have exchanges with like-minded people, to create connections between exhibitors and attendees, and to promote business contacts between industrial representatives. (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d). Many exchanges occur at a fair, so it is also of interest to investigate how event organizers have recreated these exchanges and experiences in digital formats and how they aim to integrate digital elements into their event, even when covid-19 is nothing but a memory.

The study, which will be represented in this report, investigates how event organizers can combine digital and physical elements into a hybrid event to create strong experiences for participants. Since physical event experiences are what we are used to, this study has been conducted by researching the digital participation of events. The research was conducted by interviewing and studying the social media platforms of three events which pre Covid-19 were held physically, but during the years 2020-2021, they had to transform their events into a digital format. By studying digital events, we could draw conclusions about the digital participation of hybrid event forms. Practitioners and researchers know how to construct physical events and create value for their participants. Now, there is a need to research what possibilities digital elements and a hybrid format can offer for event organizers and their audience. So that leaves us with the following question, is hybrid the best of both worlds?

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants. This will be done by identifying advantages and disadvantages for events in different formats and settings.

## 1.3 Research question

The study will investigate the following research question:

- *What are the incentives to use a hybrid event format?*

To answer this research question, the following sub-questions need to be researched.

- *What tools can be used to engage online participants into having strong experiences?*
- *What are the possibilities and challenges with different event forms?*

## 1.4 Limitations

The first limitation of this report is that it only processes the events of Swedish organizers of hybrid events. If the report were to study events on a global scale, differences in culture and access to technology would need to be considered. If the study were to proceed during a more extended period, it would have been preferable to look at this on a global level to be able to obtain a more general conclusion applicable to events globally. We have also chosen to limit the interviews to event organizers that have previous experience in organizing physical events. The study has been conducted by researching digital versions of events that were previously only physical since it was not possible to arrange hybrid events in Sweden during the time when the study was conducted.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

*In this chapter, the theoretical framework which lays the foundation of the report will be presented. The first section of the theoretical framework explains the role of experiences in today's economy and the creation of experiences. The second part of the theoretical framework offers an insight in the theories on event management and how events are designed. Lastly, our research design will be presented.*

### 2.1. The Experience Economy

The economy has been a subject of change and development ever since the agrarian economy. This change and the progression of economic value is explained by Pine and Gilmore (1998) in terms of a birthday cake. Before, in the agrarian economy, birthday cakes were made from scratch by mixing commodities. When the goods-based economy later emerged, birthday cakes were no longer made from scratch but were instead made from a premade cake mix. As the service economy developed, cakes were no longer baked in the household but were instead bought in a bakery or grocery store. As of recent decades, the cake in itself has lost its value when it comes to birthdays. Instead, the celebration is the most important part, and the party is often arranged by a third party, for example, kids' parties are arranged at a playland where the cake comes for free in a package deal. (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

The economic shift that the birthday cake illustrates does not imply that there are no remains of other economic stages in the economy. Agrarian, industrial and service products are still being produced today, so those who wish can still bake their own cake. But Darmer and Sundbo (2008) claim that the transition toward the experience economy, is due to the consumers' increased demand for experiences. The increased demand can be explained by the high perceived value that consumers consider experiences to provide. With an increasing demand for experiences, it is essential for experience-providing companies, and thereby event organizers, to be innovative and construct their experience offerings in the right way. (Darmer and Sundbo, 2008). Therefore, the following theories will present a framework for experience design, which will be used in the analysis of the data collected from this study.

#### 2.1.1 Experiential marketing

In order to answer how strong experiences can be created in a hybrid setting, it is important to review the existing theories on experiences and experience design. A leading author in the field is Bernd H. Schmitt, whose studies on experiential marketing and the downfall of traditional marketing have worked as a base for recent research on experience design. Schmitt's (1999) research on experiential marketing explains the importance of creating experiences and how experiences can be shaped.



The shift from traditional marketing towards experiential marketing is explained by three simultaneous developments in the business environment. The first development is *the omnipresence of information technology*, which allows consumers and companies to connect with another at any given time. The widespread use of information technology is also deeply integrated with the second development, *the supremacy of the brand*, since the information about brands can be spread instantly over the web. This creates an idea that things which are traditionally not seen as brands, are being treated and marketed as such, which goes in hand with the third development; *The ubiquity of communications and entertainment*, which is a result of everything being branded. This has led to everything being seen as communication and entertainment for customers, leading companies to dressing themselves as customer oriented. (Schmitt, 1999).

Experiential marketing relies on four key characteristics, which differ from the traditional marketing approach, which is illustrated in figure 1. Instead of focusing on functional features and benefits of a product, experiential marketing aims to create experiences for customers to create value that replaces the functional values of a product or brand. Experiential marketing also views consumption as a holistic experience, meaning that marketers do not see products as what they are but rather see consumption situations and how products and their features can enhance the experience. Furthermore, experiential marketing does not believe that customers are rational beings but instead, are both rationally and emotionally driven. This means that marketers now also understand that even if consumers can make rational decisions, they are just as frequently motivated by emotions since consumption often is a way of pursuing fantasies, feelings, and fun. Lastly, experiential marketing views methods and tools as eclectic. Experiential marketers are supposed to use any method or tool which feels appropriate and not be bound to one marketing theory or model. (Schmitt, 1999).

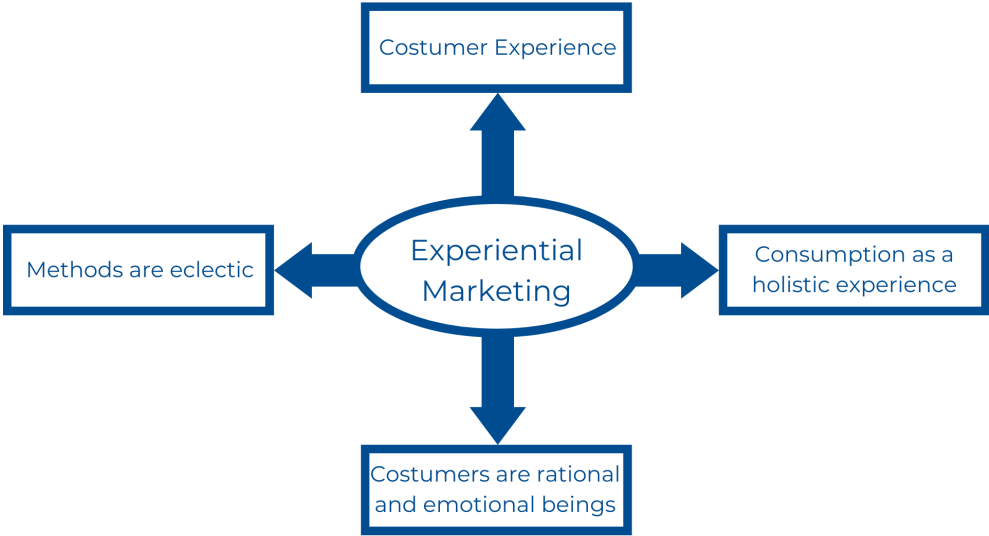


Figure 1: *The four pillars of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999).*

Schmitt (1999) has created a concept of experiential marketing which he calls Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs). The five SEMs which should be managed in experiential marketing are the SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT and RELATE modules, which all have different structures and principles, and can be managed in different ways to create the best experiences for the stakeholders of any sort of brand.

The SENSE module is about creating sensory experiences through appealing to the five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. FEEL marketing is instead about creating affective experiences so that customers can have strong positive emotions towards a brand rather than only having mildly positive feelings towards a brand. This is done by using certain stimuli to trigger the right emotions. The THINK module aims to create cognitive and problem-solving experiences which engage customers creatively. In contrast, the ACT module aims to enrich customers' lives by changing the physical experiences by offering alternative ways of doing things. The final module, RELATE, goes beyond the individual and seeks to relate the individual to a belonging outside of their private state.

2.1.2 Brand Experience

Hamzah, Alwi, and Othman (2014) later cited the ideas mentioned by Schmitt. The study explores Schmitt's ideas about experiential marketing, but in an internet setting, and focuses on corporate brand experience rather than only focusing on brands. Since brands have been the main focus of previous research, this study presents alternate ideas of creating experiences and values connected to corporations, thereby offering an insightful base and diversity of the different ways experiences can be used in marketing. (Hamzah et al., 2014). Brand experience as a concept is a brand construct that goes beyond regular brand constructs. Brand experiences are not based on general liking but on specific sensations, feelings, and behavioral responses which are evoked due to an encounter with brand-specific stimuli. (Brakus et al., 2009).

Table 1: *The brand experience design conceptualization model as presented by Hamzah et al. (2014).*

Dimension	Components
Sensory	Engage senses, perceptual interesting, sensory appeal
Affective	Mood, emotion, feelings
Cognitive	Intrigue, curiosity, creative thinking
Behavioral	Lifestyle, activities, actions
Social	Relationships, relate to other people, social rules and arrangements

The study by Hamzah et al. (2014) mentions Schmitt's ideas about brand experience as a conceptualization model consisting of five dimensions: sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and social. The model and its dimension will be used in this report to complement the framework

of experiential marketing that Schmitt presents. The five dimensions of experiences consist of three components, each that need to be understood and considered in order to create experiences that correlate to the various dimensions, which are presented in table 1. (Hamzah et al., 2014).

In order to create a sensory experience, managers need to engage the consumers' senses, and the aim is to create a brand identity by involving all five senses. A sensory experience between a consumer and a brand is influenced by a brand's visual identity like brand name, brand slogan, logo, brand colors, and brand design. By incorporating the brand-specific colors and design in stores, events, and websites, the brand can enhance its recognition and familiarity. (Hamzah et al., 2014). Color psychology is an integral part of the visual level. By using different colors, it can influence our feelings differently and therefore stimulate our sense of vision. For example, the color red tends to evoke excitement, while the color blue inspires a sense of trust. Some color combinations have even been trademarked in order to make consumers relate them to their corporation. (Solomon et al., 2014).

A brand identity is not only limited to the visual identity, instead the goal is to stimulate all five senses, which is done in different ways for each sense. Different smells can for example also help create emotions or feelings. They can invoke old memories from your childhood or act as a calming factor. Studies show that people who can smell, for example, flowers while watching ads about them are more likely to engage themselves in the buying process. Sound can affect people's behavior, feelings, and attitudes in several ways, and there are different approaches available to create desirable outcomes. Muzak is a functional type of music played in stores, shopping centers, and offices to stimulate or relax consumers. This type of music is agreed to contribute to the well-being of consumers and stimulate their buying process. The touch dimension can be stimulated by sitting in a comfortable chair at a restaurant, and the feel of a fabric can be crucial when purchasing a garment. (Solomon et al., 2014). Lastly, the taste dimension should also be incorporated to create a full sensory experience. In marketing, this is done by, for example, claiming that something is tasty or by pairing an activity with a particular taste. This was, for example, done by Gatorade, who marketed their drink with people who are thirsty and active, therefore trying to implement that they belong together. (Schmitt, 1999).

The affective experience is influenced by the components of mood, emotion, and feelings. (Hamzah et al., 2014). Even though both moods, emotions, and feelings can offer positive or negative effects, Schmitt (1999) makes a difference between the three by describing moods as a light affective state which often is triggered by stimuli which consumers are not necessarily aware of. On the other hand, emotions and feelings are strong affective states triggered by something or someone, which offer the person experiencing the emotion a more powerful affective state, that develops over time. Positive moods and strong emotions are important since they play a key role when developing a long-lasting relationship between a consumer and a brand. Therefore, a marketer needs to understand what stimuli can trigger which emotions. (Schmitt, 1999).

Cognitive experiences are created by managers through offering experiences which are intriguing, encourage curiosity and foster creative thinking among consumers. These types of experiences are meant to engage consumers creatively and aim to make consumers re-evaluate the attributes of the company, service, or product that they are experiencing. (Hamzah et al., 2014).

Behavioral experiences are experiences due to participation or observation of an event that encourages the participant or observer to change their lives. The change could be related to physical appearance, lifestyle, behavior patterns, or interaction with the object. (Hamzah et al., 2014).

Social experiences, the final dimension of the conceptualization model, revolve around linking captured value by creating relationships. The relationships created should be between consumer and brand, as well as between consumers. (Hamzah et al., 2014). The relationship between consumer and brand could be formed by likes and follows on social media, memberships, and subscriptions. While the relationship among consumers is based on a shared admiration for the brand. (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Apart from only forming relations and bonds, Hamzah et al. (2014) found that social experiences also are important for the individual's self-image, status, and prestige.

### 2.1.3 Creating enchantment

Events are part of the entertainment industry, and their main focus has always been to create experiences. Experiences have over the recent years been commercialized by everything from restaurants and stores to videogames and led to an increased supply of experiences. Therefore, event organizers and managers need to offer richer experiences to stand out in the masses of experiences. (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). There is a need to create something unique, something different from the ordinary, something that is enchanting. Enchantment can be created in numerous ways; one noticeable trend is the marketing of myths. Marketers can use myths to situate the offering in a cultural story that consumers can use to construct their identity in the desired way. (Thompson and Tian, 2008). Another trend for creating enchantment and offering ways for consumers to construct identities is by marketing nostalgia. Nostalgia marketing is based on creating connections to past times. Connections to the past and the longing for the normal has been especially visible in market communication during the pandemic. (Gammon and Ramshaw, 2020).

### Literature reflection

The theories listed in the section above process the changed role of the consumer and the increased demand for experiences. The theories discuss the importance of brands providing their customers with experiences and explain how to create strong experiences. And as Schmitt (1999) presents, everything is branded, a brand is no longer only the identifying marker for products or services, but also for institutions such as schools, or cities and also events. Since events are the subject of

study in this report, and since the main activity of the organizers that were interviewed and studied is to create experiences through different events, the theories were assessed to be relevant for analyzing the results of the collected data. When event organizers design the events and the experiences that they aim for event participants to have, they also design the brand experience, since every encounter with the brand and the participation of the event will affect how the stakeholders experience the brand.

The theories presented by Schmitt (1999) laid the foundation of the work which is presented by Hamzah et al. (2014). Therefore, they are very similar but still complement each other. The dimensions Hamzah et al. use in their study are applied to experiences from using a service, while Schmitt mainly applies his theory to marketing activities and communication. By combining the SEMs as presented by Schmitt and the experience dimensions as described by Hamzah et al., we increase the model's applicability.

The purpose of this report is to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants, it was found that the behavioral dimension and ACT module was not relevant for this study. This is because these two aspects are mainly affected by the content of the event and are not dependent on the chosen platform or location of the event. Instead, we added an alternative dimension to the two models, which processes the importance of creating enchantment. This section was seen as relevant for the study, as it declares the importance of offering something extra for customers and raises the aspect of involving nostalgia into offerings, which has been commonly used during the pandemic.

## 2.2 Event design

The event design is a very important step of the process when creating events. According to Chiara Orefice (2018), there is no agreed definition for event design, but she claims that there is an overall agreement that event design aims to create and deliver meaningful experiences. This section of the study will treat some research that considers the design as experience creation, as well as it will give a deeper definition to the hybrid event term.

### 2.2.1 Hybrid events

The Covid-19 pandemic forced companies to transform the way they do business overnight, causing years of change in a matter of months. The effect can be seen not only through digitization of interaction with customers and suppliers but also by the growing share of digital and digitally enabled products offered by businesses' product portfolios. According to a global survey conducted by McKinsey among executives and senior partners, many respondents believed that most of the changes made will last for a long time. (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

The technological shift mentioned in the McKinsey report has been especially apparent in the event industry. Many event organizers have been forced to cancel their events, postpone them, or arrange

them digitally. (Vulture, 2021). The Company Aventri disclosed the results of a recently conducted study in a seminar with the Event Manager Blog (2020), where 147 event organizers were asked about the changes, they had made to their events due to the pandemic. 91% of the respondents were sure that the virtual elements, which they had included in their events, would persist in the future and that the digital event form opened up possibilities to reach out to more attendees and sponsors and add flexibility to the event. Jim Sharpe, CEO of Aventri, said in the seminar that a big trend in event management is to combine physical events with virtual components, since it offers a more dynamic experience to a larger number of people and refers to these types of events as hybrid events. (Event MB, 2020)

A hybrid event is a function constructed by both physical and digital elements, where participants can take part in the event from any location. Essentially, this means that a hybrid event consists of a live and online audience, and regardless of if someone chooses to participate live or online, they have the opportunity to take part in the same content and experience. (Heijkoop, 2014). Hybrid events can be seen in various formats, such as seminars, conferences, product launches, business meetings, etc. The hybrid event delivers an immersive online experience by overcoming the gap between virtual and physical events by bringing the physical and virtual audience together in real-time, connecting them to the same frame. Hybrid events are gaining more and more momentum, and the ongoing pandemic has speeded up the transition. (Kacholia, 2020). The reason why hybrid events are believed to remain, even after the pandemic is over, is since the offering of both digital and physical participants opens up for a more diversified and dynamic event. Apart from making the event available to new audiences, sponsors and partnerships, it offers flexibility to the event organizers. (Event MB, 2020). Arranging a hybrid event can also be seen as a more sustainable option than a physical event since it minimizes unnecessary traveling.

When arranging a hybrid event, it is essential to include both physical and virtual participants in the same experiences. One important aspect of events, especially social events like fairs, which are the subject of study for this report, is to foster networking and social interaction between attendees. In the session with the Event Manager Blog (2020), Jim Sharpe talks about the importance of finding ways for online participants to network, as it is the primary way to build communities and engage attendees.



Figure 2: A visual representation of hybrid events

### 2.2.2. Designing for experiences

When looking at event design, our report needs to consider research about how the event design creates experiences. Engaging people in a personal way will result in some kind of experience that is said to be the core phenomena of an event. This engagement will create value that persists long after the event is done. Therefore, one can argue about the importance of seeking a deeper understanding of how these event experiences are designed and created. According to Berridge (2012), the first question to be asked is: "to what extent can planned event experiences be designed?". Then the writer addresses the importance of identifying what kind of event is planned through its function, in other words, why they are held. Eleven functions are listed and divided into categories such as premier, cause-related, spectator, and participant events, and secondly through to their form. Therefore, one can state that it is important for the event manager to consider these different aspects when designing the experience; what they are doing, why, and the desired outcome is.

The challenge of creating an event is to design an environment that will give people the experience, and in the longer range, the desired outcomes that the event is aiming at. The event stage-managed environment should create authentic experience moments within the settings for its participants. For an event to be successful, it needs to have a design-led approach that will satisfy the participants' expectations. The design must be regarded as the basis to achieve a successful production of event experience; it should have a concept expressed both verbally and visually that executes the concept of the whole event. Event experiences arise with the creations the event managers can develop with the help of tools to employ and equate design. This view of event planning should be holistically applied to the foundation of the built event premise (Berridge, 2012). The creation of planned event experiences should be part of a deliberate and integrated design-based process where the elements of the event are well-plotted and thought through to construct the environment of the event where the specific experiences can be consumed. This should include all stages of the event planning process consisting of pre-actual and post-event stages. This means that the required activities of the event designing will ultimately result in delivering the experience, starting from the initial concepts of the event, and successively follows through all the elements.

Berridge (2014) argues that it is vital for the event manager to imagine and envision the whole event experience from participants' view before the event has happened to identify elements that will create satisfactory or unsatisfactory experiences. When doing this, anticipating experiences, the design of an event can be a tool to predict the future outcome; in other words, the design can be used to create the experiences the event is aiming at. One method to do this is to find the key dimensions of event experience which are anticipation, arrival, atmosphere, appetite, activity, and amenities. Therefore, the event manager's job is to provide opportunities to affect the audience's behavior and deliver positive experiences. This by planning as many of the event components to facilitate the goals of the various stakeholders (Orefice, 2018). Focusing on the audience, there are three pillars of design that can be identified: to capture the audience, provide the foundation for an



optimal experience, and deliver the event's primary goal. But there is more to it, such as emotions and authenticity. Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012) state that the event design is relatable to activating the sensory and emotional experiences. Understanding all the multi-dimensional characteristics of an event, the psychological and behavioral elements of the audience, and thus identifying the sensory, affective, cognitive, and cognitive components will help design effective experiences and improve the predictability of the experience outcomes (Orefice, 2018). To create the experiences, the organizer needs to understand the participants' role in belonging, relationship to other people, causes, and environment. The event design should have the characteristics of delivering a "participatory, emotional and memorable experience" (McLoughlin 2015).

### 2.2.3 The event design ladder

The even design ladder, as illustrated in figure 3, provides information on how event design planning has developed over the years. The different steps of the ladder differ in how you look at the stakeholders and, in this way, also differs in how you use event design as a tool. In other words, the view of stakeholders will affect the event design activities. Step one does not recognize the stakeholders at all, and therefore there is no design. Moving up to the next step of the ladder, the stakeholders are seen as consumers where the design is used as form-giving, the event theme, decor, and styling are essential processes in the project management. Step three views the stakeholders as resources for experience creation, and where the design is a problem-solving activity, this step also incorporates the vital view that events create experiences. The fourth and last step of the ladder is still in its infancy; here, stakeholders are viewed as co-creators and co-designers of a value system, and the design is seen as a strategy. This is a long-term perspective where the events are used as a dynamic network that integrates people, objects, and resources.

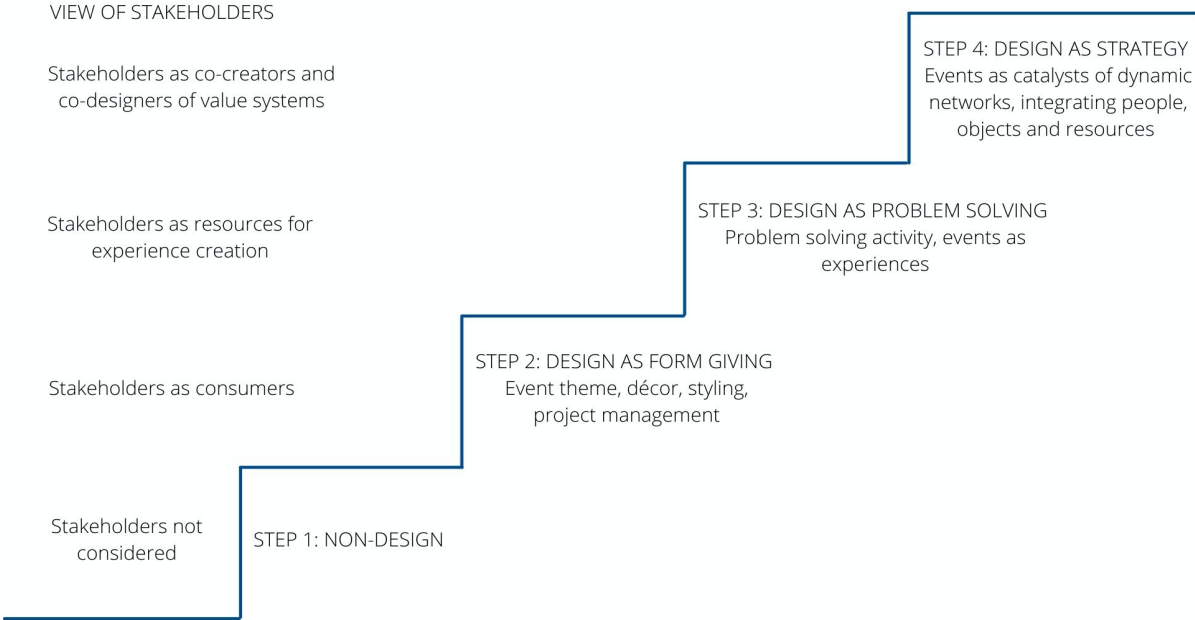


Figure 3: *The event design ladder* (Orefice, 2018)



## Literature reflection

The section Event Design processes information and theories about; hybrid events, design for strong experiences, and the event design ladder. Information about hybrid events is essential for this report since it is this type of event, the purpose is to investigate. Using previous knowledge about the event form, the report can take its stand from this and anchor the analysis to reality to develop it further.

In order to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event to create the most valuable experience for consumers and to maximize generated value for event organizers, information and theories about the event design were vital since it is said to create experiences. When obtaining an in-depth understanding of the subject, this lays ground for how event organizers, with the design, can generate strong experiences. It was found that the event design is relatable to activating the sensory and emotional experiences, which also by Hamzah and Schmitt is stated to create experiences for the participants of an event in that way, the theories can also be linked together. The event design theories process how organizers can design the event to create the most valuable experience for consumers and maximize generated value for event organizers. Therefore, it is an important component for this report to address to answer its research questions.

The event design ladder provides information about how the organizers' view of the stakeholders, impacts the design of the event. This means that the organizers' view of the event's stakeholders is crucial for how you use the event design as a tool to create strong experiences and what impact the event's design will have. This information can be useful in order to investigate what the events are designed and created to fulfill. It can also make interesting connections to the shift of the experience economy, since the progression of “view of stakeholders” goes in line with the changed role of consumers as according to Schmitt (1999).

## 2.3 Our research design

The above theories about experience design and event design often go hand in hand on many levels, but they also complete each other's cavities. Berridge (2012) describes that the design of an event causes and creates opportunities for strong experiences. Hamzah et al. (2014) and Schmitt (1999) have divided experiences into different categories and provide managers with information regarding what tools and stimuli can trigger different types of experiences. Therefore, it is important for this study to connect these theories to our interview questions to enable an in-depth analysis of how this is used in practice.

The interview guide was consequently structured so that the theories that are presented in this chapter would be treated in its entirety. This was done by structuring the interview guide into three sections: event design, hybrid events and brand experience. The questions in the different sections were directly connected to the theories that were relevant to the section's headings. In the event design section, we treated questions that went in line with the theories from Berridge (2012, 2014)

and Orefice (2018). The brand experience section of the interview guide instead consisted of questions that could be connected to the models of Hamzah et al. (2014), Schmitt (1999) together with questions regarding enchantment. And in the section regarding hybrid events, we asked questions that were related to international experts' beliefs regarding hybrid events in general as well as their future. Because the interview guide is conducted with strong connections to the previous theories about event design and experience design, this will support the study's analysis where findings can be referred to the theories.

The questions were also formulated so that they would be able to answer what we found was lacking from the information provided by the existing literature. When discussing hybrid events, it is essential to understand that it needs to deliver the same experiences for both viewers who are attending the event online and physically. Therefore, the digital elements are investigated in the interviews and the netnography, and then compared to the physical to make conclusions about the possibilities and challenges for a hybrid setting.

The event design ladder by Orefice (2018) is important as a complement for the theories regarding the experience economy, as it illustrates the changed role of consumers. Just as the theories by Schmitt (1999) point out, the event design ladder shows how the role and view of consumers have gone from demanding goods and being rational to demanding experiences and being part of the experience.

### 3. Method

*In the following chapter, the methods used in this report will be presented, motivated and explained.*

#### 3.1 Qualitative Method

The purpose of this report was to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants. Since this was studied by investigating how event organizers design their events, it was of importance to understand the social world of events from the event managers point of view. The collected data in this report was discussed and evaluated in order to gain a wider understanding on the subject. Therefore, this report will be written using a qualitative approach, since it is a suitable method when analyzing subjective experiences and situations. (Flick, 2018). The focus of qualitative research is according to Bryman and Bell (2011), to understand and interpret the researched participants' reality.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

This section of the report will present how the data was collected through semi structured interviews and netnography. The semi structured interviews were made to gain inside expert information within the research area. The netnography was conducted to triangulate the findings in the interviews as well as obtaining data and inputs from additional stakeholders that can be linked to the events.

##### 3.2.1 Semi Structured Expert Interviews

The purpose of this report was to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants. In order to take part of event industry insights, we chose to make expert interviews with industry professionals to access key knowledge on event organizing as well as their evaluations of digital and physical event forms. (Libakova and Sertakova, 2015). The interviews were held with representatives from each of the chosen events that were considered to have relevant insights in how the digital version of their events was constructed, and the event's outcome. And an additional interview with an independent event expert was held to cross-check the findings from the interviews with the event representatives. All of the interviews were held digitally through video calls and were held in Swedish; thus, quotes were translated from their original language into English.

Before the semi-structured interviews were held, we developed an interview guide with specific questions on the topic researched, where we also left room for the respondent to reply freely. The interview guide was created with the support of the report's theoretical framework, and included questions based on the information which were assessed to be of relevance for the report. For each

question asked in the interview, the interview guide also consisted of sub-questions which could be asked if the interviewee needed directing or clarification on the question asked. (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interview guide which was used when conducting the interviews can be found in the appendix. *See appendix 1.*

The main purpose of constructing a semi-structured interview was to make room for the respondents own position and thoughts as well as to ask follow up questions based on the answer which the respondents gave. With this type of interview, the respondent was encouraged to get into various interesting and relevant topics on a deeper level than the guide otherwise would have addressed on its own. This led to a conversation about the different topics that the interview addressed rather than standardized questions and answers, which gave deeper insights and more personal answers from each respondent. The interview guide made sure that all questions were answered by all respondents, but without compromising the flexibility of the interviews. Having a flexible interview was crucial since the responding companies organized their events at various times, meaning they had to deal with very different restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and thereby had very different conditions for organizing their events. (Bryman and Bell, 2011)

By constructing semi-structured interviews with relevant respondents, we gathered an in-depth understanding about the research area of hybrid events. As the respondents were given the same base structured questions, along with the freedom of talking around them we believe to have received important insights for our report from the core of knowledge.

### 3.2.2 Choice of respondents

The selection of respondents for the interviews was made to collect relevant data for the report. The respondents were limited to associations who previously arranged physical events, but due to the pandemic organized a digital event instead. The respondents are believed to have relevant insights for the research conducted in this report due to their knowledge about arranging physical and digital events. Because of their experience with both event forms, they can contribute with their observations of which digital elements they found successful and would want to keep in future editions of the event, as well as which elements they found more complicated to replicate in a digital environment. In the following section, the event organizers interviewed will be presented more in depth.

#### Göteborg Film Festival

Göteborg Film Festival is one of Sweden's biggest cultural events and is the largest film festival in the Nordic countries. During the 11-day long festival, 450 movies from 80 countries are shown in roughly 1000 screenings, which annually attracts around 160 000 visitors. In addition to the film festival, which is held between January and February every year, the association Göteborg Film Festival also arranges a youth film festival *Göteborg Film Festival Prisma* and *Göteborg Film Festival Open Air* which is a free outdoor festival held in the Garden Society of Gothenburg. (Göteborg Film Festival, 2021a)

Apart from broadcasting numerous movies in the Gothenburg cinemas, the festival offers plenty of other activities around the city such as seminars, concerts, art and workshops. The Göteborg Film Festival is also an important meeting place for industry representatives all around the world and is the main marketplace for Nordic movies and TV. (Göteborg Film Festival, 2021b)

### Gadden

Gadden is the Gothenburg University's career fair for the business, economics, law, logistics and environmental science students that attend the School of Business, Economics and Law in Gothenburg. Gadden is the largest project of the student union HHGS, and the largest career fair of its kind in the Nordic countries. The project committee of Gadden consists entirely of students, which apart from the two-day long career fair, also arrange pre-events to the fair, such as workshops and lectures, for the students to attend. (GADDEN, 2021). The career fair is an annual event which takes place in the premises at the School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University, and offers a place for students and companies to network and create long lasting relationships. (HHGS, 2018). Each year, the career fair is visited by approximately 6000 students and by over 100 exhibitors. During the event, lectures on contemporary subjects are held by well-known lecturers and the first fair day is ended by a mingle event, and the last day of the fair is celebrated through a grand banquet. (GADDEN, 2021).

### Göteborg Book Fair

Göteborg Book Fair, which was first started in 1985, is today the largest cultural event in the Nordic countries. When the first edition of the Göteborg Book Fair was held, the goal was to offer a conference consisting of interesting seminars for librarians. Today, the fair attracts 85 000 visitors annually, and among the visitors you can find industry visitors such as teachers and librarians, as well as the general public of book lovers. (Göteborg Book Fair, 2021a). The fair takes place at the Swedish Exhibition and Congress Centre in Gothenburg, where close to 800 different exhibitors could be found at the 2019 Book Fair, and more than 3000 authors, researchers, cartoonists, politicians, journalists and cultural figures took part in debates and discussions on all conceivable topics. (Göteborg Book Fair, 2021b). The main activities at the book fair are seminars, stage programs and different activities in the exhibitors' stands. (Bokmässan, 2021a).

Apart from being a literature festival which focuses on the latest books from around the world, the Göteborg Book Fair is also a place for debate and discussion on international themes and political issues of world importance, a manifestation of arts and culture, and a tribute to the freedom of expression. (Göteborg Book Fair, 2021a). Each edition of the book fair has one or more main themes. In previous years, the themes have been linked to the literature of different countries, such as German speaking countries and the Nordic countries, but the Göteborg Book Fair has also had main themes of more general character, such as multiculturalism, popular science, respect and equality. (Bokmässan, 2021b)

## Nine Yards

Nine Yards is a communication agency which helps their clients to create brand experiences through communication solutions, content production and physical, digital and hybrid events. The company has, since its beginning in 2004, worked with many big brands such as XL-Bygg, Elgiganten and Carlsberg Sweden, and have arranged events for groups of 50-7000 people. (Nine Yards, n.d).

The company representative Rasmus was interviewed for this study as an external expert on events and experience design. His insights on creating experiences and hybrid events were valuable for the study to receive an independent statement as a complement to the residual interviews. Using an independent source of information like Rasmus helped to confirm that the data retrieved from the other interviews was not biased by their own reflections and interpretations from their events but could reflect the industry as a whole.

### 3.2.3 Netnography

The aim of this report was to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants. To do so, it was relevant to examine how the event organizers used their social media platforms, and how people with great interest in the different events reacted to announcements and content that the event organizers posted on their social media. Therefore, a netnographic study was conducted. The term netnography was coined by Kozinets, as a term for a research method used to explore online communications and to gather consumer insights, which was the aim of this research method. (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

By studying reactions such as comments and posts from the visitors of the event, we could distinguish the interactive elements that were created by the use of these platforms, and also what people that participated in the events had to say about their experiences when the event was held digitally. This offered an insight in how online participants of a hybrid event would experience the event and interact with each other and the event organizers if the event was held in a hybrid format.

Before doing the netnography, an observation guide was structured in order to make sure that focus was maintained during the observation. This also enabled a reflexive element where we as observers could reflect over how we were affected by the observations. The topics that the guide processed were based on the theoretical framework which also laid the foundation of the questionnaire used in the interviews. This was done so that the results of the netnography would treat the same areas as the interviews and help answer the research question of this study. This also gave us the opportunity to cross check what was said by the respondents during the interviews in order to have a triangulation effect. The observation guide for the netnography can be found in the appendix. *See appendix 2.*

The netnography was then conducted by browsing the media platforms that were promoted and owned by the event organizers that were interviewed, such as their websites, Instagram and Facebook accounts. The events also used hashtags on their social media pages and posts, which enabled us to look further into what attendees' and stakeholders posted regarding the different events. This allowed us to get a versatile view on the events seen from the attendee's perspective, and to be a part of the groups which are active on the social media of the different events. The groups which engage in posting information and views on a topic often are people who are passionate and knowledgeable on the matter, their opinions and insights are important to consider. (Kozinets, 2002).

### 3.3 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the results from the interviews held, all interviews were recorded. The recordings were, shortly after the interview, carefully listened through several times and transcribed. The transcription of recordings was a necessary step before interpreting the data from the interviews. (Flick, 2018).

The data obtained from the interviews and netnography were then coded, which allowed us to identify similar key elements that could be gathered into phenomena. By coding, the phenomena were grouped into categories that consisted of similar content, these categories then resulted in themes which were made out of a collection of categories that could answer the research questions and conclusions could be drawn. *See table 2* for the coding process. The final coding scheme can be found in the appendices. *See appendix 3*

Table 2: *Chart of the different stages of coding and data analysis.*

Stage	Purpose
<i>Codes</i>	Identifying key elements of the data
<i>Phenomena</i>	Assembly of codes of similar content
<i>Categories</i>	Broad groups of similar phenomena
<i>Themes</i>	A collection of categories that allows the study to answer the research question

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

The research conducted in this study has been in line with the four ethical principles to qualitative research. The method framework was designed to avoid the following: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The informed consent was the first thing which we considered when contacting the companies which were prospective research participants. By explaining the background and research aims of the thesis, the respondents were well informed about what it meant to be a participant in the study. The prospective research participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary. Before



the interviews were held, the respondents were asked if it would be okay for us to record the interview and were also asked after the interviews were held if there was anything which they wanted to keep confidential by being anonymous. (Flick, 2018).

The second issue to keep in mind when designing the study to be in accordance with the ethical principles was to design the interview guide so that it would not include any questions or topics of conversation which could be harmful to the responding companies, to the company representatives with which we met, or to anyone else. The interview guide was also designed to only ask relevant questions for the study, and to not ask personal questions which could cause an invasion of anyone's privacy. (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

By being truthful and keeping the research participants informed about the research aims of the study, the risk of being deceptive was minimized. There are benefits of being vague about research aims and to not tell the respondents that they will be recorded before the end of the interview, since it keeps the respondents unbiased about the subject and makes room for more natural responses. Since the interviewees were seen as experts on the subject, and the aim of the interviews was to take part of their experience and insights on hybrid events, it was better to keep the respondents well informed about which subjects would be discussed. By keeping the interviewees well informed, they could be well prepared for the interviews and the discussions could therefore be more profound. (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

All of the data which was retrieved from the netnography were anonymized and handled with discretion, since it was not possible to ask all of the social media profiles which had commenced and published posts for consent. Therefore, anonymization was necessary, in order to not compromise any identities of the publishers of the collected data.

### 3.5 Assurance of quality

By using multiple research methods, the complexity and contradiction in the data was captured (Bryman and Bell, 2011). When collecting data for the study both semi structured interviews and netnography was used, thus, strengthened the results and conclusions made from the collected data. The data collected from the interviews was also supplemented with netnography which led to a *triangulation*. The netnography was made to cross check findings in the interviews, and together with the interview that was held with an independent source, it enabled three different resources of data which increased the reliability and validity of the data.

Reliability and validity are important criteria when assessing quality of the research when using a qualitative method. Bryman and Bell (2011) present the criteria to reach reliability and validity as trustworthiness and authenticity. In order to produce a study with high trustworthiness the four aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were closely applied and considered. For example, the correspondents have been able to read their statements before



publishing the study, to ensure that there were no misunderstandings between the writers and the respondent.

There is criticism pointed at the qualitative research method. When using this approach, the data collected was to be subjectively interpreted and understood by the writers themselves. By this there was a risk that the results of the research had been colored by the writer's own reflections and perceptions. Therefore, when the study was conducted the goal was to stay as objective as possible both during, and after the data collection, though this could have influenced the results since total objectivity can be hard to perform.

## 4. Results and analysis

*This chapter will present the results and analysis of the findings obtained in the expert interviews and the netnography received from observing the event organizers social media platforms. The result of the coding of the data will be presented combined with an analysis tied to the literature from the theoretical framework.*

During the duration of the study, we identified a couple phenomena that were relevant for several or all of the respondents which were interviewed. Phenomena that were related to each other were grouped into categories, with which we could identify two important themes:

1. Designing the event
2. Designing of the experience

In the first theme, we will present and analyze the data that processes the opportunities of a digital or hybrid event format and how to capture the crucial part of enabling interactions for online participants and offering them social experiences, even in a digital environment.

In the second theme, we will process the creation of the four experience dimensions that can be generated in events: sensory, enchanting, affective and cognitive experiences. The coding scheme that was used to develop the two themes can be found in the appendix. *See appendix 3.*

### 4.1 Theme 1: Designing the event

Berridge (2012) argues that the design of an event can be used as a tool to create the experiences the event intends to achieve and deliver to their participants. It is therefore a vital part for this study to analyze the interviewees' consideration regarding the design of their events. To attain an in-depth understanding of how the design can create strong experiences in a hybrid environment where physical and digital are combined.

#### Ways of participation

From interviewing Göteborg Film Festival, Gadden and Göteborg Book Fair, it was clear that even though they are very different events, they all have a physical arena which has been of great importance to them when arranging their events. The movie theatre Draken is the heart of the Göteborg Film Festival, Svenska Mässan is where the Göteborg Book Fair takes place annually, and the grounds of the School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University is the main site of Gadden. The three events all have the city of Gothenburg in common, and those wishing to attend or participate in any of the following events when held physically, had to visit the city to take part of them.

Pre-covid, when it was possible to arrange physical events, the arrangers had the whole city of Gothenburg as their canvas to design their event. Since the latest edition of the events were held

digitally, alternate ways of participation had to be constructed. All of the interviewees presented that they had developed or hired a digital platform to arrange their events, but they were somewhat differentiated from each other. Gadden used the platform Graduateland, a platform developed to connect students with future employers, and which functioned as an online fair where exhibiting students could connect with companies and chat. Göteborg Film Festival and Göteborg Book Fair on the other hand used their platforms *Draken Film* and *Bokmässan Play*. Draken Film is a streaming service provided by Göteborg Film Festival, but during the festival, it was used as an online cinema. To make the digital festival more than just another streaming service and to get the feeling of it being an online cinema they created a tableau with new premiers every day, the movie was then only available for 24 hours to make it more exclusive. Bokmässan Play was developed by Göteborg Book Fair as a response to the fair being held digitally. The play service broadcasted live seminars which were also recorded, which allowed participants to either watch the seminars live and to watch them later on. This made it possible for viewers to rewatch their favorite seminars, and to catch up on discussions which the viewer had not been able to watch live. The designs of the platforms were well arranged and according to Berridge (2012) when considering the experience of the participants throughout the whole design this opened up for extensive experiences.

An aspect that the interviewees mention to have considered was that some of the participants might have suffered from technical issues in the matter of not having enough technical skills. To handle this, they created technical support divisions where the participants could get help and continue the experience in the online setting. The respondent from Nine Yards also commented on this aspect with the attitude that this, on the other hand, would not be a problem in the future since those generations will and are developing greater technical skills.

When shifting into a digital setting, the need of replacing meetings that used to be physical was important. In the interviews it was found that one solution was to use different social media platforms and other mediums to communicate with visitors of the events. Göteborg Film Festival replaced seminars with podcasts which became very popular. Every day during the festival they released new episodes that included in depth interviews with the movie creators of which movies had premiered the day the podcast was released and other interesting subjects that were enlightened by the festival were discussed as well. Another respondent used Instagram as moderator during a live seminar to obtain questions from the viewers that the speakers then could answer live, in that way the viewers could participate in the discussion even though the meeting was not physical. In that way the participants could feel more participatory which would result in a memorable experience (McLouglin, 2015).

The interviews held both with the event organizers and with Nine Yards, show that one great opportunity with hybrid events and the integration of digital elements is to keep the past event alive for a greater period of time. In the case of Göteborg Book Fair, the seminar programs were

available for people to watch from the 25th of September until the 31st of March 2021. By keeping the seminar programs available for a longer period of time, the fair could create greater experiences for their participants as they could relive their favorite moments again and again. This was also acknowledged by the respondent Maria to be positive for partners, as it now was possible for them to be part of the event for a longer period of time.

*Now we are very happy that we have this platform today (...) we have started to have side events such as the award ceremony for Årets Bok and Storytel Awards. The Bokmässan Play then became an attractive platform for our partners to be seen on. We have more traffic to the website, many subscribers to newsletters and such. We can also offer content all year round in a different way, meaning that the Book Fair no longer is bound only to the four days in Gothenburg (...) which was interesting for us and also for the authors and publishers. – Maria, Göteborg Book Fair*

With an increased traffic to the websites and a long-lived event, we can assume that this creates even more incentives for potential partners to be a part of the events. This because it enables the partners to be seen as well as communicate their own offerings for a longer time on the digital event platform, than would have been possible at a strictly physical event.

### Familiarize with your target group

Berridge (2012) expresses the importance of identifying the function of the event before designing the event, and with that underline the importance of knowing your target audience. From the data collected in the interviews, we could also see that this was true in practice. When the respondents were asked what the main thing to consider before planning an event was, many of them answered that the first thing to think about is for whom you are creating the event.

The respondent from Nine Yards was of the opinion that organizers of fairs and similar events have to categorize their events, exhibitors and happenings more thoroughly, so that consumers easily can locate those things which are of interest to them.

An audience that attends the event digitally, is often attending from the comfort of their own home and are more prone to get distracted and go do something else. This was also acknowledged by the respondents; Maria said the following when asked about how they planned for the digital edition of the Göteborg Book Fair:

*It was very important to reconcile with the thought that we cannot do everything. We cannot translate the physical book fair into a digital format, that will not work. Instead, we had to think about how to adapt it to be even better. It was at that point we started and then landed in this; that TV-production is what people are used to. We need to work with a host that keeps up the tempo and makes it interesting for the viewer. Then people may not have the patience to sit for 45 minutes so we needed to shorten the formats of the*

*program. When you sit at home the viewers will have some other demands. -  
Maria, Göteborg Book Fair*

When planning for a hybrid event, the online participants are those to consider in the first place. As Rasmus from Nine Yards said:

*“People that participate online, it is their focus that needs to be considered. It is much easier to get distracted when you watch something from home, and as soon as the viewer wanders off, you risk losing the viewer. (...) In TV-production it is always the viewers at home on the couch that are being focused on, as a TV-host you do not look at the audience, you look into the camera since it is the people watching from home you whose interest you want to keep”.*

The same fixation on at-home participants which is used in TV productions, should be used in hybrid event productions, this is partly done by our respondents as they incorporate the physical location in the digital context, and as they worked with traditional TV-production during their digital events. The important key takeaway from the interview that we held, was that TV-production would be the way to go even with a physical audience. In this way organizers can create equivalent experiences to both live and online participants in a hybrid event, and the concentration of the online participants would be more easily captured. By designing the event this way the organizers try to overcome the gap discussed by Kacholia (2020).

Connecting our findings to the Event design ladder (Orefice, 2018) they show that the organizers see their various stakeholders as resources for creating experiences but also as co-creators of the event which puts them somewhere in between the third and fourth step of the ladder. They sent out different surveys to gather information about what the stakeholders of the events thought and then gathered this feedback to design the event with consideration of their thoughts and wishes. This also goes in line with the shift to the experience economy and the changed role of the consumers. The organizers clearly consider their consumers as co-creators or sources of information to create the best experience possible. This results in that the events are designed and created to, what is shown in the ladders third and fourth steps, provide experiences and to work as dynamic networks that integrate people. As we will process further in the chapter *Enabling interactions*, the participants of events are seen as co-creators as the interaction between participants determines what kind of social experiences the participants have, which is a crucial part of all of the events which were studied.

### Reaching the audience

The results of the interviews clearly showed that by arranging a digital event rather than a physical one, it opened up for a bigger audience and for interesting partnerships, which also was one of the upsides of hybrid events which was mentioned by professionals. (Event MB, 2020). This is clear to see in the case of the Göteborg Film Festival. Arranging the film festival digitally, made it

possible for more people to watch more movies. During a physical film festival, about 30 000 unique visitors buy 145 000 movie tickets. The 2021 online film festival attracted 40 000 unique participants, who together watched 425 000 screenings. Usually, the main visitors at the Göteborg Film Festival are based in Gothenburg or Västra Götaland County, but during the digital edition of the festival, 25% of the participants lived in the region of Stockholm, and in total, the participants of the event were from more than 250 different municipalities.

The same was true for the Göteborg Book Fair, where the digital edition made the fair available to target groups which usually don't attend the fair. From the interview with Göteborg Book Fair we learnt that according to a customer survey conducted by the Göteborg Book Fair, 25% of the visitors of Bokmässan Play had never before attended the fair, and the main audience was no longer centered to the Västra Götaland County which it has often been in previous years. Even the international group of fair attendees grew. Particularly, there was a large rise in the number of Nordic visitors, which was an audience group that increased by 88%. In total, the number of views on the Göteborg Book Fair was around 650 000 by the 31st of December 2020, which can be compared to the number of visitors at the Book Fair in 2019, which had around 86 000 visitors, which is due to the increased availability and the opportunity to relive the fair long after the fair took place.

The career fair Gadden's target group are students at the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg, and therefore their main goal was not to reach out to a larger audience of students. Instead, they found that during their digital edition of Gadden, it was more natural to include lecturers from all around the world, than it would have been in a physical setting. For example, when Gadden arranged a lunch lecture with Business Sweden, the lecturers were people from Stockholm, Hong Kong and Dubai, which were all able to attend without any sort of traveling.

For the events which aim to reach out to a larger audience, offering a digital alternative to the physical one has been proven to be successful, as it makes the event available for new customer segments and partnerships. This also adds diversity to the event, since participants are able to choose their way of participation. As the representative from Göteborg Film Festival pointed out:

*“By having a hybrid event, which offers both the opportunity to participate at the event physically and the opportunity of participating from a distance, people can learn about the festival in the comfort of their own home, and hopefully decide that they want to experience the festival from Gothenburg the following year”.*

The netnography confirmed that the audience of the digital events were diversified seen from geographical location. Many comments in the comment section of Göteborg Film Festival and Göteborg Book Fair said something along the lines of “I have always wanted to go, but haven't

been able to find the time, this year I could finally participate from location X!”. As can be seen from the quoted comments below. It was also clear to see from the netnography that many stakeholders wished the digital events to remain as a complement to the physical events in the future, since it would enable them to take part of more happenings than a strictly physical event would.

*“Thank you for a lovely festival. Smooth, nice setting and very affordable. It has been so nice to have the opportunity to watch tons of good movies at home on the sofa, far from Gothenburg. I really hope that this will be possible even in the future. Thank you.”*

*“This was so fun and very interesting movies. Thank you for allowing us, all over the country, to be a part of the festival this year!!!! I hope that this will become a tradition!”*

- *Comments from the Facebook of Göteborg Film Festival*

### Enabling interactions

One thing that was clear from both the interviews held and the netnography, was that many lacked the possibility to communicate and create relationships with other participants of the event. Most of the respondents acknowledged that they did not offer any certain mediums for online participants to have discussions about happenings at the event, and that this was something that needed further work in potential upcoming hybrid editions of the event. A crucial role of the events which were studied, is to be a mediator between consumers and industry representatives, and for this reason, the ability to create connections even in digital format is central if they were to arrange their events as a hybrid. These findings are supported by Jim Sharpe (2020) talking about the importance of finding ways for online participants to network, as it is the main way to build communities and engage attendees.

Göteborg Book Fair and Göteborg Film Festival, which are important meeting places for industry representatives, both came up with solutions to fix the meeting between industry representatives. Since it was still possible to meet in smaller groups when the Göteborg Book Fair took place, they arranged small dinner parties, mainly in Stockholm since that's where many authors live. Göteborg Film Festival did not have the same opportunity, but instead used a conference platform where people from the movie industry could meet digitally, have seminars and have online mingles.

Most of the happenings during the events were pre-filmed or live streamed, and therefore the consumers had little to no opportunity to communicate with each other or the ones who moderated the seminars or discussions. When studying the social media of the different events, it was clear to see that many attendees lacked the opportunity to make small talk and discuss the movies or seminars seen. This can be shown in the citation below, where a person has commented on a post,

saying that they missed the discussions which took place in the theatre after the movies, and other people also commented that they agree with the statement.

*Thank you for fixing this for us who normally are crowded on the stairs of Draken. I usually watch 20 films, due to the easy accessibility I got to watch 35 this year but I missed the discussions in the salon! A big thanks to all of you who made this possible! - Comment from the Instagram of Göteborg Film Festival*

When browsing the media platforms, you could see that the organizers generally used interactive questions in combination with posts to create discussions and engagement. Which goes in line with what McLoughlin (2015) states, shows that the organizers of the events have considered in their design, that the participants need to feel in belonging and relationship with others deliver a participatory and memorable experience. An example of this is from Göteborg Book Fair's Facebook, where they asked their followers which of the books that were nominated to the award Årets Bok 2021 that they had read, and which book they hoped would be the winner of the competition. Many people commented on the post and also answered other people's comments, as seen from figure 4.



Figure 4: The post and comment section of Göteborg Book Fair where the followers are asked to share which book they have voted for.

Even though the use of social media encourages people to interact with the organizers of the events, authors, movie producers etc., the interaction between different stakeholders on these platforms cannot be said to offer the same social stimuli as participants at a physical event would have experienced. The need to socialize and create relationships with other people with similar interests is part of the RELATE module, one of the five SEMs constructed by Schmitt (1999) hence,



offering platforms for attendees to connect with likeminded people is of great importance when organizing an event with online participants.

*The benefits of using the platform were that the companies could get in direct touch with the students, something you cannot do on a physical fair. When this was digital, they could look up the students and write to them. They could also get information about the students through their uploaded CV and other things. This was a benefit as it was easier for the students to chat with them and that it lifted the social “barrier” a bit. Even though this was a benefit the disadvantages were almost overwhelming I would say. The whole thing about the fair is that you get to see and feel each other physically and that is something you cannot do in a chat function. So, it was positive that it was easier to communicate but also negative that it is not the same thing without the presence of the students. - Olivia Gadden*

Enabling interaction possibilities between the participants of the online fair is by the citation from Olivia both important and beneficial but has its challenges. Since the very reason for these types of events is to discover and connect with people, it is very important for a hybrid event to provide a social experience where relationship creation is enabled.

What can be interpreted from the interviews and netnography, is that some interactions can be recreated in a digital format. In contrast, others might still need to be kept physically as of now, and therefore different encounters might need to be handled separately. This can be seen both from the quote of Olivia and from the fact that the Göteborg Book Fair arranged small dinner parties between industry representatives. This is because it shows that those wishing to enter some contract or deal will feel the need to meet up with the company or person in real life. From this, we can assume that these types of meetings in a hybrid edition could have advantages with physical interaction. Furthermore, it can be seen from Olivia's statement that it might be suitable to have the first encounter on a digital platform, as it lifts the social barrier. However, we can decode that encounters that can possibly lead to an agreement or partnership might require a physical meeting.

#### 4.2 Theme 2: Designing the experience

As said by Darmer and Sundbo (2008) the shift towards an experience economy and consumers' increased demand for experiences has led to the point where just buying your book or watching your movie no longer is enough. People are looking for an experience in everything that they see, do and consume. Therefore, extraordinary experiences are vital for organizers of events to produce. This is to be created through the design of the experience. From the interviews and netnography, four different categories with phenomena have been detected and will be analyzed to make clarity in how the experiences are designed and how it relates to previous studies within the field.

## Sensory experiences

Schmitt (1999) presents the strategic experiential modules that includes five different experiences that can be created and generate value for the consumers. One of these is the SENSE module. To create sensory experiences, it is important to offer stimuli to all five senses.

Within the sensory dimension, *visual* experiences are of high importance for this study, as they are the easiest to produce both for live and online participants. The vision dimension is also especially important to work with according to Hamzah et al. (2014), as it enhances a brands recognition and familiarity. From the interviews and netnography we found that all participants of the study used different visual tools to create experiences for the visitors of the events. Such as, when logging on to the platform of the different fairs you saw pictures from movie theaters, grand libraries, or balloons in typical brand colors. The vision is easily stimulated by different colors, Göteborg Film Festival for instance worked with the strategically selected contrast color red, since it is often related to movie theaters and the curtain sliding away when the film starts.

During the interviews, we found different ways for engaging the sense *smell* of participants. Smells are naturally stimulated when participating in an event physically, for example the scents of other people or the smell of event typical snacks. For the digital edition of the events, the stimulation of the smell dimension was done by sending home packages for VIP invited people that contained popcorn or by encouraging the participants of an afternoon tea event to bake their own scones for the sitting. Both of these actions would give the participants a room filled with a suiting scent that corresponds to the event they would participate in.

Typical *sounds* which would be experienced in a physical setting for all of the studied events is the sound of conversations and being surrounded by people. The main action which we found was taken in order to create the same experience for digital participants, was to encourage them to watch the events together with friends. This was done through social media posts and communication, which can be seen from the example below.

*Bring a colleague with you and log on to bokmässan.se, choose a seminar that you both find exciting and watch together. All seminars remain until the end of the year, maybe it will be a new lunch tradition? - Göteborg Book Fair on Instagram.*

The stimulation of the sense *touch* was done in different ways. For the Göteborg Book Fair, a typical thing for participants to do is to look at, feel and purchase books. This was offered to the virtual participants in the format of Bokmässan Deals, where people had the opportunity to buy physical books that would be delivered to their homes. The Göteborg Film Festival worked a lot with communication and encouraged their audience to create their own cinemas at home, or to book a hotel night with partnering hotels where they could watch the streaming movies comfortably. Communication which included tips on how to enjoy the different screenings, was

found to engage consumers to take action. From the netnography we noticed that many participants shared pictures of how they set up their minievent, which indicates that the use of communication encouraged consumers to stimulate the sense of touch as recommended.

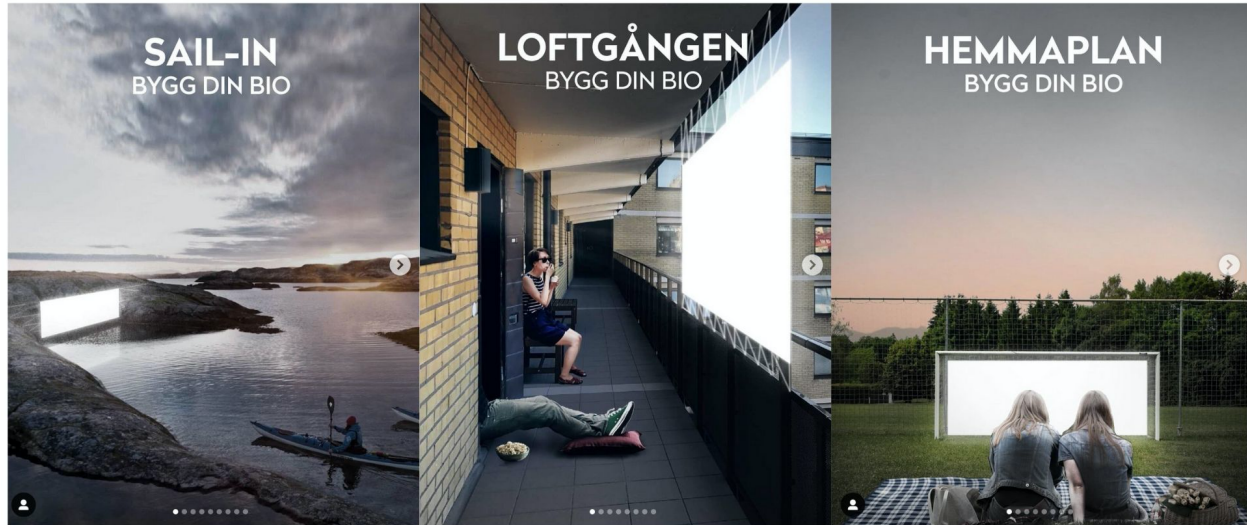


Figure 5: A collage of different ways that Göteborg Film Festival inspired their stakeholders to engage all five senses when participating in their event “Göteborg Film Festival Open Air Anywhere”

The final sense, *taste*, was stimulated in similar ways as the smell dimension. By receiving home popcorn, or by being encouraged to eat or buy home a fitting snack, the online audience could have a full sensory experience. The main way of stimulating taste for participants was done by encouragement through communication. For example, for lunch lectures, the participants were encouraged to eat their favorite lunch, or to brew a tasty cup of tea or even to open a bottle of champagne to create a festive atmosphere.

It might seem as engaging all five senses for both online and live participants in a hybrid setting is challenging, but creativity is the only limit to creating full sensory experiences even for online participants when arranging a hybrid event. As Schmitt (1999), Hamzah et al. (2014) and the interviewee Rasmus said, it is crucial to stimulate all five senses and to not stop only at stimulating the vision of participants, in order to create sensory experiences. This was noticed from both the interviews and netnography, that the organizers did try to stimulate all sensory dimensions, and this was mostly done by encouraging the visitors to create a setting at home that would stimulate the senses sound, touch, taste and smell. These encouragements often stimulated more than one sense, when for example eating lunch with a friend while watching a seminar, all dimensions could be said to be stimulated. The respondent from Nine Yards also talked about creating sensory experiences for participants by offering them an additional purchase, which would allow online participants to have fully engaged senses during the event without requiring maximum effort from the participants alone.

*“Oh, you are interested in this seminar? For Xkr you can get this package sent home in time for the seminar and it would include the object which would be discussed in the seminar, or suitable snacks for example.” - Rasmus, Nine Yards*

Nine Yards also made the parallel to the well-known yearly music competition Melodifestivalen, which is very popular among the Swedish people and commonly watched from the comfort of people's homes. Melodifestivalen has succeeded with making up the concept of Mellofest which creates engagement from the viewers that goes beyond just watching the festival on their TV. People create their own mello-parties at home where they invite several friends and decorate with accessories that are typical for the Melodifestivalen, such as hats, feather boas and OLWs mello-chips. These arrangements stimulate all five senses and is not a phenomenon which needs to be exclusive for the music competition, but an effect which is possible for any event to achieve.

The atmosphere of an event is one of the key elements that needs to be considered when planning the event design according to Berridge (2014). To create memorable moments for the visitors of the events, there were some additions made to create the illusion of some kind of presence between the parties involved in the events in order to reduce the space between them.

### Enchanted experiences

A phenomenon which we identified, was the creation of strong experience relying on the myths and nostalgia of previous events or of the mythical location where the physical events had taken place previously. (Gammon and Ramshaw, 2020). By doing this the organizers create an enchanted space where the experience can be intensified. (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The interviewees pushed for the importance to keep those parts even in a digital setting. Karl from the Göteborg Film Festival explains how the cinema Draken, is the heart of the festival and that it was used as the recording location of the introductions to the movies that was shown during the festival.

*“We worked with Gothenburg as the destination, we are here in Draken so you do not lose the connection to Gothenburg when it becomes digital”- Karl, Göteborg Film Festival*

This phenomenon was also true for Gadden, who filmed their inauguration of the career fair in the largest hall at the School of Business, Economics and Law, Malmstenssalen. If you are or were a student at the school, this would be a place that you are familiar with and would recognize. Instead of having their grand opening ceremony with pomp and circumstance in a physical setting, Gadden translated this into a live stream but keeping the solemn moments also in the digital, where the Marshalls of the student union inaugurated the fair. Another element that can be associated with Gadden is their mascot “Erik Gadd”, a bee representing the fair who you often can see running around campus on different occasions. The mascot was found present in several of their movies and posts on media which can promote and connect elements from the physical events.

The association to the city of Gothenburg was also found on the platform of Göteborg Book Fair. A silhouette of the city's skyline representing the famous Gothia Towers and The Swedish exhibition and congress is visible, which is also the place where the book fair usually takes place. What we found in the case of all three studied events, was that there is a consistent pattern of using the location of where the event physically would have been held, to try to connect the digital participants to the place even though they cannot actually be there. The anchoring to the physical place of the events gives participants which previously have experienced the event physically a feeling of nostalgia and longing back, and also helps strengthen the brand familiarity and important locations of the physical event for those participants who have not had the opportunity to experience the event physically. The Göteborg Book Fair also engaged their followers on Instagram and Facebook by asking them to share their best memories from the fair. This was done to celebrate the release of the photo book *What A Mäss*, which contained pictures from the previous book fairs. This encouraged people to be nostalgic and simultaneously share their best moments with each other, thereby also creating a space for community building and an opportunity to relate to others. (Gammon and Ramshaw, 2020).

*“My best memory is from the first time I visited the fair, in 2010, and walked onto the exhibition floor for the first time and was affected by an overwhelming feeling of belonging. It felt like home. Each year after that, I have felt the same thing when walking on the exhibition floor, that I am home.” - Comment from the Instagram of Göteborg Book Fair*

*“I would say the feeling that occurs when you stand in the escalator on the way down to the exhibition floor, a little tender after hours of impressions and some seminars buzzing in your head and just so wonderfully happy that you have another day to look forward to. Love the Book Fair and miss it almost so it feels in the heart.” - Comment from the Facebook of Göteborg Book Fair*

Berridge (2012) argues that the organizers are to create an environment that can create authentic experience moments for the participants. This will in the longer run create positive outcomes of the event and strong experiences for the participants. In other words, when the organizers create a hybrid event and incorporate the physical location of the event to the digital platforms and social media, the environment and its authentic moments are translated from the physical setting to the digital, so that all participants regardless of location are able to have the same experiences.

### Affective experiences

Moving on from incorporating the physical location into the design of the event, this leads to the next finding that with sort of similar trend occurring. It was found that some physical elements to complement the digital experience were added to cover parts of elements that the physical event could offer. These elements would have been lost if not replaced with these solutions. The Göteborg film festival sent out packages to their VIP-guests, containing different elements such as

popcorn, beverages and nicely written letters in order to create a festive atmosphere during the inauguration of the festival that otherwise would have been a physical ceremony. Göteborg Film Festival also distributed physical program sheets, which during physical festivals has been a typical element for the event. Gadden created a way to hand out their physical goodie bags to the students, which according to Olivia is a very popular element in the physical fair. This statement can also be strengthened in the netnography because the interaction from students for Instagram posts including the goodie bag information has almost three times more interaction than the other posts.

*“The release of goodie bags during the days of the fair were a strong incentive to register to the Graduate platform and was absolutely a carrot to get people to join!”.* – Olivia, Gadden

The Göteborg book fair arranged Bokmässan Deals to cover the important aspect of being able to buy books physically at the fair. With this addition they made it possible for the participants that attended the digital version to buy books and make deals that they would be able to do at the physical fair, this was also stated as an important component during the physical fairs.

As Hamzah et al. (2014) states that; to create affective experiences the organizers need to access the components mood, emotion and feelings. These types of additions to the event helps create affective value for the visitors of the event in a digital setting by giving them opportunities that helps stimulate positive feelings and moods about the event and by that the affective experience is created. This provides opportunities for the organizers to influence the outcome of their participants' response to the experience. Through these positive experiences created by adding physical elements, or opportunities, strong memorable experiences can be created also through a digital edition of the events. This also goes in line with what Orefice (2018) states; the organizers of the event should be providing opportunities that can affect the audience attitude and that these opportunities create positive experiences. This was carried out by the events by incorporating components that were to resemble those from previous physical events, that were well appreciated. The respondents to our interviews knew their target audience well and knew what they wanted. As Olivia said, students love to get free stuff in the form of goodie bags, and the visitors at the Göteborg Book Fair love to make great deals at the fair. We can thereby see that by giving the audience something extra, and keeping these successful elements for digital participants, such as a goodie bag or a VIP package, or great deals on current books, the events can be said to try to inflict positive feelings on the participants. These positive feelings that are triggered by customer specific stimuli can then develop over time to strong affective states, which goes in line with the theories of Hamzah et al. (2014) and Schmitt (1999). These positive moods and emotions are also important for the long-lasting relationship between the consumer and a brand Hamzah et al. (2014), for this study this is the aspect of the stakeholders of the event building a relationship with the organizers which may result in participating at the event over a longer period of time.



## Cognitive experiences

When corresponding with the respondents, it was clear that the decision to arrange their events in a digital format was not voluntarily, but due to them having little to no options. Due to the restrictions which were present at the time, it was not possible for either one of them to arrange their events as they normally would. The alterations in the event which had to be done however, was also found to open up several opportunities for them and their visitors and can be related to the THINK module. (Schmitt, 1999). The THINK module is about creating enlightening experiences which make consumers, or in this case event participants, rethink the abilities of the offering, and thereby find alternate ways for them to experience value. By arranging their events in a digital format, it allowed participants to experience the event in a new format.

The digital format for all event organizers which were interviewed for this study opened up another dimension of availability for participants. Partly because the participants could take part in the event from any location of choice, but also because the material was available in a different way. For the Göteborg Film Festival and Göteborg Book Fair, participants often need to make a choice between different seminars, concerts or films, since they are being screened at the same time. For the digital edition however, the movies shown by Göteborg Film Festival were available up to 24 hours after they first aired. In the case of the Göteborg Book Fair, the seminars were available for several months after the fair. This enabled people who took part in the events to watch more movies and seminars, and to experience discussions and screenings that they otherwise would have opted out due to time constraints. This created cognitive experiences for participants as they could experience new parts of the event which they were curious about, and thereby reevaluate the offerings which the different events provide its visitors. (Hamzah et al., 2014).

Even if the choice of hosting a digital event at first was not voluntarily, after they received the response from their participants, many of the respondents answered that digital elements definitely will be a part of their future events, as it was very popular among the visitors. This was also shown in the netnography, as many people in the comments were happy that they did not have to opt out anything, and that they had got to experience movies and seminars that they otherwise would not have prioritized watching, but now are happy that they got to see.

*“To meet the film creators at the filmfestival is unique and not something that everyone knows about because often they enter the stage, ready to answer questions, after half of the audience has left. Now they were able to see the greetings even before the movie. I believe that more people got up their eyes for this “Oh right it is actually really cool that you get to meet the creator at the festival”” - Karl, Göteborg Film Festival*

One example of how the digital version of the event opened up for cognitive experiences can be visualized by Göteborg Film Festival. The festival created greetings made by the film creators where they were able to introduce the movie and the viewers could meet the creators, which was

screened as an introduction for the movies. This is regularly done at the physical events as well, but the presentation regularly takes place after the movie has ended. Therefore, everyone might not have been aware of this part of the festival before, even if the opportunity for movie creators and audiences to meet is something that is unique to the festival. The representative Karl also saw this as a value creating aspect in a way, since he believed it to be an eyeopener for many of the visitors of the festival.



## 5. Discussion

*In this section, the results and analysis of the study will be discussed. This section also presents recommendations for event organizers which are based on the results of the study. Furthermore, we will present how this study contributes to the research area and present our proposal for further studies in the field of hybrid events.*

### Discussion theme 1: Designing the event

From the interviews and netnography we found that an important tool to work with when having digital participants is communication. By using websites and social media platforms we can see that it enabled several possibilities that resulted in the following advantages. Firstly, the communication activity that we found to be essential when arranging an event which contains digital participants, is to engage the online audience to turn the online event into a happening. The analysis also showed that by using an online platform for the event made it possible to extend the lifetime of the event. Because of this it was possible to get more traffic to the website and platforms which created added value for exhibitors as they could communicate their offerings for a greater period of time than would have been possible during a physical fair.

We also observed from the analysis that the addition of a digital part of an event can create much larger audiences and open up for different partnerships that without the digital element would have been missed. When arranging a hybrid event, you can use both the audience that comes with having a physical event and the ones who will participate online which allows the event to grow which from a value creating perspective is essential. The digital format also made it easy to reach international stakeholders, not only because they did not have to travel to participate, but also since the digital format allowed the material to easily be translated. This led to Göteborg Book Fair translating a number of authors talks to several languages, which enabled more international stakeholders to take part in the event.

From the above findings it is clear that when arranging an event in a hybrid format, it makes the event available to new potential customers, and therefore it might put more requirements on event organizers to structure their event programs accordingly. An important finding to consider when working with an online audience, is that their attention span is not the same as for a physical audience. A physical audience is more patient, since if they get bored with what they are watching, or do not find something particularly interesting, they find something else to do at the event. They are at the scene and will want to be entertained during their visit. But for someone attending digitally losing interest would most certainly end up with the participant ending their event experience. This means that adjustments to the event program for a hybrid event is essential in order to maintain the attention with the participant.

The analysis showed that the social media platforms and websites were used by the organizers to engage with the participants as well as to create an environment where they could interact in a

community-like environment, where participants could find other like-minded participants of the event. Social media channels were although proven to not offer enough stimuli of the social experiences, since participants did not find the communication possibilities similar to those interactions between participants who would have attended in a physical environment. For a hybrid setting, this means that it is of great importance to consider giving the participants of the event a way to interact with each other and a forum where they can discuss the happenings they have experienced. Even if those who truly are engaged with the brand and event are believed to visit the event physically, the digital complement can lead to more committed visitors if they were to have strong experience during their digital encounter with the event.

When looking at the structure of the different events, you can see that there are different encounters going on and that they in the aspect of interaction need to be divided into categories of; interactions that can lead to business opportunities or similar, and interactions between participants of the event that wants to discuss the event content. This leads to the important insight that some interactions, such as between industry representatives, where potentially deeper commitments could be formed are more suitable for the physical part of the event. Whilst those meetings where discussions about event content, seminars, books and movies, could have been recreated in an online setting still deliver meaningfulness. This we believe is grounded in the traditional idea that meetings of more serious substances should be held physically, while the discussion of hobbies is something that people are used to doing online. For a hybrid event this means that the organizer needs to recognize what meetings can be recreated in an online setting and what encounters that would suffer from this and need to be held physically.

### Discussion theme 2: Designing the experience

By studying how the sensory dimension of participants is stimulated, we found that there are several tools that event organizers can use to foster sensory experiences. What kind of sensory experience event organizers wish to mediate differs between various events. Therefore, the tools need to be flexible. One flexible tool to engage the senses of the attendees is communication. Communication through social media platforms require minimal effort from the event organizers, a simple “*we recommend a meal of \_\_\_ for this seminar*” might have what it takes to engage the taste and smell dimensions. When using communication to recommend means for participants to create their own sensory experiences at home, the participants creativity can also be stimulated. When creativity among participants is encouraged, cognitive experiences can arise.

A second tool to create sensory experiences is to provide participants with physical objects, such as event programs, a snack kit or décor, which they can enjoy during the event. Physical complements as such, have also been found to fill participants with positive moods and feelings. The physical complements can help online participants feel more connected to the physical event, since they get to take part in similar ornaments or snacks as the physical participants. We have also seen that this can cause participants to have affective experiences, since the little things can be what makes a great difference in how the event is perceived.

Integrating physical elements does not have to be done by offering physical objects but can also be done by incorporating the physical location into the virtual platforms. Since hybrid events require that all participants are able to take part in the same happenings and experiences, the perceived distance between the physical location and the home of an online participant needs to be reduced. By using event typical scenery from the physical location, the online participants are able to feel part of the same sphere as live participants. This can also create an enchantment around the physical space where the event usually takes place, since those who have visited these sights previously might feel nostalgic. The nostalgic feeling that occurs due to the re-experiencing and romanticization of a place in this way, can create a mythic and enchanted space. As we have seen, this can create a longing back for those who have previously taken part of the physical event, and for those who have not gotten to experience it before, create a longing to do so.

What is clear from the results and analysis, is that when designing for one particular experience, many more experiences tend to follow along. Through a recommendation as the following “*Gather your friends, open a bottle of champagne and enjoy this screening*”, participants are encouraged to have social experiences by enjoying the event with friends together with festive drinks in the form of a mini event. However, more than just the social experiences and sense of taste can be stimulated through this exhortation. First of all, all five senses will be stimulated since the participants of the event will be able to feel, smell and hear each other, taste the drinks, and watch the event. The participants of this mini event are also most likely to converse with one another, thereby creating social experiences. When a participant invites friends to enjoy the event together, it can also foster curiosity and creativity among the invited. This since it might lead to new people getting to know about the event, or even to the creation of a tradition among the friend group. This means that an exhortation like this could have the potential of stimulating the sensory, social and cognitive experiences simultaneously.

### 5.1 Recommendations for organizers and other practitioners

This study provides marketers and event organizers with important insights to consider when planning and arranging hybrid events. First of all, we want to emphasize the importance of focusing on your digital participants. The analysis shows that adding a digital component to the event will increase the number of participants. These participants need more consideration in the event design, since their concentration is harder to retain. This should be done by working strongly with TV-production, since it is a format which people are used to. TV-production always considers the at home participants in the first place, and for hybrid events, this is as crucial. The hosts for a seminar or similar should for example look into the camera, rather than look out over the physical audience, to make the online participants feel seen and feel part of the event. This will also reduce the space between the online and physical settings. It is also important to enable ways so that the digital participants can communicate and interact with the host, such as being able to ask questions

and make comments on the program in the same way that physical participants are able to do, in order to deliver as similar experiences as possible for all participants, regardless of their location.

The second part for event organizers to consider is to always engage all five senses for all participants of any event. Sensory experiences are one of the most important factors when it comes to engaging consumers and to create strong experiences. Creating experiences which are appealing for all five senses even for online participants is easily done by communicating different ways for consumers to set up their own scenery or by giving them recommendations of a suitable set up, snacks, music and decorations. In order to fully engage participants, without putting the full responsibility on them, managers could send out or offer online participants the option of purchasing an additional package which fits the event that they wish to attend. By giving online participants tools to create a mini event from a distance, it creates stronger experiences as it engages more senses and creates experience in more dimensions.

Lastly, we want to encourage practitioners not to forget the need for participants to socialize during the event. The study's results show that people are social beings and want to discuss the event content with likeminded people. Therefore, our recommendation is to influence community creation and foster interactions. This can be done either by providing forums for discussions or by encouraging digital attendees to enjoy the event from a distance with friends.

The recommendations together can be seen as a checklist for practitioners, which can be adjusted in different ways to fit any event. By offering an event where all participants feel seen, all five senses are stimulated and the participants have an opportunity to interact, we believe that any hybrid event can be successful and can bring strong experiences for its participants.

## 5.2 Our contribution to the research area

This study was conducted during a world-changing pandemic, which shifted the world to a more distanced and at the same time connected world. The way we arrange meetings and events quickly switched from mainly physical to becoming strictly digital, and this change is believed to remain even when the pandemic is long forgotten. Therefore, the results of this report are believed to offer valuable insights for event organizers. Since digital meetings and solutions are believed to be a part of future business offerings, it is crucial for event organizers to know how to structure events which consist of both physical and digital participants without compromising the experiences of the participants. Because there is limited research within the area of hybrid fairs and festivals, we believe that this report is an early contribution to the field.

## 5.3 Proposal for further studies

There are a lot of uncovered grounds to be discovered within the research area of hybrid events and its advantages and disadvantages. We therefore suggest that further studies on the area of hybrid events investigate other events than those of fairs and festivals. There are many types of events such as concerts, conferences but also events in other industries than the entertainment

branch. By doing research among a greater number of industries a more general theory about hybrid events can be developed and be applicable to a much larger extent.

When developing further research, we would propose researching the perceived value and experiences created among participants of hybrid events. Our research studied hybrid events from the event organizers' point of view. A complementary study conducted through participants' points of view offers valuable insight for event organizers and research. We would suggest that further studies would be interesting if conducted by creating focus groups among the event participants. Focus group discussions are a great way for comprehensive qualitative research because they build upon attendance and dialogue, which may deliver a deeper understanding of the experience among the participants. This, we believe, will leave essential insights for practitioners within the field.

## 6. Conclusions

*In this final chapter we will revisit and answer the research questions. Firstly, we will treat the two sub-research questions and lastly this section will answer the research question, and thereby we will achieve the purpose of the study, which has been to investigate how digital and physical elements can be combined into a hybrid event by event organizers and thereby create strong experiences for participants.*

### What are the possibilities and challenges with different event forms?

During the study, we found possibilities and challenges with the different event formats which have been converted to advantages and disadvantages with each event form, these are presented in table 3.

Table 3: *Advantages and disadvantages of different event forms.*

Physical event	Digital event	Hybrid event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Easy to stimulate all senses</li> <li>+ Interaction comes naturally</li> <li>+ No need for participants to struggle with technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Opportunities to reach a larger and diversified audience</li> <li>+ Possible to participate from anywhere</li> <li>+ Allows the event to grow</li> <li>+ Enables a long-lasting presence of the event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Opportunities to reach a larger and diversified audience</li> <li>+ Possible to participate from anywhere</li> <li>+ Allows the event to grow</li> <li>+ Enables a long-lasting presence of the event</li> <li>+ Offers stakeholders a choice of participation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has a limited capacity to number of participants</li> <li>- The event ceases to exist when the physical event has ended</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Risk for technical difficulties</li> <li>- Limited direct interaction</li> <li>- Stimuli of different experiences requires larger efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires structural changes to the organization to manage both event forms</li> <li>- Stimuli of the senses requires larger efforts</li> </ul>

Advantages are marked with + and disadvantages are marked with -.

Firstly, we found that events that aim to have a large and diversified audience have a clear advantage in incorporating digital elements and arranging a hybrid event, since it increases the availability of the event. This is because the virtual world has no limit to the number of participants and since participants can participate from any location. A hybrid event also offers stakeholders a choice of participation, meaning that those who might feel reluctant to struggle with technology can still take part in the events physically. Because of the large and diversified audience that is allowed in a hybrid event this also gives the possibilities for the event to grow and become national or even international functions rather than a local one.

By arranging events in a hybrid format, it is possible for event organizers to keep the event alive for a longer duration. This enables the event to remain in the participants memory for a longer time period, thereby reducing the time until the next event is held, and once again attain the effect that more people are probable to be exposed to the event, which also can cause the event to expand. Another advantage of having a long-lived hybrid event is that they are attractive for partners to be part of, since the partners get the opportunity to market themselves through the event for a longer time.

There are however difficulties with arranging digital and hybrid events, since many different experiences occur at events. Social and sensory experiences appear naturally for physical event participants but require more effort to recreate for digital participants. We found that it is essential to work with stimulating the different senses to create strong experiences, equivalent to those who experience the event physically, also for the participants on the digital side of a hybrid setting. Even though this requires larger efforts to stimulate for example the senses of taste, smell, touch and sound it is not something that is impossible and needs to be considered at all times in order to create strong experiences for all participants of the event.

### **What tools can be used to engage online participants into having strong experiences?**

From the study we found that the most crucial tool for fostering engagement among participants was communication. By communicating means for participants to stimulate senses that the digital screening alone does not, it is possible for event organizers to influence the participants into strengthening the experience. By asking engaging questions on social media and inviting people to discuss the event content, it enabled a place for community building and allowed the audience to have social experiences and build a community, even from a distance.

Another tool that the organizers can use to engage the online participants into taking part of the experience was to use graphic design. This can be used in many different aspects, but the main area of use discovered by this report was to stimulate the visual dimension of the senses by incorporating different elements in the design of the event leading to the ability of creating different experiences.

The final tool which we found to create strong experiences, is the delivery of physical complements such as smaller gifts and purchase options. This helps the digital event to resemble the physical event as much as possible, and to deliver similar experiences to both online and live participants which is crucial for hybrid events. The extra effort of offering these things can also lead to the creation of positive feelings and emotion, which is proven to be essential for the creation of a long-lasting relationship between the event organizers brand and their customers.

### **What are the incentives to use a hybrid event format?**

Hybrid events have as we can see, many advantages in comparison to alternative event forms. The main incentive for event organizers to arrange their event as a hybrid, is because a hybrid event

has endless opportunities. A larger number of attendees to take part of the event, since the event is not limited to the capacity of a physical location. This can cause the event to expand in several aspects. By integrating different ways for stakeholders to attend, the event becomes more diverse, and is more likely to attract new customer segments. By offering digital participation, even country borders can be erased, and the event could grow from being local to global. All this without requiring any travel or major effort, it only takes Wi-Fi. In other words, the hybrid format of an event allows a new dimension of availability than other forms.

To conclude this report; there are no limits to what a hybrid event can offer, given that the participants that attend digitally are provided with the same experience as those who attend physically. By arranging a hybrid event rather than a strictly physical or digital one, advantages from both settings can be used, and the disadvantages of each event form are almost eliminated since they match each other out. Therefore, we can say that hybrid events deliver the best of both worlds.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview guide

#### Introduction

- Start by introducing yourself and where your research is conducted.
- Explain what area the thesis aims to explore:
  - *What are the incentives to use a hybrid event format?*
  - *What tools can be used to engage online participants into having strong experiences?*
  - *What are the possibilities and challenges with different event forms?*
- Ask the respondent if it is okay that the interview will be recorded.

#### Background

- Could you introduce yourself and your role in the company?
- Could you shortly tell us about your company as a whole?
  - What is your company's business area?
  - What are the core activities of your company?
- Who is your target audience and why?
  - Demographic factors
  - Interests and lifestyle
- How do you want your company to be perceived?
  - Fun/professional, relaxing/exciting, intellectual/entertaining

#### Event design

- What would you say are the key elements to consider when planning an event?
- What tools are crucial to succeed with a great event?
  - Which tools and digital platforms did you use when arranging your event digitally?
- How do you design the event to mediate the brand experience?
  - How do you trigger the different sensory levels? (Sensory Experiences)
    - In a digital/in a physical setting.
  - How do you create different emotions among the participants of the event? (Affective Experiences)
    - What emotions are you aiming at?
    - Do they differ depending on if the event is physical or digital?
  - How do you design your event to activate stakeholders' minds? (Cognitive Experiences)
    - How do you design for this in a physical/digital environment?

- How do you design your event to encourage your visitors to create relationships with you, your exhibitors and other visitors? (Social Experiences)
  - Did you have to make any alterations when arranging the event in a digital setting?
- Do you position your event in any certain cultural context, by marketing myths or nostalgia surrounding your brand? (Enchanted Experiences)
  - How do you do this in a physical/digital environment?
- Do you see your stakeholders as important voices when planning the event? (Steps of the ladder)
  - Do you ask for guidance from previous participants if possible?
  - Do you see your event visitors as consumers/resources/co-creators?
    - If you view your visitors in any certain way, did this have to change when you arranged your event digitally?

## Hybrid events

- What would you say are the most important exchanges/encounters between stakeholders at your event?
  - How have you worked to create the same meetings in a digital environment?
  - Did you find that you lacked any tools to create the same experiences in a digital environment which would have been possible to create in a physical setting?
- You have had experience within arranging your event in both a physical and digital setting, what would you say are the challenges and opportunities with each event type?
  - How did you organize the relatively sudden shift from physical to digital events?
  - When planning for your digital or hybrid event, did you intend to recreate the same experience as much as possible, or did you consider the digital edition as a whole other event/experience?
  - Would you say that some things, experiences or happenings would have been easier to accomplish in a hybrid setting, where you could choose which moments should be performed digitally and physically?
  - What was the response from your visitors after arranging your event digitally?
- Many researchers have expressed their belief that hybrid events will persist in the future. Do you believe that, after covid, you will go back to business as usual or that your event will keep some sort of digital element?
- For the event market as a whole, do you believe that hybrid events are here to stay?
  - Why or why not?
  - Do you believe that some businesses and events might have an easier or harder time keeping the digital element in their events?

## Brand experience

- How would you broadly describe your brand?
  - Are there any certain values that you wish to mediate through your brand?
  - Do you have any slogans, key words or payoff which visualizes this, or how do you communicate these values to customers?
- What sort of experiences do you wish your stakeholders to have when in contact with your brand?
  - Which sensory impressions are the most important to mediate to your stakeholders when they are in contact with the brand? (SENSE)
  - Which feelings do you wish to arouse among your stakeholders when they are in contact with your brand? (FEEL)
  - Do you find it important to activate your stakeholders cognitively? By for example stimulating your stakeholder's curiosity, creativity or excitement when in contact with your brand? (THINK)
  - Do you encourage interaction and community building between your stakeholders when they are in contact with your brand? If so, in what way? (RELATE)

## Appendix 2. Observation guide

The netnography was performed on the media platforms promoted and owned by the event organizers that were interviewed. Observations of the content that was published from the event organized shall be studied from the following guide:

- *How are the senses engaged in the post?*
- *Which feelings and emotions are stimulated by the post?*
- *Does the post encourage any cognitive actions?*
- *Does this post encourage any community creation/interaction possibilities available?*
  - *Is it possible to detect communication and interaction between different people in the comment section?*
- *Does this post reflect any myths/cultural stories/nostalgia?*

The posts made by followers and stakeholders, such as comments, reposts and posts containing hashtags which can be derived to the certain events will be analyzed based of the following questions:

- *What is the follower's response to the announcement/content of the post?*
  - *What did they find positive?*
  - *What did they think needed further development?*
- *Are there any patterns in the posts made by the community?*
- *What elements of the event did the followers find valuable and successful?*

Appendix 3. Coding scheme

