Marketing Hybrid Events

A qualitative study investigating the event industry during the Covid-19
pandemic and the change from physical to hybrid events

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Abstract

The world has been forced into adapting to new circumstances due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The event industry went from physical to digital and hybrid events. A hybrid event is a live event with both a digital and physical audience. This study focuses on examining opportunities and challenges regarding marketing of hybrid events. It also intends to examine how the event industry has been affected and how event organizers' marketing strategies have changed due to the shift into a digital or hybrid setting. Lastly, the report aims to answer the question; What do the event organizers think the future holds for hybrid events?

These aspects were examined through event marketing, marketing communication and experience. A qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews collects the data The results were analysed to fulfil the purpose of the study.

The findings showed that the event organizers had experienced possibilities in the form of a wider reach, a bigger target group and a larger demographic. The challenges found in the study were difficulties determining the target group, creating a valuable hybrid event experience and competing on the new market. The marketing strategies had been affected in multiple ways, but not to a great extent. The communication had been moved to digital channels and the research showed that event organizers used marketing communication as a tool to enhance the event experience.

The respondent included in this study was predominantly positive towards the hybrid format and saw themselves implementing it continuously in the future. This was because of the many benefits found in organizing hybrid events, such as flexibility, availability, and sustainability.

Keywords: Hybrid Events, Event Marketing, Event, Marketing Communication, Marketing, Marketing Mix, Event Experience

Definitions

This section presents definitions of terms commonly used throughout the report.

Brand: An intangible concept that helps people identify a particular company, product, or individual. In this study the word brand refers to the event as the product that the event organizers are producing.

Communication: An act or process to deliver or indicate a message. The message can be sent from a stakeholder or company.

Digital event: A gathering that takes place during a specific time and in a digital setting.

Event Organizers: A person, group of people or company who forms, schedules, and plans an event.

Experience: An event, personal encounter or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone, often in the form of a sensation.

Fair: A place or setting with the aim of exhibiting or presenting companies, a person or a group of people. It can also be intended for gathering people or networking.

Hybrid Event: An event that includes both digital and physical participants.

Market: A physical or virtual place where buyers and sellers can meet to facilitate the exchange or transaction of commercial goods and services. In this case the goods refer to events and experiences.

Marketing: A business or action involving market research, promotion and/or advertisement. It can also intend to sell products or services.

Physical event: A planned physical gathering that takes place during a specific time at a specific place or venue.

Stakeholder: A group or a person with interest in a business or industry. In the case of events, this refers to for example visitors, exhibitors, or industry professionals.

Value: The worth, significance or meaning of an event, company or industry that can be considered beneficial or important.

Table of Content

1. Introduction

In the following chapter the subject of the study will be introduced and problematized. The chapter will explore the topic of hybrid events and why it is relevant to society today. Thereafter, the purpose of the study will be presented, followed by the research questions the study intends to answer. Finally, the limitations and information needs will be stated.

1.1 Background

In March 2020, The Word Health Organization announced that the Covid-19 outbreak should be categorized as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The virus shook the world at its core and social distancing, isolation and quarantine became the new reality. People and businesses were forced to rethink and redo everyday practices that had been natural and taken for granted for years on end. The event industry was met with great uncertainty and the social events we had been looking forward to were pushed, cancelled or held in digital forms (LYYTI, 2020).

The lack of physical social interactions during the pandemic left people longing for alternative ways of communicating and socializing. Online services, social media platforms and digital meeting rooms played an important role in keeping society connected. The pandemic created a high incitement for technical development and can be seen as a fast forward motion towards digitalization. Individuals have become more adaptive towards digitalization due to the pandemic and the increased demand for online experiences and platforms for engagement pressured the companies and institutions to change their way of conducting business. According to a survey done by McKinsey & Company (2020) companies have accelerated their digital development by 3-4 years.

During the pandemic, the event industry was forced to adapt toward restrictions and think outside of the conventional production of events. Digital and Hybrid events became the resort for businesses to be able to continue providing events. Hybrid events are events that combine both traditional physical participation and digital aspects (Creative technology, 2021). An example of this could be a livestream, distance speakers or digital engagement with the audience. Hybrid events have been around for ages, watching a football game or "Melodifestivalen" on TV is actually a way of participating in one. The covid-19 pandemic and the rapid digitalization has pushed more events into becoming hybrid. In Sweden, 2020-2021 have been years of hybrid concerts, hybrid fairs, video speakers at conferences, hybrid marathons and even hybrid city festivals (Executive Effect, 2021).

Although the event industry is used to adapting to change and has been a subject to the digitalization era for years, the Covid-19 outbreak and rapid conversion to digital and hybrid formats can be seen as one of the most trying times for event organizers and marketers (LYYT. 2020). As the conditions for events changed, so did the event market. Marketing is one of the most important parts of a successful business. A well-established marketing strategy allows

businesses to grow, increase sales, engage consumers, and create awareness towards the brand. The marketing efforts of a brand can determine how the company is met on the market and whether the brand will be appreciated by the consumers or not, this is also true for events (Moving Targets, 2021).

Preston (2012) argues that marketing an event in a sufficient way will lead to a higher demand for the event and more attendance. A key component in marketing an event effectively is having a clear marketing strategy. This means having a greater understanding of the market and which steps should be taken to differentiate and position the event. A marketing strategy is commonly defined as a game plan for how businesses are to reach prospective consumers and consists of the company's values, desired target group, and other important elements. A survey performed in 2019 revealed that companies that constantly work on building their marketing strategy were 313% more likely to achieve success from their marketing efforts (Barone, 2021), which makes the subject of marketing strategy interesting to investigate and understand.

The Covid-19 pandemic generated challenges and new circumstances. Event organizers were forced to rethink and adapt their marketing strategy and event format. The conversion from physical to hybrid events opens a lot of opportunities for event companies and marketers but will also require marketers to take a new approach in communicating and attracting consumers (Executive Effect, 2021). This study takes an interest in the challenges and possibilities regarding marketing, created by the change from physical to digital and hybrid events. As well as looking at how event companies' marketing strategies have been affected by the new circumstances and shifts within the industry. These insights can provide implications for future marketings and event organizers regarding how to adapt their marketing efforts and navigate under the new circumstances.

The advantages of hybrid events are many and have been realized by event companies during this trial-and-error time. Hybrid events enable more attendance, are easily accessed, more flexible and require less transportation which is better for the environment (Fourneau, 2021). Experts within the event industry have for a long time predicted hybrid events to be the future of the industry due to these advantages and the digital adaption caused by the pandemic. (Executive Effect, 2021). This study aims at investigating whether these statements are true or not for event organizers.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to create an understanding of the challenges and changes marketers are facing with the increased demand for hybrid events caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also aims to gain an insight to the future of hybrid events and account for the possibilities the format provides for marketers and event organizers.

1.4 Limitations

This research is limited to the producer perspective of marketing hybrid events. As the report aims to create an understanding of event organizers experiences of the hybrid format, the report will not take the consumers' perceptions of the event or marketing process into account. The research is also limited to the Swedish market and will only analyse a restricted number of events. The study is exclusively limited to the experiences of the respondents' perceptions of the situations described and does only provide knowledge from one person from each event. The study could result in different outcomes if performed within another group of respondents.

1.5 Research Questions

In order to fulfil the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be examined:

- *What are the challenges and possibilities of marketing a hybrid event?*
- *How have event organizers' marketing strategies been affected by the change from physical to digital and hybrid event format during the Covid-19 pandemic?*
- *What do the event organizers' think the future holds for hybrid events?*

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, the theoretical framework and foundation for the study is presented. The section starts by introducing the concept of event and goes on to describe the hybrid event format, followed by the concept of event marketing and marketing communication. Lastly, the chapter presents the theoretical framework for event experiences and event design.

2.1 A Market for Events

The event industry has been part of organized society since the ancient period. An event is commonly defined as a planned social gathering, which can fulfil different purposes. Research has shown that the modern consumers consider the value of events to be high, which has increased the demand for events and experiences in general. Events are a core practice within the tourism industry and have become more attractive in recent years according to Armbrecht, Lundberg, and Andersson (2019). Festivals, fairs, exhibitions, concerts, and all events in general provide social, economic, and cultural benefits both before, during and after an event takes place. Events are also a driving force for social gatherings and interactions between people (Ivkov, Blešić, Raljić, Džigurski, Pivac and Jovanovic, 2015).

Getz and Page (2016, p. 595) describes *event management* as "understanding and improving the management of planned events. Working in stages is an important aspect in the planning process of events. It refers to taking several aspects and perspectives into consideration and evaluation (Getz and Frisby, 1988; Getz et al., 2016).

2.2 Hybrid Events

The Covid-19 pandemic meant an abrupt stop to social gathering and many event organizers were forced to either cancel, postpone, or shift their events into a digital setting. The organizers that chose the online option discovered the possibilities within technical solutions and online platforms. McKinsey & Company (2020) argue that the pandemic acted as a fast forward button for digitalization and technical development in the world, especially within the event industry. According to a survey done by American Express, most event organizers believe that the digital format of events is here to stay. Benefits like increased availability, flexibility and demographic reach makes the digital components worth its while. Despite the benefits of digital events, forecasts show that 81% of meetings in 2022 will contain a face-to-face, in person, component. Industry representatives believe that the lack of physical engagement during the pandemic has people longing for in person interactions. The answer to this demand will be the hybrid format of events (American Express, 2021).

The hybrid format entails that there is a live experience with both digital and physical attendance. For an event to be classified as hybrid, it needs at least two people with physical participation and any number of digital participants. Interaction is an essential part of hybrid events. Some experts argue that a hybrid event needs to offer interaction between the digital and physical audience to be called hybrid, others are not as convinced that interaction needs to be possible (Chodor, 2021). Hybrid events can be conducted in various formats. During the

Covid-19 pandemic, people have been able to attend hybrid festivals, conferences, seminars, concerts and many more formats. There are several possible variations of hybrid formats. It can for example be a video conference, where two physical groups in different locations interact with each other through a digital platform. Another example is a Hub, where several groups located in different locations interact though a digital platform. A watch party is a physical event with a live audience where the participants can interact both with each other in person and online. Another type of hybrid event is a congress, where the main event is physical but includes both physical and digital participants that can interact through digital platforms (Göteborg & Co, 2021c).

Hybrid events are predicted to become the next big trend within the event business. The immediate appeal made obvious during the covid-19 pandemic is the expanded reach the hybrid format has. Participants can attend from all over the world digitally or participate live physically (Fourneau, 2021). Pushpak Kacholia (2020) believes that the hybrid event format is a way of overcoming the gap between virtual and physical events by bringing both audiences together in real time. Hybrid events are a more dynamic format than a strictly virtual or physical event and can offer more diverse content and a larger reach. Lauren Weatherly (2021), senior vice president of marketing at PGi, believes that hybrid events give communicators the opportunity to tailor their content to different audiences. She argues that "the virtual portion of a hybrid event can have its own unique content, rather than merely being a streamed version of the in-person segment" which can make the individual attendee feel more special and valued. Other benefits include possibilities for more engagement and increased opportunities to network (Weatherly, 2021). The format also enables the use of advanced technology like AI, VR and holograms that can deliver a greater experience for the participants. Arranging a hybrid event can also be seen as a more sustainable option than a physical event since it minimizes unnecessary traveling (Fourneau, 2021).

An essential part to hybrid events is to include both physical and digital participants in the same experiences. The "2022 Global Meetings and Events Forecast" by American Express (2021) sheds light on the difficulties of engaging and delivering an equal experience to both the digital and physical participants. Research shows that 45% of event organizers use engaging activities like polls, games, and entertainment to engage both audiences. Food delivery and wellness activities are also pointed out as tools for creating a better experience.

2.3 Event Marketing

When creating an understanding of the challenges and possibilities of marketing a hybrid event it is important to review previous research and basic tools within event marketing. The book "Event Marketing - How to successfully promote events, festivals, conventions and Expositions" by C.A Preston (2012) refers to event marketing as applying strategic marketing concepts when organizing and promoting planned events. He argues that using event marketing will help event organizers to meet the objectives of the event and communicate the experience to its best advantages. The heart of event marketing is according to C.A Preston (2012)" making sure that what is on offer is going to be wanted in sufficient numbers to make the event

worthwhile, and to find a way of attracting sufficient attendance and involvement". Creating Excitement, creativity, enthusiasm, generation of experience and memories are, according to the author, key ingredients when marketing an event.

Event Marketing does not only entail promoting and marketing an event, it is also a term used to describe using events as a marketing strategy. An event can be used as a marketing tool to promote another cause, for example building a brand, promoting a product, or driving tourism to a destination. Many brands use events as a part of their marketing, to create positive associations. For this to be successful, the values of the event must be inlined with the brand's values. The same goes for the event brand, here the image of the experience by the brands it consists of. An example would be a congress for sustainability, here the companies taking part in the event would be seen by the public as more sustainable, but the event would probably not be met with grace if it was sponsored by the oil industry. (Preston, C.A, 2012)

A key component in marketing an event successfully is having a clear strategy, to have a clear understanding of the objectives with the event and how to fulfil them. It is important to have an overview of the market the event is on, to be able to obtain competitive advantage it is key to be aware of the direct and indirect competition. In the world of experience economy, meaning that there is an economic implication in arranging an event, there are probably many similar events. Why would consumers choose your event over another? (Preston, C.A, 2012)

When conducting a marketing strategy, Hoyle (2002) suggests that marketers should ask themself five helpful questions: why, who, when, where and what? Event marketers can use these five Ws to assess the direction of their marketing plan. Why should anyone want to come to the event? The "why" should be communicated to the consumer in a convincing way, this can be done in multiple ways, e.g. through ads, direct messages, images and many more. Generally, people want to attend an event that is beneficial and valuable to them, so they want to spend their money and time on it. Who can we attract to our event? This question determines the target group. It is important to create a clear target group to establish how to direct marketing communication towards. When should the event be held? There is an immense value in timing regarding events, determining factors can be time of day, day of the week, seasonality, and holidays. Where should the event take place? The location is a key asset in promoting an event, both when it comes to availability for participants, but the location can also create value for the experience. What are we selling? This question determines what the event experience is offering, is it e.g., a fun experience, a learning experience, or a networking experience?

2.3.1 Marketing Mix - The Six P:s of Event Marketing

The Marketing Mix, also called the 4P's of marketing, stands for *product*, *price*, *place,* and *promotion*. These elements work together to achieve a certain response from the market. The aim is usually to obtain higher demand and profitability, but it can also be to gain a strong position on the market (Kotler, Armstrong and Parment, 2017). Hartmann, Ostberg, Parment and Solér (2020) explains that it is fundamental that the four components co-operate to gain a

certain response. The Marketing Mix has dominated the traditional way of viewing marketing since the 1950s (Baines, Fill and Rosengren, 2016).

Product can refer to goods or services but also brands, packaging, design, etc. Meaning how it satisfies the consumer's needs. *Price* often refers to the consumer's cost, but it can, in some cases, also refer to the seller's cost. Perceived and real costs are included in the price, as well as promotions and discounts when relevant, according to Twin (2021). *Place* means the way or in what channels in which the product is distributed to *promote* goods or services which will be further presented in the following paragraph.

Preston (2012) offers a new approach to the 4P model known as "The Six P's of Event Marketing". This model adds *People* and *Process* into the marketing mix. Preston argues that all the elements are not mutually exclusive and can affect each other. The *product* in event marketing refers to the event and what it is offering. It is the content of the event but also the extended products, the value of the event and what it means to people. Preston emphasises on the thoughts and feelings the event experience is creating within the participants and points out that event marketers should look at each component of the event as representing a part of the experience and that all components must work for the event to be attractive and satisfy the needs of the consumers. Preston points at one example of the importance of all components of the experience: "Music Festival attendees may want to see particular acts, but they also want to be able to use the toilet and get a kind of vibe, as they may say. Atmosphere is just as much part of the event products as infrastructure".

The *price* of an event refers to how much the attendees are paying for the event. Firstly, the price is connected to covering the costs for the event. There might be a discrepancy between what the event marketers want to charge and what is possible given the constraints of covering costs. The circumstances of how the event is founded influences the possibilities for budget and price. The price charged for an event determines the position the event takes on the market, the price point of the event must be consistent with the value of the event. If the price positioning is inconsistent with the overall product positioning, the consumer may react negatively to the inconsistency. The event marketers must be coherent and analyse the market to create a fine balance between supply and demand. Preston also argues that the event marketers can work with variable prices such as early bird pricing and different offers to attract attendees to the event. (Preston, 2012)

The *place* element of the model refers to the venue where the event is taking place, which is equivalent to the packaging for a good. Preston argues that the venue must reflect upon the event and be consistent to the values of the event. A great venue can enhance the experience of the event whereas a venue that does not reflect well on the event can serve a negative outcome. A great setting has shown to enhance the participants engagement during the event and lays out the groundwork for the event organizers. (Preston, 2012)

The operatives who come in direct contact with the attendees are also an important aspect of event marketing and refers to the *people* part of the model. Preston (2012) argues that "it is

difficult to think of anything that influences our impression of an experience more profoundly than people we encounter". He goes on explaining that the event personnel are a necessary part of creating loyalty and returning attendees. The *process* refers to the process of booking and using the event. All parts of the process, from booking the event to participating during the event, must work smoothly to attract and keep the attendees engaged. (Preston, 2012)

Model 1: The 6 Ps of Event Marketing

2.4 Marketing Communication

Marketing communication refers to the last P in the marketing mix (promotion) and can be described as how a company communicates their value, products, and brand to consumers. A well-integrated marketing communication reaches the intended target group and captures the attention of consumers. Kotler, Armstrong and Parment (2017) describes a central model within marketing communication, "The promotion mix". These are the tools marketers can use to communicate with the consumers. They include *Advertising*; which includes non-personal communication of a brand from a known distributor, e.g. tv-commercials or ads, *Sale promotion*; which is short term incentive for purchasing a product, *Personal selling*; which is personal presentations that intend to sell a product, e.g. engagement with store staff or salesman, *Public relations;* which is building good relationships towards actors on the market and *Direct marketing;* which is direct communication to a customer on order to create a long term relationship, e.g. personal ads, email communication or personal offers. According to Kotler et al. (2017) these tools must be integrated and combined to reach the consumers. They also claim that marketing communication goes beyond the promotion mix and that design, packaging, price, and distribution also are ways of communicating the brand to the consumers.

C. A Preston (2012) has created a variant to the original promotion mix, specific to event marketing, *see Model 2*. The model points out that advertising has changed since the creation of the original model and the main advertising activities today are taking place online through e-marketing and bought advertisement in social media. Preston argues that advertising will illuminate the event and let people know about it. He goes on explaining "*advertising is effective in the advocation of idea and meaning, as well as information and entertainment.*

Potential customers of the event are interested in what the event will do for them, whether personally or socially, they are looking for an experience" (Preston, 2012, p. 78). Social media has the power to spread the message of an event immensely without the control of event marketers, much like word-of mouth marketing. It is important for the event to have a presence on social media.

Model 2: Event Marketing Promotion Mix

2.4.1 The Communication Process

Another important part of marketing communication is the communication process. Creating a good customer relationship is not only about the output of communication but also the response and feedback the consumers communicate to the company. What the company wants to communicate is not always what the consumer perceives, which is why it is important to be coherent towards the consumers (Kotler et al, 2017).

2.5 Literature Reflections Regarding Event Marketing

The theoretical framework listed above started by describing the origins of the event industry and the increased demand for events in general. It goes later on to describe the cause for the increased demand for hybrid events and implications and challenges previously found when marketing and creating hybrid experiences. These findings are relevant to this study as they provide a groundwork to extend the research from and to compare the results found in the report to. The literature on hybrid events were mainly based on opinions from individual industry professionals which mean that the literature is highly speculative, and one could question the validity. The surveys referred to regarding challenges and implications for hybrid events have high validity as they include many participants but could be questioned as they are performed by profitable companies within the industry. These sources were included in the framework despite these factors as they provide an insight to the industry and in lack of more extended research.

The Event Marketing Theory is based on some of the most recognized marketing theories within the field of marketing management decision making. The 4Ps theory has been the dominant framework since it was published in 1960. It helps marketing managers all over the world determine a clear and effective marketing strategy. The 6P model has been modernized and connected directly to marketing decisions regarding events and seemed therefore relevant to the topic of this report. The aim of this report is to create an understanding of the changes and challenges the hybrid format has meant for event marketers. The event marketing theory and the 6Ps provide an important frame that builds a structure for analysing the marketing strategies of hybrid event organizers.

Both the six Ps of event marketing and the promotion mix included in the theoretical framework have been criticized for being outdated and not up to date with digitalization (Hartman et al, 2020). We argue that this fact makes the theories interesting to look at from the perspective of the modern industry of hybrid events. Some of the elements included in the promotion mix have been excluded from this report, viral marketing and experiential marketing are interesting components but were not operable with the data collected in the study.

2.6 Event Experience

Preston (2012) argues that the products of an event are made up by the consumer's experience and the content the experience has to offer. In order to take a favourable position on the market and attract attendees the experience has to offer more than just great infrastructure; it has to involve emotions and have a higher value for people. De Geus, Richards and Toepoel (2015) describes event experiences as creating something extraordinary, where one event is not like the other. Orefice (2018) argues that aspects such as emotions, authenticity and surprise open for event producers to affect and create event experiences through *event design*. The author discusses that there are five key dimensions to take into consideration when producing an event experience: sensory, affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social. These dimensions are also supported by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) and Schmitt (1999) when describing brand experience. Sensory refers to taste, touch, sight, sounds and scents. Affection means feelings and emotions that blossom when experiencing an event. Behavioural refers to involvement which can be measured in participation or engagement in the experience. Cognitive is about the intellectual activity of the visitor, whereas social aspects refer to belongingness, relations, and community.

De Geus et al. (2015) explain that creating a feeling of community, socialisation and belonging is key when creating event experiences. Richards (2019) also agrees with this and adds that interaction plays a crucial role in the concept of experiences. Understanding how event experiences play a role in events is major to successfully market it.

2.6.2 Event Design

Event design can refer to producing a "particular, emotional and memorable experience", according to Orefice (2018, p. 22). There is not a recognized definition of the concept and

different researchers argue for different definitions. Ferdinand and Kitchin (2012, p. 52) argue that it is "a purposeful arrangement of elements of an event to maximise the positive impression on the attendees and other key stakeholders".

To give some clarity to the concept, design can be defined separately from the concept of event. "The theme, programme, setting, services and consumables are all subjects of design", according to Getz et al. (2019, p. 15). Orefice (2018) states that design is often described as a tool to deliver experiences, starting from forming an idea to delivery of the experience. Berridge (2014) also states that the design of the event plays a big role in creating great experiences. It helps the audience to build their own image and opinion of the event. The author argues that using design as a tool can anticipate and predict the future of event experiences. "In practice this means that the professional event manager must be able to envision and imagine the whole experience from the attendee point of view and identify the elements that will mitigate unsatisfactory experiences" (Berridge, 2014, p. 12).

2.7 Literature Reflections Regarding Event Experience

The theoretical framework listed in the previous section describes how marketers create strong experiences for events. The theoretical framework about event experience is based on five dimensions, acting as pillars. The presented theory by Orefice (2018), Schmitt (1999) and Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) complement each other and has high validity as it has been reviewed and reworked many times by several researchers. Experience is relevant to this study because it is of high importance to understand the design of events to market and communicate it. Also, a larger proportion of the interviews mentioned and elaborated on this area which makes it relevant to this study. There are however more components in the theory that could be included as relevant elements for experiences. These have not been included due to its focus on brand experience.

Experience creation is often related to consumer behaviour, meaning how consumers are affected when interacting with an event. Preston (2012) argues that the consumer's experience plays a big role in how the experience is presented. The author states that the concept of experience should go hand in hand with the event to offer an attractive product. This makes event experience relevant in terms of the six P's. The concept is relevant to this study when exclusively looking at it from the producers' point of view, meaning how event organizers use the components of event experiences when creating an event. This can however also be seen as an absence in the theoretical framework because the elements are not fully based on the producer's perspective. The literature on event design is relevant to this study when examining its impact on events as a product, price, and place but also how producers can create experiences by enhancing the event design.

3. Methodology

In the following chapter, the used methods and their relevance will be presented and explained. The section accounts for the ethical considerations that have been implemented through the duration of this study. Finally, the chapter analyses the quality of the results.

3.1 Abductive Research Approach

It is of high importance to determine and describe the research approach in early stages of compiling a report, as it is a relevant step in determining the research design. There are two common ways of relating theoretical literature to reality, deductive and inductive research approaches. Bryman and Bell (2017) define an inductive research approach as observing reality and later finding theoretical literature that describes the phenomenon concluded in the observation (Bryman et al., 2017). Deductive research approach is defined by using theoretical literature as base for formulated research questions, and further analysing the results to decide if the literature could be used to describe the reality or not. This report does not aim to confirm or deny a hypothesis but takes an interest in understanding how producers of hybrid events work regarding existing marketing theories. The report combines the deductive and inductive approach and follows an abductive approach (Bryman et al, 2017). The research questions and furthermore interview questions have been anchored in existing theoretical literature examining its correlation to reality but it does also offer new findings that have an impact on the theoretical framework.

3.2 Qualitative Method

Bryman et al., (2017) describes the inductive research approach as being connected to the qualitative research method. Qualitative research focuses on how individuals perceive and experience an identified phenomenon. The qualitative findings are not measurable variables but can create a deeper understanding of a situation and generate an applicable theoretical framework. The aim of this report is to examine the challenges and possibilities of marketing hybrid events. The report also aims to gain a deeper understanding of how event organizers' marketing strategies have changed during the pandemic and offers an insight into the future for hybrid events. To answer the research questions and generate a deeper understanding of different producers' experience, a qualitative research method was established. Bryman et al., (2017) describes the qualitative method as suitable for analysing and interpreting the experiences and reality, which is why the method is suitable for this report. People's experiences include emotions and interpretations which can be examined through verbal methods, according to Patel and Davidson (2019). This makes a qualitative method suitable to fulfil the purpose of the study as producers' experience.

3.3 Data Collection

The data used in the report was collected through semi structured expert interviews. To gain a deeper understanding of how the organizers events think and work with marketing, expert interviews within the field were performed.

3.3.1 Semi Structured Expert Interviews

To create an understanding of the event organizers experiences and answer the research questions, expert interviews with representatives from different hybrid events in Sweden were conducted. Fulfilling the purpose of the report required insight into the event industry and in-depth information about the transformation from physical to hybrid events. Therefore, industry experts were chosen as respondents for the interviews. The respondents were project managers, coordinators and marketers with relevant knowledge and experience in the chosen area. Using industry professionals are, according to Libakova and Sertakova (2015) favourable when looking for deeper knowledge about a specific industry, which is the case in this study.

Before the interviews were conducted, a manuscript with relevant themes was produced to gain relevant responses with regards to the research questions. The manuscript was structured to better understand the respondents' perspectives and knowledge regarding the studied area (Patel et al., 2019). The structure of the manuscript was created with support from the theoretical framework but also gave room for the respondents to interpret the questions and answer them freely. The questions covered a wide area relevant to this study. This provided an opportunity to find additional relevant aspects within the subject but also to be able to identify the aspects that were less relevant to the research question (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). In the introductory part of the semi-structured interviews, the purpose of the study was presented. This was made shortly to prevent influencing the respondents' responses (Patel et al., 2019). *See Appendix 1.*

The interviews were based on semi-structure, as it meant that the researcher had more space for follow-up questions beyond the ones designed through themes for the interview. This can be referred to as a more flexible and open-minded way of thinking, according to Bryman et al. (2019). During the interviews, we experienced that the semi-structure resulted in less standardized answers from the respondents but more nuanced perspectives on their experiences. The semi-structure offered tools to guide the recipients when needed to obtain deeper and more specific answers, by asking follow-up questions such as "how? and why?". Semi-structured interviews usually consist of a low degree of standardization, according to Patel et al., (2019). The questions asked in the interviews were not standardized to a great extent, meaning that the order in which the questions were asked varied between the interviews but still followed the same base structure. Depending on which way the interviewer chose to answer the previous questions, the manuscript was adapted, and questions were put in the order that best suited the situation. This method gave the respondents space to share their experiences to a wider extent.

The study includes seven expert interviews, six of them were conducted through video calls and one was held on the phone with the respondent. The choice to use video calls instead of in person meetings was simply due to convenience and availability. We found that the video calls gave opportunities to reach respondents located in other cities which offers a wider perspective of the event industry in Sweden. Bell et al., (2019) describes that phone interviews are more convenient and time efficient but offers less opportunity for observation and capturing body

language and gestures. The choice to use video calls enable observations to some degree but not to the same extent as the respondent becomes more aware of their own reactions when seeing themselves. The interviews lasted between forty to one and a half hours depending on the depth the respondent went into and the amount of follow up questions.

The semi-structured interviews conducted during this study offered a profound description of the respondent's experiences and knowledge about marketing hybrid events and the foreseeable future of the format. We believe that the interviews contributed to important insights that constitute relevant core knowledge in this study, as they were based on structured questions and the respondents were given the possibility to talk openly about the themes.

3.3.2 Choices of Respondents

The choice of respondents was done to collect relevant data for the report. The events included in the report were limited to companies that had previously organized their event in a physical format but, due to the pandemic or digitalization of the world, chose to organize a hybrid or digital event instead. To achieve an overview of how the event business has experienced the change to hybrid events and the challenges of marketing and communicating the new format, respondents within different fields of the event industry were interviewed. The respondents included experts within both a hybrid festival, hybrid fairs, a hybrid congress and hybrid conferences. This provides a versatile and in-depth picture of the challenges. The respondents are believed to be relevant contributors to the study as they have first-hand experience with marketing and creating both physical, digital and hybrid events. They can provide immediate observations of how the events have been communicated and the challenges this entails. In the following section, the event organizers included in the report will be more closely presented.

HX-festival

The HX-festival is an annual city festival in Helsingborg. The festival is organized by the city owned event company Helsingborg Arena and Scene. It uses the city as its arena and during two days in august, the people of Helsingborg and surrounding cities can partake in multiple activities and experiences. The festival offers everything from concerts and tivoli attractions, to stand up, food trucks and markets. The HX festival has three focus points: music, culture, and sports. It aims to attract tourists to the city, but most importantly to provide a fun, social and engaging experience for the city's residents (HX, 2021).

2020, the HX festival, became Sweden's first digital festival. The experience consisted of a live studio, an online festival area, and pre-recorded visits and interviews with local organisations, people, and companies. This year, 2021, the festival was held in a hybrid format, with activities on different locations out in the city, a live studio and broadcasted concerts with a smaller physical audience (HX, 2021).

Gothenburg Book Fair

The Gothenburg Book Fair is the largest cultural event within the Nordic countries. The fair attracts more than 80 000 visitors each year, divided over four following days in September.

When the event first started, in 1985, the participants were exclusively librarians, and the event format was a conference offering interesting seminars about literature. Today, the fair targets both the industry audience and the public. Among the visitors one can find authors, teachers, publishers, and general book lovers. The fair offers different activities such as seminars, stage programs and experiences in the exhibitors' stands. The fair is held in central Gothenburg, in the Swedish Exhibition and Congress Centre. The venue fits over 800 exhibitors and offers several food and beverage options, different installations, stages and try kitchens (Bokmässan, 2021a).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the book fair could not be held in its usual form 2020 and 2021. The 2020 book fair was carried out online, in a digital format, where participants could watch seminars and book discussion at home through "The Bookfair Play". 2021 opened up for more physical participants and the event was held in a hybrid format with a smaller audience at the site and a bigger audience online (Bokmässan, 2021b).

eCarExpo

eCarExpo is a fair about electrification of cars organized in Gothenburg, Stockholm and Copenhagen once a year. The fair focuses on being able to give visitors the chance to, for example, test drive and get more information about electric and hybrid cars, charging technologies and other electrical products (eCarExpo, 2021a).

The fair took a break in 2020 due to the outbreak of Covid-19. In 2021, eCarExpo was held both digitally and physically. On their website, Gunnar Dackevall, CEO of eCarExpo, writes that the hybrid fair can reach a global reach and that the goal is to be able to convey the same atmosphere, content, and inspiration both physically and digitally, which makes the company interesting to interview (eCarExpo, 2021b).

Gadden

Gadden is the largest career fair in Scandinavia for students within business, logistics, law, and environmental science. Seventeen students that work in a project committee create and organize the fair which takes place at the School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University once a year for two days. The fair has around 6000 visitors but also 100 exhibiting companies and organizations. At the fair, students have the opportunity to network with different companies and potential employers. Gadden also provides students with lectures, activities, mingle events and a banquet. The fair was held digitally in 2020, which is a difference from having been completely physical before. In 2021 the fair was not held at all due to the pandemic and instead a new website was launched (GADDEN, 2021).

Digital Well 2020

Digital Well Arena is an ongoing project that provides an innovation area where the public sector, companies, academia, and civil society come together to create and develop new ways of working and digital solutions that increases peoples' possibilities to live a healthier life. Digital Well 2020 was a congress organized as a steppingstone in this project. The 2020 Covid-

19 pandemic turned the event first intended to be physical into a hybrid congress where the participants could choose to attend the event physically, digitally or through a hub (Digital Well Arena, 2021).

Helsingborg Arena Studio

Helsingborg Arena Studio is a new initiative from the event company Helsingborg Arena och Scen AB enabling stakeholders to perform digital or hybrid events in a fully equipped studio. Helsingborg Arena has historically organized conferences, fairs and meetings in different formats and sizes. The Arena offers premises that can be rented for meetings and has as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic turned one of the meeting rooms into a studio that is staffed with technicians and studio operatives to help stakeholders through the event process (Helsingborg Arena Studio, 2021).

Göteborg & Co

Göteborg & Co is a company owned by the City of Gothenburg. Göteborg & Co aim to get more people to discover and choose Gothenburg as their living and holiday destination. This is done by enhancing the sustainable work and development of Gothenburg that creates benefits for everyone that visits or lives in the city (Göteborg & Co, 2021a).

Göteborg & Co describes hospitality as key in the Swedish economy and in order for Gothenburg to achieve the ambition regarding sustainability, international relations, education, employment, business development, cultural life and integration. The company works with communicating and creating campaigns for events, fairs, destinations, etc., located in Gothenburg (Göteborg & Co, 2021b). In 2020, the company launched a new project intended to implement and analyze the hybrid event format in the city (Göteborg & Co, 2021c).

3.4 Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and later carefully listened through and transcribed to facilitate the data analyses, except for one interview, due to the respondents' preferences. Listening back on the material was important, as it gave the opportunity to analyse the tone of voice and interpret the underlying meanings. Bryman et al., (2017) argue that qualitative research takes an interest in both what the respondents are saying and what they are implying, which is why being coherent to these factors when listening to the material is important. Further, it is crucial to account for the complete exposition of the exchange in the interviews to gather an absolute foundation for the analysis (Bryman et al., 2017). This was obtained by transcribing the data with a partition.

The transcribed data was then coded using the method found in the grounded theory (Bell et al., 2019). Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) refer to the coding process as the most central part of the grounded theory. We started by reviewing the transcript and breaking the data into categories by common phenomena found in the interviews. The data was then examined, compared, and conceptualized to find connection to the theoretical framework and turned into

categories. This is called open coding, according to Bell et al. (2019). The categories were named after the different parts of the theoretical framework and common concepts found within the data were grouped into these categories. We used colour coding to systematically connect quotes from the interviews to suitable categories. Phenomena found within each category were then written out into a scheme that was later used to conduct the analyses.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Bell et al. (2019) describes that ethical principles regarding business research tend to revolve around four recurring issues. These areas include whether there is harm to participants, whether there is a lack of informed consent, whether this is an invasion of privacy and whether deception is involved. We have taken all these issues into consideration during the process and conduction of this report to ensure ethical consideration.

Bell et al. (2019) refers to harm as entailing several factors including physical harm; stress; harm to career prospects; harm to development or self-esteem and inducing prospects to perform reprehensible acts. To ensure that none of the respondents included in this study were harmed in any of the ways mentioned, we conducted an interview guide consisting of questions whose answers would not reflect badly on any of the companies or be harmful to the respondents, stakeholders, or anyone else that may be affected by this study. Some of the data from the interviews was deliberately excluded as some of the statements could reflect negatively on the respondent, such as opinions regarding other companies and controversial beliefs. The report does contain opinions regarding sensitive topics, like environmental aspects, these were not excluded as they provided valuable points and nuances to the result. The AMO Code of ethics recommend that confidentiality and anonymity should be negotiated in advance to the interties (Bell et al., 2019). The respondents knew they were not anonymous and would be quoted on their statements during the interviews.

Informed consent refers to ensuring that relevant information about the study is presented to the respondents. It also refers to informing the respondents whether recording equipment will be used in the interviews or not (Bell et al., 2019). All the respondents were informed about the study's purpose before deciding to participate and asked if they agreed to be recorded, which six out of seven agreed to. This was done to ensure their consent. Bell et al., (2019) explains that these are important aspects to take into consideration to prevent issues for both parties.

The third issue, the right to privacy, refers to the informed consent of the respondents and them as individuals according to SRA guidelines (Bell et al., 2019). The interview questions were formulated in a way that included relevant aspects for the study and excluded personal questions that can affect respondents negatively. Each of the respondents shared their personal opinions and experiences regarding the studied subject but the interviews were not intended to be an invasion of the respondents' privacy. To ensure this, their surnames were excluded throughout the whole study, and some were anonymized in parts that can cause potential harm or sensibilities which the data may imply. One respondent disagreed with being recorded, it

was necessary to meet their preferences to prevent their privacy and security from being compromised.

Deception occurs when researchers present their research in a misleading way giving the respondent a false understanding of what the intention of their participation is (Bell et al., 2019). To minimize issues of deception we explained the intentions of the study to the respondent before the interviews. By informing the respondent of the aim of the interviews in advance, we could obtain greater knowledge about their experiences as they were prepared and had time to think about the subject.

3.6 Assurance of Quality

The study accounts for seven respondents' thoughts and experiences regarding marketing of hybrid events. Using a higher number of respondents offers a broader perspective on the problem and can result in higher authenticity (Bell et al., 2019). The choice to include seven different event organizers in this study was taken due to several circumstances. Due to the time period and duration of the study, the availability and possibilities were limited. We argue that the depth and length of the interviews make up for the limited number of respondents. Expert interviews provide expertise and deep insight into the field, which is why seven respondents are a sufficient number in this case (Bell et al., 2019). As the purpose of this study was to create an understanding of how event organizers have experience marketing hybrid events, we found it important to include several types of events in the report. By focusing on examining one type of event, the study could have offered a deeper insight. Focusing on several events makes it necessary to generalize to a greater extent.

An eventual risk with a qualitative research method is that the authors of the report can affect the outcome of the interviews depending on knowledge and personal experiences related to the subject of matter. This may depend on how the questions are presented or if the respondents are provided with information before answering the questions. This is not always a negative aspect as the interviewer should guide the respondent in creating meaningful responses to a certain degree, but it can however contribute to absence in the study's validity (Patel et al., 2019). Putting the authors own thoughts and opinions aside was necessary in order to stay objective and prevent the analysis from angling in a specific direction, despite these efforts personal interpretations are hard to avoid in a qualitative study. Bryman et al., (2017) points out the risk of the respondent adapting their answers to the intentions held by the interviewer or answering in a non-sincere way, from an angle of self-interest. This could lead to misleading results and low validity.

An eventual risk with semi-structured interviews is that misunderstandings can occur when verbal information is transcribed due to differences in speech and writing (Patel et al., 2019). This creates some uncertainty in determining what the respondents actually meant and how it was interpreted by the interviewer. This is partly since body language and coherent sentences may not be captured when transferring the interview to writing. All the interviews in this study were recorded and transcribed, except one due to the respondents' preferences. To ensure the

validity of the recorded interviews, the transcripts could have been shared with the respondents but were not in this case (Patel et al., 2019). The authors state that the validity of the data can be controlled by an observer, which was the case for many of our interviews where both authors attended. This is called inter-rated validity (Patel et al., 2019).

The fact that one of the interviews was not recorded or transcribed implies great uncertainty in its validity. Meaning that the respondents complete answers may not have been included in the collected material and the interviewer may have coloured these answers afterwards when reconstructing the interview from memories. This makes it hard to guarantee both the respondent's answers and what the interviewer captured. Bryman et al., (2017) explains that it is important to conduct the interview even if it is not recorded. Meaning that it is still likely to collect important and relevant information that can be used in the study.

Reliability is described as the extent to which the result would be persistent if the research would be repeated. The qualitative method does not offer a high reliability as the results are highly affected by the opinions and thoughts apparent when the interviews and analyses are conducted. (Bell et al. 2019). The data collected through a qualitative method cannot be generalized to common practice in the same way a quantitative result with high reliability would. The results apparent in this study offer insight to the industry but cannot be seen as the general event organizers experience.

4. Results and Analysis

The following chapter will disclose the findings obtained in the conducted expert interview. The result from the coding of the data will be presented and analysed according to the theoretical framework.

During the coding of the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, a couple of phenomenon and common denominators were found and divided into three main themes in relation to the theoretical framework and research questions. These themes were:

1. Event Marketing
2. The 6 P:s of Event Marketing
3. Future for Hybrid Events

The first theme presents some of the challenges and possibilities commonly found throughout the interviews. The second theme accounts for the changes and challenges regarding marketing strategy. Lastly, the third theme presents and analyses the data that processes the future for hybrid events.

4.1 Event Marketing

A New Demographic

C.A Preston (2012) argues that a key component in successfully creating and marketing an event is knowing and determining the target group. In order to create a working marketing strategy, create a great value and attract the audience to the event, knowing the target group and what they want is crucial. The events included in this study have significantly different target groups and take up different segments of the market, but they all have a clear and determined target group and intention as to who and why they are creating and marketing their event. The data collected in the expert interviews show that the enabling of digital participation during and after the event have changed the demographic of participants and created both challenges and new possibilities for marketers.

Previous research on the incentives for hybrid events suggests that an upside of the hybrid format is enabling a larger reach and a more diverse content than strictly virtual or physical events (Kacholia, 2020). This study confirmed that hybrid format opens up for bigger audiences and new demographics. Jonas, Project Manager HX festival presented the results of the statistics collected during the hybrid festival 2021. The festival had experienced a significant raise in the number of total participants compared to previous years. The physical festival has had around 150 000 visitors in previous years, the hybrid format reached 252 896 digital visitors and approximately 15 000 physical participants.

The HX festival stated that their digital event format in 2020 had been seen from all over the world. By the power of social media and the event being shared on Facebook, it had reached

audiences in the US, Germany, Spain and many more countries. The same phenomenon happened during the hybrid format in 2021. *"People that never would have considered going to Helsingborg are now taking part in our city festival, both people from other parts of Sweden but also in other parts of the world"*, explained Jonas, Project Manager at HX. Digital Well 2020 had experienced the same tendency, the possibility to participate digitally and in a hub format enabled them to include stakeholders outside of their usual demographic.

> *"We have targeted stakeholders within Värmland and neighbouring cities previously, but the hybrid format has given us the opportunity to turn the event into a national project (...) We have been able to send out invitations to more companies and enable new and exciting collaborations"* - Sandra, Digital Well 2020

The digital participation within hybrid events has not only enabled a bigger geographical reach but has affected other demographic factors such as age, gender, and interests within the participants. Kim, Marketing Chef at Gothenburg Book Fair explained the impact the digital platform "Bokmässan Play" has had on their participants:

> *"We have seen a huge gain in reach on a demographic level, we saw that a lot more men were participating in the book fair this year. We went from 20% to 35% male participants, regarding the seminar program. We are reaching a whole new target group…"*

The data collected from the interviews show that all the respondents agree that a bigger reach and a more diverse group of participants is a good thing. They want to have a bigger audience, more people engaging in their brand and more tickets sold. The digital part of hybrid events enables marketing the event to a bigger crowd and involving more participants in the experience, which is an incentive for the hybrid format. The respondents also suggest that the flexibility offered by the hybrid format attracts more participants, as they can choose if they want to partake in the event physically or digitally. Sandra at Digital Well 2020 suggested that the hub format and the different ways of participation enable those with symptoms of illness or faced with other obstacles to change their ticket from physical to digital. This led to more participants being able to partake in the experience and was highly appreciated by the participants. Preston (2012) suggests that a big part of the marketing communication is word-of-mouth marketing and the consumers spreading the event online. By obtaining a bigger target group and demographic reach, more consumers' words and opinions can contribute to attracting more people and building engagement toward the brand.

The result also shows a phenomenon that suggests that the event organizers have experienced challenges due to the changing target group. Helsingborg Arena Studio experienced a shift in their client group to such an extent that they had a hard time knowing who the target group was and which stakeholders to direct their marketing towards. C.A Preston (2012) emphasizes on the importance of familiarizing and knowing the target group in order to offer the consumer an appealing experience and creating a marketing strategy that reaches and attracts the target group. When the target group is undetermined it becomes hard to establish a working marketing

plan. Jonas, Project Manager at Helsingborg Arena Studio expressed the concerns regarding the changing target group as following when asked about their marketing communication:

> *"We are working with marketing communication in some ways, we have our website, and we send out newsletters and show adverts on our big led screen outside of the arena, but we should have done a lot more. The lack of communication efforts had a lot to do with us not knowing who the consumer was.."*

A New Competitive Market

The experience economy has created a competitive market for events and an overflow of similar events for the consumers to choose from. Event Marketing Theory suggests that having an overview of the market is highly important for the event organizers to be able to create competitive advantages. For the event to be appealing to consumers to such an extent that they want to attend, it has to offer a value that is higher for the customer than any other similar event (C.A Preston, 2012). The data collected in this study show that the recipients have experienced a change within the competitive market during the pandemic. The organizers suggest that the digitalization of events has created an overflow of stakeholders on the market and has put an extended pressure on the organizers to stay relevant and be able to compete on the market.

Many of the respondents express that they have experienced that the audience is expecting more production value and accuracy when they are participating in an event online. Both HX, Gothenburg Book Fair and Helsingborg Arena Studio suggest that the shift into digital and hybrid events has placed them on the same competitive market as TV-productions and other streaming services. For them to attract and satisfy the audience, they must create content that matches the content of Netflix or TV-channels.

> *"The production value had to be very high, as the digital aspects makes The Book Fair into more than just an event, it is almost a TV-show that we are doing. We are competing with Netflix and Babel, real TV-shows. It became super important to us to use top notch moderators and hosts that had experience within TV or Radio"*

The new competitive market created challenges for the event organizers both regarding budget, technique and content of the event. Having a great production that can compete with TV-production calls for a much bigger budget and advanced technical devices. The event organizers partaking in this study all express that they had to learn and adapt to the new market when the pandemic hit, this includes learning new skills and rethinking the old ways of creating value for the consumers. The objectives of the event changed and had to be replaced into higher production value and value creating content. Both The Book Fair and The HX festival had previously used the social aspects of the event as key elements in their marketing. The HX festival was marketed as a big "summer party" and The Book Fair wanted to communicate "Book Party", where the interaction with authors and different people were used to attract participants. When the social aspects were stopped due to the pandemic, they had to focus on other aspects of the event to create competitive advantages. These aspects included offering

more interesting content, using experienced hosts, or hiring artists that would attract participants.

The data collected through the expert interviews suggest that some of the event organizers have experienced difficulties in attracting digital participants to the events. Jonas, at Helsingborg Arena Studio, explains that the new competitive market is overfilled with options for the consumer. It becomes harder to stand out and choose to attend your event when they have options of attending any event around the world. Jonas puts emphasis on the difficulties of competing with free options like YouTube and suggests that the consumers rather watch a free video than buy a ticket for an online event if the event does not contain something of higher value to the consumer. C.A Preston (2012) suggests that the experience must offer something unique and valuable to the consumer to attract online participants.

Gadden experienced difficulties with getting the students to participate during the online events. Aylin, Head of Marketing at Gadden, explained that they had to use prizes in order to persuade the students to participate. They also worked with trying to create more interesting and desirable content in their event. The digital aspects of the hybrid format made it easier for Gadden to invite speakers from different parts of Sweden, which created incentives for the students to participate. Previous research within the incentives of hybrid events suggest that the format opens up for more diverse content (Kacholia, 2020). This is true in this case of Gadden, as it enables the event organizers to offer more interesting content in their experience.

Marketing Strategy

The event marketing theory points out that a key component in marketing an event successfully is having a clear strategy. This strategy should include the intentions of the event and a carefully thought-out plan for the position the event wants to take on the market, what value it offers to the participants and who the event is for. The five Ws by Hoyle are a useful tool in creating a marketing strategy. The events that are subjects to this study have expressed that having a clear strategy and intention is important when creating and communicating the event. Both Gadden, The HX Festival, Digital Well 2020 and The Book Fair explained that they had a clear intention and thought behind every marketing effort they perform. For many of them, the vision for their brand and event was the factor that made them want to redirect their event into a hybrid or digital instead of format when the pandemic hit.

During the interview with The Book Fair, Kim shared the intention of the event. He explains that *"bokmässan wants to create a thrill in the soul of people through being the most inspiring and thought-provoking experiences during the year"*. The Book Fair wants to encourage reading, education, and litterateur to make the world a better place. Kim pointed out that the organizer of The Book Fair keeps this in mind through the whole process of organizing and marketing the event. Gadden intends to create a bridge between students and companies at Handelshögskolan, Digital Well 2020 wants to make different stakeholders come together for the wellbeing of people. The HX festival wants to be the "Helsingborg's most glorious summer party". Due to the pandemic, HX decided to change their vision and instead become "The first

and only digital city festival". The event organizers stated that they worked closely with their established strategy even when the event format changed. Some aspects, which will be further explained later in the analyse, of the strategy changes during the transition into hybrid events but the main intentions remained and worked as a guiding light for many of the event organizers.

4.2 The 6 P:s of Hybrid Events

All the events included in this study want to achieve a response from the market, whether it means obtaining higher demand for the event, creating a stronger position or becoming more profitable. Gadden wants more students and relevant companies to participate in the fair, The Book Fair wants to be the most inspiring event and Helsingborg Arena Studio wants more companies to use their studio. According to Kotler, Armstrong and Parment, 2017, obtaining the desired response requires the four elements of the Marketing Mix, the 4 Ps. Products, Place, Price and Promotion need to co-operate to establish a position on the market. C. A Preston (2012) has come up with an extension of the model, focusing on the event market specifically. The model adds People and Process into the mix. The data collected from the expert interviews show that the event organizers have experienced changes and challenges regarding all the elements in the Marketing Mix.

Product

The Products, the event, has been forced to change due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The events that were previously offering social interactions, big crowds and in person communication were moved to the digital or hybrid format. Preston (2012) describes the product as all the content of the event but also the extended products, the value of the event and what it means to people. To attract and make the participants return to the event, it needs to offer a valuable experience to them. It does also have to be more desirable than other events on the market. Preston (2012) emphasises on the thoughts and feelings the event experience is creating within the participants. Orefice (2018), Schmitt (1999) and Brakus et al. (2009) describes great and impactful experiences created through five elements: sensory, affective, behavioural, cognitive and social. These have an impact on how the participant experiences and connects to the event. The event organizers included in this study expressed that they faced challenges implementing these aspects in their product (experience) in the hybrid format, as the digital setting of hybrid events means that the physical contact disappears.

Sensorial aspects can lead to enhanced experiences for visitors of events and contribute to valuable memories through the different senses like touch, scent, and view (Orefice, 2018; Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009). The events included in this study all agreed that sensory awareness is important to include in the product, to create involvement and an unforgettable experience no matter the type of event. The events in this study expressed difficulties with bringing the five elements into an online setting. Anna at eCarExpo described that their audience requires to view, touch and test drive the cars on the exhibition. This study showed that the sensorial elements are difficult to enhance in an online setting but excluding the

element would mean limiting the experience. Identifying the right tools is therefore key in creating experiences online. Sandra at Digital Well described scent as an uncommonly used tool with high impact:" *It's something that elevates the environment and differs from other [tools] (...), we have so many more senses than hearing and sight*". This study showed that sensorial aspects can enhance the experience and therefore the product. However, many of the respondents expressed difficulties with finding suitable solutions to do so. The results also showed that the degree of sensory experiences differ, depending on the goal of the event.

The second element, affection, was also proven to be an important aspect in creating impactful experiences. Kim at the Gothenburg Book Fair explained that the concept of affection, meaning feelings and emotions, have a big impact on the audience and how they perceive the product. He suggests using pictures and moving material to create involvement and enhance emotions in an online setting. Sandra at Digital Well 2020 explained that: "*you do not remember exactly what they have said and what they talked about, but you often remember a feeling. How did I feel when I walked away from this event?*".

Event organizers also expressed the importance of including cognitive and interactive aspects in the product. This is to involve and include the participants in the event as much as possible. Kim at the Gothenburg Book Fair explained that creating the same interactivity for the participants online as the physical ones was a challenge. Digital Well tried to tackle this by identifying the participants potential thresholds and indirectly forcing them to cross them. This provided the event organizer with a guide on how to work with interaction and therefore also involvement (behavioural element). Quizzes and tasks also turned out to be effective in making the participants interact with the product. Henrik at Göteborg & Co. exemplified this by describing the Swedish song contest Melodifestivalen. It involves the audience at home through voting but also physically, where the performances are broadcasted live with a physical audience. Including the audience in these ways creates feelings of community and belongingness towards the product, referring to the social element (Orefice, 2018). A successful product in the form of an event requires well thought out planning which should include the five dimensions of experience (Orefice, 2018; Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009).

The study also showed that the respondents experienced difficulties with prioritizing both audiences in the hybrid format and building equal value for both groups. The difficulties referred to engaging one of the audiences without leaving out the other one.

> "*It's almost like two different events that you work with at the same time, one online and one on-site*" - Kim, Marketing Chef at Gothenburg Book Fair.

> "*It is obvious to me that the hybrid format takes double the amount of work. As soon as you get people in the room you have to make a choice of which audience you want to focus on. To say that both the audiences are equally important sounds good, but it doesn't work in reality, at least there are not many hosts who can manage that. I have experienced that the focus, more often than not, is directed to the physical audience and that the digital audience notices and feels a bit left out. The same goes for the other way around*" - Jonas, Helsingborg Arena Studio

Price

Some event organizers subject to this study had experienced challenges regarding the pricing of the event. Jonas at Helsingborg Arena Studio explained that they experienced difficulties in matching the price of their services with what the clients wanted to pay for them. The clients were used to one price for arranging a meeting, but as the hybrid or digital format required more resources and time, the producers had to increase the price. This resulted in them losing some of their regular clients that could not afford or did not see the hybrid format being worth the higher price point. Other event organizers experienced challenges regarding establishing the value of the physical and the digital participation. A common phenomenon during the interviews was that the organizers took a lower price for digital tickets than they did physical tickets as they valued the digital experience to be less desired by the consumers if the pricing was higher. Jonas at Helsingborg Arena Studio has found pricing to be a challenging part of hybrid events and argues that it takes a lot of marketing effort to persuade the digital participants to buy tickets to the hybrid events.

> *"(...) the problem is the budget, some things only go to the venue and entertainment, things that the digital guests do not experience but cost just as much if it was physical or not. In fact, I would say that one should charge much more than what is done for the digital participants but they themselves think it should be much, much cheaper since it is not physical. I'm just looking at the screen. It should not be worth much since we're used to watching Netflix, etc. One is not used to having such a high cost per hour and per minute. YouTube is free, for example. It is a big challenge, but if you do it right, you can definitely do it. But then you have to be a proper marketing organization to work with early bird prices and constantly be up to date, push and prove that the content is worth so much" - Jonas, at Helsingborg Arena Studio*

Digital Well 2020 on the other hand, chose to have the same price point for both ways of participation. Sara, Project Manager at Digital Well 2020 explained that *"we wanted to offer the same experience for both consumers, that's how we (...) taking the same price, the only thing we took away from the digital participators fee was the cost for food"*. Establishing the price for an event seems to be a fine balance of figuring out what the attendee wants to pay for the digital or physical experience but at the same time covering the higher cost for technical equipment needed for the hybrid format.

Preston (2012) argues that the price level for an event should relate to covering the costs for the event and should be equivalent to the value the event is offering. He explains that the price point can be used as a way of positioning on the market. The events that were free, like the HX festival and Gadden wanted to position themselves as open to everyone. These events are also state funded and do not have to cover the costs of the events in the same way that The Book Fair, eCarExpo or Helsingborg Arena Studio must do. This makes the pricing much less of an issue for the free events that keep their position on the market regarding price, whereas the events that had to change their price due to higher cost might have ruptured their old position on the market.

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Another challenge related to the price of an event is how to design an event in relation to the budget, meaning the organizers cost. Designing an event plays a big role in how the audience perceives the event (Berridge, 2014). Understanding event design can also help producers to create better products and identify tools that can enhance the experience. The events in this study had different goals, which also meant different goals with their design. However, this study confirmed that the technical aspects play a big role in achieving an intended design. The product, in terms of content, can be lacking if the technology does not work well. It can be about, for example, how well the platform works in terms of sound, image, and polls. Here, it also becomes important to review what opportunities the budget allows. This means that depending on the event's budget, producers can use and develop event design to different extents. Jonas, at Helsingborg Arena Studio expressed this challenge: *"If I could design all the events exactly the way I want them, they would always be much, much, much more expensive, so somewhere you just have to put a roof over it and say 'yes, but this is our budget'"*. This study confirmed that everything that is visible should work as well as what is not, in order to create an event with coherent design and save on expenses.

People

People refers to all the operatives coming in contact with the participants of the event. This factor has become compromised by the pandemic, as social contact was not allowed face to face. Preston (2012) argues that the operative's service during the event has a big impact on the attendants' experience and their attitude towards the brand, which is why it is an important part of the marketing strategy. Jonas, at Helsingborg Arena Studio agrees with this statement and argues that a big part of what they are trying to present as their value is communicated through great service employees and in person contact with the client hosting the conference or meeting. Service-minded, positive, and knowledgeable employees will create positive associations towards the brand. Sandra, at Digital Well 2020, explained that the operative staff at an event can create security for the event participants, having someone to ask for directions or help you find your placement will enhance the experience. To create this security and interaction with staff during the digital format, which Richards (2019) argues is important. Many of the event organizers created a chat function for digital support, where the participants could get help with answering questions and so on.

When asked what feeling the company wants the brand to relate to and how they achieve this connection, Jonas said that the staff is an important factor in this process. *"We want the impression to be welcoming and professional (…) the initial contact and having great service employees is an important part of that"*.

Place

Place refers to the venue the event is held in. Preston (2012) describes that the venue should be in line with the theme or offering of the event. The HX festival described that they have tried holding the event in different parts of Helsingborg but came to the conclusion that the harbour was the most efficient placement for the festival. Jonas, Project Manager at the HX festival explained that the venue shift was mainly connected to enabling traffic in the city but also

because the atmosphere close to the water was festive and fun. Many of the events included in this study are connected to a set venue and have been at the same location for years, Gadden has for example always been at Handelshögskolan and Helsingborg Arena Studio is bound to Helsingborg Arena. The Hybrid format has added a new venue for the events, the online venue. A common phenomenon within the interviews was that all the respondents had put a lot of work into making the digital venue easy to use, appealing and efficient.

The place can be influenced by the setting in which the event is designed. Orefice (2018) argues that event design can create memorable and emotional experiences. The venue in which the events in this study were set, were shown to be enhanced through the five elements of event experience; sensory, affective, behavioural, cognitive, and social (Orefice, 2018; Schmitt, 1999; Brakus et al., 2009). Many of the respondents had used their physical venue as a way of enhancing the experience, by for example using visuals and design. The Book Fair suggested that an important part of the experience is the designs on the venue. Kim explained: "The different concept areas, for example the gander area where we put up trees and paint different installations are a big part of creating feelings and an enhanced experience for the participants".

The digital value does not offer competitive advantages in the same way as having an outstanding physical venue can. C. A Preston (2012) suggests that a great venue can enhance the experience of the event whereas a venue that does not reflect well on the event can serve a negative outcome. Many of the respondents explained that they had put a lot of work into designing the online venue in a way that reflected the event and represented the brand in an efficient way.

Process

The process refers to using and booking an event. For an event to reattach attendance, every aspect if it must run smoothly. The event organizer emphasizes the importance of making every aspect of the event easy coherent. To achieve this and create an event process that is desirable and valuable to both the physical and digital participant groups in a hybrid event, Jonas at Helsingborg Arena Studio suggests that when designing the event, one should place themselves in the participants' shoes. He suggested that the event organizer should ask themselves questions the participants may have during the event and gave the following example:

> *"Will it work technically and if it does not, is there anyone who can answer my questions? Should I be part of the Zoom? Do I have the equipment? Can I test it in advance? And how can I know that if I am going to share something, know when it starts? Do I see a timer that counts down when there is a break for them [the participants]? What should I do then? How do I know when it will start again?" - Jonas, Project Manager at Helsingborg Arena Studio.*

Sandra at Digital Well 2020 also suggested that all parts of the event are important for the overall impression, especially during a hybrid event. The respondents in this study also stated that it is important to be consistent and create a constant theme for the event. This makes it possible for the process, from idea to implementation, to be smoother.

Promotion

The last P in the marketing mix is *Promotion*. Promotion is an important tool used to bring an event forward and generate attention from potential attendance. Marketing communication is both a way to present the event to consumers, but also communicate the values, offers and brand (Preston, 2012). The respondents in this study all work with promotion and integrate the different tools in the promotion mix in different ways. Many of the respondents emphasized on using their communication channels to spread their values and the importance of keeping all the communication aligned both graphically and emotionally to create a clear impression of the brand's values to the consumers. When asked what they wanted to communicate to the consumer, Kim and Jonas answered as following:

> *"We want our communication to give a warm, delightful and inspiring feeling to the consumers, we are using a lot of people in motion and authors in our adverts to create that feeling" - Kim, The Book Fair*

> *"We want to communicate the feeling of ice cream; we want our ads to pop. It should feel like that summer rush, we want you to think of piggelin when you think of the HX festival and happiness and community" - Jonas, The HX Festival*

The conventional events like The Book Fair, The HX festival and eCarExpo uses digital advertisement as their main tool for communication. Kotler et al. (2017) argue that advertising is a great way of reaching the masses which is what these events want to do. Many of the events are using paid online ads, where algorithms present their adverts to their chosen target group. A common phenomenon seen in the interviews is that the hybrid format and the pandemic has made the event organizers focus more on their digital presence and social media content, thus they believe that the digital audience is present online. It is unclear though if the change is due strictly to the hybrid format or is connected to digitalization in general. Contradictory, eCarExpo explained that they had not changed their marketing communication at all during the pandemic, they were using the same channels and strategy as they did during the physical format of the event.

The Book Fair explained that they had collaborated with other already established digital platforms like, "GöteborgsPosten" and "Sydsvenska" to spread their event and encourage traffic on their website. They had also hired a digital marketing agency to ensure that their digital communication worked efficiently and reached the correct crowd. *They helped us with paid media and made it work. They also helped us A and B test the different pictures and headlines to see what worked the best. I don't think that we have done that before."* explained Kim at The Book Fair. Kotler et al. (2017) expresses that it is important to be coherent to the responses that the communication gets from the consumers. Many of the event organizers did, much like The Book Fair, try out different types of content to see what worked best and did also conduct surveys after the event to see how the communication and event was perceived by the audience to be able to adapt the results to the next event.

The events that had a more specific target group, for example Digital Well 2020, Gadden and Helsingborg Arena Studio focused more on direct marketing and sales promotion in addition to digital and printed ads. Digital Well 2020 created personal video invitations to their alleged participants. *"We wanted to make them feel special and chosen with the personal invitations, and we chose to do a digital video as it communicated that the event was hybrid and cool"* explained Sandra. Aylin at Gadden explained that they called their sponsors on the phone and showed up during school lectures to get a more personal touch to their communication, which could be seen as sales promotion. Both Gadden and Helsingborg Arena Studio used their own websites and social media as main promotion channels. Common for all the events were that they all wanted to be where their consumers are, whether it was in the city as for HX or on Handelshogskolan for Gadden.

As disclosed previously in the analyses, a huge challenge of hybrid events was creating a great experience for both the digital and physical participants when the social aspects of the event disappeared. Before the pandemic, visual tools like interior design, lighting and settings had been used to enhance the experience. The results from the expert interviews show that the event organizers used communication as a tool to enhance the experience for the consumers during the hybrid format. By painting a picture of the sensorial, social and emotional aspects of the event through pictures and text, the event organizers hoped to inflict these feelings for both the physical and the digital participant. Jonas, at The HX Festival explained the following when asked how they worked to create these feelings for their audience during the digital and hybrid format of the festival:

> *"I think it is all about visualizing and describing the feelings in text. If we can't get the audience to smell the langos, we can describe the smell to them. We worked a lot with that in our sales text and PR in order to activate the senses. An example was "experience the HX festival from a safe distance, create your own at home festival and eat something good". We offered examples for recipes they could cook at home and worked a lot with bright colours to activate the visual senses."*

The Book Fair experienced challenges regarding the communication as they wanted to communicate "the book party" with pictures and text of a big crowd to create the feeling of socialization and gathering for their audience. In contradiction they did not want to encourage dangerous behaviour or be associated with promoting the pandemic in any way. Kim at The Book Fair explained the following when asked how their marketing had changed during the change from physical to hybrid format:

> *"It's hard to say which changes have to do with the hybrid format and what has to do with Covid-19. It was really challenging communicatively to work during the pandemic. It's hard to paint a picture of this fantastic event in a way that won't be perceived wrong. We have to think about communicating in a responsible way".*

Here, the event organizers are also being coherent to the world that they are sending messages into and aware that the intent they might have with an ad filled with people might be perceived

differently by the consumer as the state of the world has changed. This has clear connections to the communication process model (Kotler et al., 2017).

4.3 Future for Hybrid Events

What the Future Holds

Previous research within the field of hybrid events indicates that the hybrid format is here to stay. According to a survey done by American Express, benefits like availability, flexibility and reach makes event organizers convinced that the hybrid is the future for the event industry (American Express, 2021). The event organizers included in this study all agreed with this statement. All the respondents are convinced that they will continue to include the digital format in some way, even when the world allows for bigger physical audiences. The benefits of enabling digital participation on the event are simply too many, to such an extent that it, despite the challenges the hybrid format includes, makes it worth it. Kim, Marketing Chef at Bokmässan described the following when asked about the future for hybrid events:

> *"I am personally convinced that the hybrid format is the future for The Book Fair and I think that this is only the beginning of our journey with hybrid events. We are reaching people that we would have never reached without the digital aspects. At the same time, we don´t want to cannibalize our own event and stop people from coming to the physical fair, but I don't think that will be a problem, we have had many people reaching out to us wanting to come back to the physical setting..."*

Despite all the respondents being generally positive towards the hybrid being a future trend, the results from the interviews show that the extent the event organizers see themselves using the hybrid format in the future has connections to the type of event they are offering and the intentions behind the event. Gothenburg Book Fair, HX festival, Gadden and eCarExpo are all very tied to their physical format and express an urge to go back to their normal setting when it's possible. According to American Express (2021), 81% of future events will contain face-to-face interactions as people are longing for the physical meeting. Both Jonas at the HX festival and Anna at eCarExpo are convinced that there is nothing that can replace the feeling of engaging in a live experience physically. Standing in a big crowd surrounded by other people and talking to exhibitors' face to face. Most of the respondents in this study report that they will offer the digital aspect as a bonus feature to offer more diversity, reach and as an alternative experience to the people participating online. Some might even film the content of the event and offer participants to take part of the content even after the live event is over. The Book Fair explains that most participants at the live event won't be able to attend all the seminars and filming it will enable them to experience the whole program afterwards.

Some of the event organizers in this study have experienced such success with the hybrid format that they are convinced that they won't go back to doing strictly physical events. Digital Well 2020 have experienced great incentives of organizing the event in a hybrid format. Sandra, Project Manager at Digital Well 2020 argued that the hybrid format offers too many benefits,

and that they can't overlook them. She expresses an excitement in the future and being able to keep developing and refine their hybrid format. *"Think of the development that has happened during the last two years, imagine what we will be able to do in the future,"* she explained. Sandra thinks that the challenges the hybrid event format entails for the event organizers will be minimized in the future. Technical and organizational development like improved digital platforms and established ways to work will make the hybrid event format much more natural to both organizers and participants. Sandra is under the impression that the new generation is much more open to the hybrid format of socializing which also indicates that it will be more natural in the future. Gothenburg & Co shares the impression of the younger generation, arguing that virtual engagement like gaming has prepared them to be more susceptible to the hybrid format.

Previous research has shown that the hybrid format is a more sustainable option as it reduces the need for traveling (Vulture, 2021). Jonas at the Helsingborg Arena Studio agrees with this statement and argues that sustainability is an important benefit of hybrid events, along with that event become more convenient, require less time and are safter:

> *"It is very logical that there are a lot of unnecessary meetings, to make people travel just to listen to someone say something that could have been digital, so I just think it's really healthy. Meet when it's important and have digital meetings to avoid taking flights just to present a message. We had a customer who ran a digital event. They did an incredible show with Rebecca and Fiona and they had Bon Jovi on link. (...) It was a very expensive event but, in the end, it would have been much more expensive to fly in all the thousands of people to watch it. It is not only the cost itself or the environmental impact that is good for, but it is also all the time that would have gone to the flight that you can now do something else with. But it is a question of the environment and I definitely feel that some meetings are unnecessary and can be digitized"*

Despite previous research lifting sustainability as one of the main incentives for hybrid events (Vulture, 2021), some of the respondents in the interviews are not as convinced that the hybrid format and sustainability go hand in hand. Sandra, at Digital Well 2020, argues that sustainability is used as a selling point and believes that it will continue to be used that way in the future. She argues that when events are digital, they are more environmentally friendly but what many do not think about is that other aspects, such as broadband, databases and energy also affect the environment. She argues that the importance of thinking long-term when it comes to sustainability must be considered when producing and planning an event.

Sustainability can be divided into three parts: social, economic, and ecological. One respondent agreed that hybrid events can be more ecologically sustainable. However, their organization's focus is mainly on the economic and social aspects. They explained that "*we avoid that question altogether. (...). We still want people to travel here so we do not talk about sustainability in this way. We talk about social sustainability, and we talk about economic sustainability."* The respondent describes that the greatest sustainable advantage, for them, is the economic aspect.

Meaning that more people can be included and participate because the form is more flexible, which is why they want to implement the hybrid format in their city.

McKinsey & Company (2020) argue that the pandemic acted as a fast forward button for digitalization and technical development in the world, especially within the event industry. Most of the subjects of this study are convinced that the hybrid format is here to stay and argue that the development into the hybrid event format probably would have happened eventually regardless of the pandemic. When asked how the event's decision to do a hybrid format was affected by the Covid-19, all the respondents answered that the conversion would not have happened this quickly if it wasn't for the pandemic.

> *"This happened 100% due to the pandemic. I think we would have done it eventually, but it would have taken a really long time. We were stuck in our tracks and did not really see past how we had always done it, the pandemic had us change gear and rethink in just a few months" - Kim, Marketing Chef, The Book Fair*

> *"I don't think it would have happened without the pandemic. We did not see the demand for a studio, and we didn't have the knowledge in house. Now we do and we will keep using the knowledge we have obtained during the pandemic" - Jonas, Project Manager, Helsingborg Arena Studio*

A clear phenomenon apparent in this study is that the event organizers have experienced a trying time and big challenges during 2020 and 2021, but they have learnt and obtained a lot of knowledge. Jonas, at Helsingborg Arena Studio argued that the pandemic has made the consumers expect that the event organizers can provide digital aspects during the events. Jonas goes on explaining, *"The possibility to take in digital participants or digital speakers to a conference or meeting will be a hygiene factor in the future and something that the producers and consumers will take for granted that we can offer to them"*. Depending on the intent of the event, the digital aspect will be more or less important. The HX festival with the intent of creating a city party intends to use the digital aspect to a minimal extent, maybe integrating streaming concerts online or using virtual tools to extend the experience. Jonas at HX expresses an urge to go back to the original version of the event and focus on the physical experience once again. The meeting, conference and fair subjective to this study indicated that the hybrid format will be in focus in the future.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

In the final chapter of this report, the conclusions found in the report will be presented. The section includes recommendations for event organizers based on the result presented in the report. Furthermore, this chapter will present the contributions this study has made within the research field and proposals for further research on hybrid events.

5.1 Conclusions

What are the challenges and possibilities of marketing a hybrid event?

When analysing the data from the expert interviews, we found that the event organizers had experienced several possibilities and challenges of marketing hybrid events, these are presented in the table below, *see Table 1*.

Possibilities	Challenges
+ Opportunities to reach more participants + Opportunities to reach a new demographic + Allows the event to grow + Opportunities to interduce the event on a new market + Allows for new ways to enhance the product	- Defining the target group - Creating competitive advantages on a new market - Creating an impactful experience requires larger efforts - Determining a price point that reflects the value of the event - Attracting participants to the event

Table 1: Possibilities and challenges of marketing hybrid events

The data collected showed that all the respondents had experienced that the hybrid format opened up for reaching a larger audience and possibilities to new demographics within the target group. This is as the digital way of participation enables audiences from all over the world to take part of the event and a new demographic introduces the event to new segments on the market. The research showed that the hybrid format had allowed the events to grow as some of the events had experienced more participation during the hybrid format than the physical. The digital aspect introduces the event on a new market that reaches beyond the geographical area that the event is held in. In conclusion, the values of the event can reach more people and enhance the event's position on the market. The hybrid event format also allows new ways to enhance the product and make it more competitively advanced on the market, for example making it more interactive, including virtual tools and enabling the participant flexibility to participate online or in person.

This study shows that the event organizers experienced several challenges in marketing hybrid events. Firstly, the larger reach and demographic lead to difficulties defining the target group and knowing who to direct marketing communication towards. The hybrid format placed the events on the same market as TV-production which challenged the event organizers to create differentiating value to achieve competitive advantages. It also challenges the events to provide a higher production value. The price was another challenge evident in the study. As the internal cost for the events grew with the need for more expensive equipment and resources, the price for the event had to be higher which did not match what the consumers were willing to pay. We found that some of the event organizers meant losing consumers. The non-profit events were not met with this challenge to the same extent but experienced that their budget did not offer room for their full ambitions.

Creating an impactful experience was another challenge found in this study. Marketing a product that would offer value to the participants through stimulating the senses took more effort for the event organizers. We found that some of the respondents experienced challenges in attracting participants to the new format, both because of recalcitrance to the new format from the consumers and the participants not seeing the value in participating online.

How have event organizers' marketing strategies been affected by the change from physical to digital and hybrid event format during the Covid-19 pandemic?

From the data collected in this study, we found that the event organizers had clear intention and marketing strategy both before and during the pandemic. Their strategies have been affected in some ways, but the study also found that many of the respondents used the same marketing communication channels and marketed the events with the same main value as before the pandemic.

The results show that the promotion had moved to the online setting to a greater extent than before the pandemic, but it is hard to determine if the cause for this change was the new event format or digitalization in general. We found that marketers tended to communicate in a more responsible way due to the pandemic. Meaning that the marketing strategy of hybrid and digital events required marketers to communicate in a new way to avoid giving out signals of jeopardizing people's health and wellbeing.

The findings show that the digital and hybrid format during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the event organizers using marketing communication to a wider extent. Marketing communication can provide the events with beneficial tools to enhance the product. Through storytelling and visual content representing the values of the event, the organizers hoped to create a more impactful experience for the participants. Designing the event around the five elements of event experience was found crucial for some of the events in this study, especially regarding the sensorial and affective aspects.

We observed that the marketing strategy of some events in this study were forced to change due to the new circumstances in the world. However, these changes were not spread to a large extent. Meaning that large parts of the event organizers strategies remained the same or almost the same as before the pandemic. We can conclude that for the event organizers who went through changes in their strategy, these changes covered the six P's: product, price, people, place, and promotion. This is explained through the new position on the market that hybrid and digital events gained during the pandemic.

What do the event organizers think the future holds for hybrid events?

Through our observations, we found that event organizers predicted that the demand for physical events will increase remarkably when the world opens and allows for non-restricted meetings and exchanges. Although the organizers experienced that participant long for physical interaction, this study indicates that hybrid events are here to stay. Our observations showed that this is strongly connected to the type of event, since some events fit into the online setting more than others. It also depends on the event's organizers intention and the value they want to create for the participants.

In conclusion, it is likely that the format will continue to be included in many events due to the many benefits it contributes with. These benefits include sustainability and availability. It will also be a matter of staying relevant on the market and in line with digitalization and technical improvement. However, this cannot be determined and remains to be seen.

5.2 Discussion

In the following section, the implications for event organizers will be discussed. The section will also account for the study's contributions to the research field and proposals for future research.

5.2.1 Recommendations for Event Organizers

This report has collected data and information regarding different event organizations experiences during the covid-19 pandemic and has contributed with insight of how experts within the event industry work to create experiences and market their events. The study does present marketers and event organizers with important insight to consider when arranging and marketing digital and hybrid events. The results found in the report suggest that digital and hybrid events call for more efforts regarding both marketing communication and marketing strategy. It is important to have a clear intention as to whom the event is for and what it offers to the participants. Having a clear marketing strategy can help the organizers avoid some of the challenges seen in these reports. This report identifies some of the challenges previously experienced by event organizers that can be useful to know when producing a hybrid event.

Creating an attractive hybrid event that offers value to the consumers requires more effort regarding communications and finding new ways to engage both the online and physical participants. Using ads and direct communication that reflects the value of the event by

visualizing or describing the sensations and affections the organizers want to inflict on the participant can be a helpful tool to create a better experience and product. Introducing new techniques like VR and AR give room for questions, interaction and socialization which can be valuable for online participants.

The findings in this study suggest that the pricing has been an issue regarding hybrid events. This implies that event organizers should consider what their target groups are willing to pay for the offered experience. At the same time, it is important to consider the organizers budget and prioritize the resources after the significance to the experience. The report also implies that it is important to be coherent to the market and consumers to be able to create a fulfilling product and price. This goes for the entire process of the event, from marketing communication to the implementation.

Lastly, the conclusions of this study recommend that focus on establishing a high production value to be able to compete on the new market and make sure that all the elements included in the hybrid event come together to create a coherent overall impression.

5.2.2 Contributions to the Research Field

This study contributes to the research field with insight from event organizers experiences of conducting events during a time of a global pandemic. The knowledge found in this study is valuable as it provides a glimpse into the growing industry of hybrid events. The pandemic has caused an increased demand for digital and hybrid events, which has created a need for research within this relatively new and unexplored field. The hybrid format is believed to remain even after the pandemic, which makes the research found in this study a great contribution to the field of event research. This study does only account for a small portion of the events conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and an even smaller portion of the hybrid events previously organized. The study can contribute as a basis or complement to further research within the field. It should be considered that the study was performed during a time of uncertainty in the world and the results have been highly affected by restrictions taking place during the pandemic. The conclusions found in this study might have been given a different outcome if the events would have included a bigger physical audience. This should be taken into consideration when referred to the study in future research.

5.2.3 Proposal for Future Research

This research has only covered a small portion within the field of hybrid events. This study has covered the organizers perspective on marketing hybrid events and provided insight from a limited group of respondents. In order to use this study in future research, we propose that interesting complementary research within this field would be to examine consumer behaviour and consumer experiences, this would create an overall picture. This study could be conducted using focus groups consisting of participants of a hybrid event or consumers exposed to the marketing of an event. Focus groups are a great qualitative method for building a dialog and obtaining deeper understanding of the consumers experiences in connections to a hybrid event.

Using a quantitative method such as surveys would provide wider but less profound knowledge.

Another interesting approach for future research would be to examine other types of events than the ones included in this study. We experienced that using different forms of events as subjects to this study provided an interesting overall insight. To gain a deeper understanding within one event type, we propose exclusively studying one limited type of event. In addition, extending the respondents to a global level would provide a wider understanding. Using the interview manuscript in this study in a future research process would provide insight of changes and new perspectives within the field.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Background

- Could you please tell us a bit about what it means to work as (emplyment title) for (company)?
- Could you tell us a bit about the company as a whole?
  - *How do you work?*
  - *Which are your main activities?*
- What is your target audience?
  - *Demography*?
- How do you want your consumers to perceive the company? What emotions do you want to be associated with?
  - *Which tools do you use to create this perception of the company?*

Hybrid Events

- The pandemic and social distancing have changed the conditions for physical events. What would you say are the most important parts of a successful physical event?
- Would you say that social interaction is an important part of the events you produce?
  - *What have you done to bring these parts into a digital environment?*
  - *Have you experienced any challenges in including these parts in a digital environment?*
- How has your company experienced the change in the event industry during the covid-19 pandemic and the evolving digitalisation?
  - *In what way have your conditions changed?*
  - *Did you arrange hybrid events even before the pandemic? Why/why not? If not, was it an obvious choice to move on to this form of event when the pandemic struck?*
- What incentives/advantages do you see in having a hybrid event compared to a strictly digital or physical event?
  - *Do you see any challenges with this form of event?*
- How does the planning process of a hybrid event look for you?
  - *How does it differ from the planning of a physical or digital event?*
  - *What parts do you think are important to include in a hybrid event?*
  - *What tools and digital platforms do you use when implementing hybrid events?*
- What would you say is the most important thing to keep in mind when arranging a hybrid event?

Marketing communication

- How do you communicate with your target group? How do you reach them?
- Which communication channels do you use? Why?
- Is there any difference in how you communicate physical events vs. hybrid events?

- - *Do you use the same marketing channels?*
  - *Have you experienced any challenges related to marketing communication in the transition to hybrid events?*
- Do you communicate to more people demographically?
- Has the target group changed with hybrid events?
  - *How has it affected your marketing communication?*
- What pricing do you have for the event?
  - *What do you want to communicate with this pricing?*
  - *Is there a difference between physical and hybrid events?*
- Do you use direct marketing, how and why?

Event Experience
- How would you describe your brand?
- How do you want to be perceived by your visitors?
- What elements do you think should be included in a hybrid theme to create a good experience for visitors?
  - *What sensorial experiences do you want your visitors to feel?*
  - *What feelings do you want visitors to feel in connection with your brand?*
  - *Do you think it is important to activate the cognitive ability of the visitors?*
  - *How does your brand create interaction and community between visitors?*
  - *How do these elements help to create entertainment for your visitors?*
- Do these elements differ between physical or hybrid events? How?

Future
- Many experts within the event industry predict that hybrid events are the future. How do you see it?