

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXTERNAL FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE ATTENDEES CONSUMPTION OF EVENTS

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Abstract

In recent years the event management industry has faced unprecedented disruption from external factors. In the area of event management, external factors are uncontrollable factors that affect the industry. The scope of this study concentrates on recent world events including terrorism, a global pandemic (Goncalves, 2021) and war and the extent to which, if any, these factors play on the minds of event attendees and thereby impact event consumption. As a result, this paper seeks to identify and explore what specific external factors influence attendees' decisions when partaking in events. In a world where uncertainty seems to be evermore present, it is imperative for event researchers and practitioners to consider such issues (Dragin-Jensen et al., 2022).

Using a qualitative approach, five focus groups were conducted during the Covid-19 crisis to examine attendees' decision-making response to partake in events. The focus group participants were drawn from the entertainment, sporting and cultural event sectors, and the results were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. In identifying and analysing the most important external factors that attendees prioritise before, during or after consuming an event, the findings that emerged predominately related to two key themes namely, the behaviour of others and perceptions of safety. Behaviour of others included hooliganism, social media, and alcohol consumption, while safety perceptions included Covid-19, political situations and terrorism.

This study provides an analysis of the decision-making process attendees engage in. Extending understanding of event planning, attendees' perceptions and how these perceptions affect event attendance will assist in building much needed resilience in the event industry. In identifying attendee's concerns during and after the event, event organisers and researchers will be better placed to address issues and alleviate attendees' concerns.

Keywords: Event Management, Attendees, External Factors, Event Consumption

1. INTRODUCTION

Given deepening concerns about securing and safety, event organisers are charged with securing the safety of attendees while managing attendees' perceptions and expectations. Recent geopolitical developments are putting event planners under increasing pressure to secure the safety of their attendees. For example, one of the most disturbing commonalities of terrorist attacks is that often events themselves are the target and therefore the security infrastructure at events can and do reduce the impact of such brutality, saving lives. It is becoming more evident that large crowd gathered at events are becoming a focal point for terrorist groups as they can inflict maximum impact as demonstrated by the attacks on the Manchester and the German Christmas markets. Consequently, event security and alleviating attendees' safety concerns is central to event planning and management.

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will provide event organisers with greater insight into how attendees' perceptions of events are established and influenced by the current heightened awareness of security issues and perceived prevalence of security threats. This study will consider how event management can provide the necessary level and quality of experiences at events while ensuring attendees feel safe and secure. Subsequently, identifying the challenges that event organisers now face on a day-to-day basis such as social media is also relevant. In so doing, this research will provide both academic and practical benefits for the event management. Theoretically, this study will add to the growing body of knowledge in event management and will help researchers to become more aware of external factors and how they affect attendees. Practically, this research will inform the event

industry on approaches to managing the projected and perceived image of their events with a particular emphasis on safety and security.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 How do attendees consume events?

It is important to first critique how pleasure and enjoyment seeking attendees consume events. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p. 92), pioneers in Hedonic Consumption, define the concept of pleasure seeking as *'the facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experiences with products'*. Similarly, the Marketing Dictionary (2022), defines hedonic consumption in a service setting as consumption focused on sensory pleasures provided by the interactions with services such as in the tourism and the events industry. The concept of hedonic consumption follows utilitarian consumption which concentrates primarily on needs such as food and water (Han *et al.*, 2020) with hedonic consumption focusing greater attention on the numerous ways in which event attendees seek pleasure and enjoyment (Horiuchi, 2003). A possible motivation for hedonic consumption is the theory of sensation seeking pioneered by Zuckerman (1979). He identified sensation seeking as a fundamental personality trait, which can be defined by the consumers quest for experiences, and emotions that are *'varied, novel, complex and intense'*, adding that risk taking is a regular characteristic of this trait (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 27). He also describes the willingness of these individuals to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience. Therefore, assessing how attendees perceive such threats and risks when attending events is appropriate.

Risk perception is the belief of an individual regarding possible harm or potential of a loss (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Slovic *et al.*, 1980). This perception is defined as a subjective conclusion that people preconceive concerning the characteristics and severity of a risk (Fischhoff *et al.*, 1983). To perceive risk includes assessments of the likelihood as well as the effects of an uncertain outcome (Slovic *et al.*, 1982; Darker, 2013). Research conducted on the perception of risk permeates numerous fields of study. Within the field of event management, research has centred on event safety (Tarlow, 2002), event practitioners' attitudes (Reid and Ritchie, 2011), threats (Sancho *et al.*, 2020), sporting events (Amorin *et al.*, 2014), security information (Radoglou-Grammatikis, 2021; Altas *et al.*, 2022; Perez-Sanchez and Palacios, 2022), and environmental risk (Sultana *et al.*, 2020). Given that emotions play an influencing role in both threat and risk perception, this perception may be fuelled by the concept of sensation seeking at events. When presented with a situation that involves risk, an emotional response can impact thinking in two ways; the first is the emotions quality, positive versus negative feelings and the second is based on congruent information, for example positive information when positive emotions are experienced. Peters *et al.*, (2006) explore this further by assessing how information can be reversed by emotions, as emotions can often increase risk perception. This concept is based on people relying on negative data about a situation. For example, when negative emotions are felt, individuals focus on the negative information to make decisions rather than assessing all available information. Rottenstreich and Hsee (2001) agree with the powerful influence of emotions and identify how strong negative emotions experienced by individuals, can result in individuals' propensity to rely on such emotional influences and disregard factual detail. However, Chodorkoff and Chodorkoff's (1956) now dated study, proposed the concept of perceptual defence which discounts emotional responses contending that individuals tend to ignore information that is either personally threatening or culturally inappropriate (Chodorkoff and Chodorkoff, 1956). This is evident when attendees disregard past situations and incidents and continue to visit a particular host country or venue where negative incidents occurred previously as borne out in attendees' behaviour post terrorist attacks in the 2015 Paris and the 2017 Manchester attacks.

2.2 Terrorism and the Event Management Industry

According to Toohey (2008) there is no accepted universal definition of terrorism as the term is interpreted differently in every country. The Constitutional Rights Foundation (2006) identifies that each country decodes the meaning of terrorism according to their own beliefs, culture and individual countries efforts to sustain their particular national interests. The European Union differ on the position of a

precise definition of terrorism and have developed a framework to better understand the term (European Parliament, 2015). More recently, in 2017 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO, 2017, p.7) defines terrorism as *"The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence, instilling fear and terror, against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, or to gain control over a population, to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives"*. This definition alludes to religious events as a factor that stimulates terrorist attacks, which was perceived as a primary motivation in the 2017 Berlin Christmas Market and the Manchester Arena attack in 2017. The foremost important aspect of this definition as it pertains to the events sector is the role terrorism plays in 'instilling fear', an emotion which lasts long after the incident has taken place, and one which creates perception (Cakar, 2020; Baxter, 2018; Bakker and de Graff, 2014).

Since 2013, the event management industry has increasingly become a target of numerous brutal terrorist attacks including the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, attacks at the Stade de France and in the Bataclan Theatre in Paris in 2015, Bastille Day attack in Nice in July 2016, the attack at the Berlin Christmas markets in November 2017, the Manchester Arena attack in May 2017, the Las Vegas Strip shooting in October 2017 and the Strasbourg Christmas Market Incident in 2018. Tarlow (2002) suggests that such events are attractive to terrorists, noting the strong association between events and terrorism. It is suggested that these events make inviting targets for terrorists due to the close proximity of many events to major transport routes and the potential of immediate media attention (Skoll and Korstanje, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that event organisers assess existing and perceived safety concerns and implement measures to mitigate such risks. This increase in attacks, where numerous innocent lives enjoying life have been lost, has brought security at events under scrutiny. In recent years, the development of geopolitical issues have resulted in event managers being put under an implausible amount of pressure to entirely secure the safety of attendees at events (Atkins, 2022). Colston (2019), in a discussion of 2020 event trends, analysed the continued need for an increase in event security reiterating the accountability of event organisers to keep their attendees safe by creating the securest possible event environment. Similarly, in forecasting event trends, Lade *et al.*, (2020) evaluates how event organisers are progressively engaged in addressing safety and security and advocates security as a basic need and expectation of event attendees while asserting that security is usually invisible and thus not impacting the experience of the event.

Although security is now seen as a necessity, Shone and Parry (2004), the authors of *Successful Event Management*, warn that it is important not to draw too much attention to, or make a performance of obvious physical security on site at an event. They contend that doing so may be counter-productive and rather than making people feel safe it can cause attendees to question the need for strong security presence engendering fear and mistrust among attendees. Due to their mundane nature, it is evident that events have become a soft target for such attacks. Burke (2017) reported events as "lifestyle targets", with the increase in attacks at events attributed to heightened security at previously targeted locations such as military bases, embassies, and government offices as these locations are now better protected and prepared. In contrast, by their nature events are considered more carefree and places where people once felt safe as attendees were all gathered together in the same location for a common purpose. For example, Christmas markets (McAuley, 2018; Steinke, 2018; Lapkova, Kotek and Rozek, 2020) and festivals (Paraskevas, 2008; Korstanje and George, 2021; Quagliarini, Fatiguso, and Bernardini, 2021) are targets due to the ease of access to large groups of people in one place, openness of venue, vulnerability of the crowd and the assumed lack of awareness of attendees. Given the increase of security and safety incidents, critiquing event organisers response and identifying what event organisers are now doing is useful.

2.2.1 What event organisers are doing now?

Since the attacks, event organisers and law enforcement have worked to protect event venues from mass shootings and major incidents, while also keeping in mind the perceptions of attendees after such incidents. Ominously, in a 2016 Event Huddle poll, 93 per cent of those who work in the event industry did not believe they were sufficiently trained for an incident (Ibrahim, 2016). Event organisers have cautiously implemented protocols and procedures to prevent such attacks from happening again. News reports suggest that law enforcement should hire more off duty undercover police officers for

surveillance of event venues to allay attendees' fears and reassure individuals by providing extra security patrolling the venue (Rozin, 2017). Garrett (2017), agrees and advises that every outdoor event should do a sweep of tall buildings surrounding the event space. However, researchers report that a high presence of security at events can influence attendees to presume that there is an imminent threat (Garrett, 2017). It has also been advised that event organisers should be trained to recognise the sound of shots fired, be equipped to assess the direction of shots and be able to identify the type of weapon being used in order to minimise the number of casualties (Rector, 2021). Sumesh-Singh (2018) suggests that event organisers should invest in event apps that can be utilised to deliver emergency messages to attendees as the technology can direct attendees to exit points. For example, the company Guidebook (2022) allows event organisers to create an app around their event which allows the organiser to input information pertaining to event safety. It is intended that this will assist in promoting safe crowd control and provide valuable information to attendees effectively and efficiently enhancing attendees' sense of security should an incident occur.

Carroll (2017) suggests attacks and security issues at events have made venue security a significant concern and that security at events is now a fact of life that cannot be taken for granted, even if the public believe that these security measures are burdensome and overbearing. However, O' Neill (2017), acknowledges how challenging it is for event organisers to determine the appropriate balance needed to keep attendees safe, maintain the correct level of security while managing attendees' expectations and perceptions. While the world continues to respond to the threat of attacks and violence, the volatility and grave concerns for the future which have resulted from the disruption caused by the Covid-19 global pandemic is unparalleled in recent history. Covid-19 serves to reflect the rapidly changing context in which the event industry operates and magnifies issues of event safety and security challenges still further. The pandemic has underlined the fundamental importance of event safety and securing and clearly highlights the urgent need to understand how events can be managed in times of a major crisis and fully recover. Therefore, this study suggests that while the advent of Covid-19 has exposed the fragility of events, the timing of this research is fortunate as it allows a first-hand response and reflection on the issues and challenges in security and safety measures resulting from the pandemic.

2.3 COVID-19 and Events

In 2022, the world is living through the reality of COVID-19 and its far-reaching ramifications on society. As this virus is new with virologists learning more each day, the potential threat that events bring as vectors to the spread of the virus is unknown (Monhanty, Himanshi and Choudury, 2020). As a result, the event management industry has been particularly badly hit with most events cancelled or changed to an online or virtual setting (McCloskey, 2020; Janiszewska *et al.*, 2021; Kauppila and Ridderstråle, 2021). This is hardly surprising, as researchers such as Ishola and Phin (2011) and Dickman (2013) have historically flagged events as one of the largest sources of the transmission of infectious diseases. However, despite the vulnerability of the industry, researchers in academia have addressed the problem of getting attendees back to events. This body of knowledge relating to COVID-19 and the event industry is largely based on limited data, with contributions heavily leaning on tourism research (Yang *et al.*, 2021; Coles *et al.*, 2022) and sporting events (Ludvigsen and Hayton, 2020; Mann *et al.*, 2020; Miles and Shipway, 2020; Adami *et al.*, 2021; Dergaa *et al.*, 2021).

In a new world of learning to live with the virus, many potential attendees fear attending events, and most are likely to expect higher standards of security and safety. How therefore do event organisers get attendees back to events while also keeping them safe in a world where assurance is shaken, and peace of mind is threatened? In posing these questions, it is necessary to appreciate that the experience and response to the pandemic has been specific to each country. The role and value of communication with attendees is significant in the context of event management. Harcastle-Geedes (2020) of PCMA blog, reported the importance of event organisers to be pro-active and consistent in their communication with attendees during this time of uncertainty, and more importantly as the industry begins to reopen. In Harcastle-Geedes' (2020) analysis she expressed the need for attendees to access all of the information they can gather about an event, and the importance of the role of organisers in conveying the truth by communicating the realistic risk of attending events while the virus is still spreading. The Eventbrite blog (2020) makes similar commentary in discussing transparent communication between organisers

and attendees stressing the significance of honest and consistent communication in increasing customer loyalty. They also noted the role of sensitivity in event organisations transmitting information to alleviate attendees' anxieties and anticipated queries. Interestingly, both blogs advised that if organisers stay silent at this time of uncertainty, it can fuel anxieties amongst attendees and increase the spread of rumours.

With COVID-19 restrictions slowly starting to ease around the world there are both psychological and physical barriers facing events attendees before attending an in-person event again (Marashi *et al.*, 2021; Pedrosa, 2020). According to a survey conducted by YUGOV on possible event attendees in Australia, United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Denmark, and the Philippines; 43% of respondents declared that they would be uncomfortable in attending live events such as music concerts and sports events (Dabhade, 2021). Researchers such as Arora (2020), Asumundon and Taylor (2020), Abdelghani *et al.*, (2021), and Pan, Xu, Luo and Law, (2022) believe the reason for this fear can be explained by the Coronaphobia theory. This theory is based on a relatively novel phobia specific to COVID-19. Naguy (2020), define the phobia as an extreme prompted reaction to the anxiety of contracting the virus, which in turn, can lead to considerable stress. In the context of event management this can transfer to safety seeking behaviours (Knowles and Olatunji, 2021) and the avoidance of public spaces (Viana-Lora and Nel-lo-Andreu, 2022; Sepe, 2021; Drury and Stokoe, 2021).

Initial contributions to this emerging body of knowledge within event management identifies the possible negative impacts of the pandemic, and its transformative capability for positive change (Hall *et al.*, 2020; Sigala, 2020). For example, Benjamin *et al.*, (2020) and Ioannidis and Gyimothy (2020), suggest the pandemic could be a rejuvenating time for the industry, with the establishment of fresh behaviours and systems for facilitating and managing behaviours of patrons that had become unsustainable. Ateljevic (2020) and Hidding -Desbiolles (2020), refer to behaviours in their research, noting the doubt of practitioners regarding consumers returning post Covid given new behavioural conventions and prospects of consumers inducing a 'new normal'. However, there is a noticeable shift in consumer behaviour regarding the tourism sector as discussed by Hodbod, Hommes, Huber and Salle (2021) who note that 10% of households, after numerous lockdowns, have come to a "realisation of not missing it anymore". While this number is low, it is still quite substantial, especially with regards to the economic crises the world is currently facing.

While terrorism and the recent pandemic have hugely impacted the event sector and attendees' consumption of events, the threats posed by the current war in the Ukraine are increasingly impacting the event sector in the context of rising energy costs and perceptions of safety in Europe (Bowers, 2022). Borelli (2022) maintains that this has resulted in an increase in the cost of materials which have been passed on to event attendees via event ticket price hikes. Initial academic contributions on the relationship between war and the event industry highlight a deficiency in the event management literature resulting from the ever-changing situation currently felt by society and businesses. As such, this study provides a unique opportunity to assess the increased pressure and demands on event organisations to adapt in new conditions. In addition, this study facilitates a rethink of the impact of safety and security on changing event consumer behaviour offering new insights from attendees through the use of focus group discussions.

3. METHOD

3.1 Focus Groups

Kruger and Casey (2000), illustrates the usefulness of employing focus groups in research which involves identifying people's perceptions and thoughts on particular issues, services and opportunities. As this research aims to assess attendees' perceptions, employing focus groups in this study is appropriate. Rodgers (2001), notes that focus groups are widely used in tourism research to distinguish customer's reactions to a service but are less prevalence in event management studies. For the purpose of this study, a total of five online focus group discussions, with a total of 22 participants were conducted representing the categories of entertainment, sport and cultural events. The focus groups were facilitated over a period of 4 months, from January 2022 to April 2022. Data collection was maintained until no

new perceptions were generated by the data. When utilizing focus groups, data saturation is typically considered to be between four and six discussions (Brod, Tesler and Christensen, 2009), and was applicable to this research. Focus groups can capture multiple social realities experienced by an event attendee, as events are a human experience. Hillman and Radel (2018), describe how people respond to the perceptions of security issues through knowledge which cannot always be obtained through quantitative research and thus focus groups were deemed an appropriate research tool for this study.

During the data collection phase, it was imperative that the researcher advised participants of their responsibility to maintain confidentiality. Throughout the data collection, Abrams and Gaiser's (2017) 'Online Focus Group' guidelines were followed to ensure the discussions were facilitated objectively. Pre prepared questions and interview schedules were drawn up for consistency. Focus groups have been proven to be useful as they promote richer conversations in contrast to other research tools such as questionnaires. The participants in the groups were permitted to speak freely to stimulate discussion and maximize insights which may not otherwise have been obtained (Masadeh, 2012).

Due to the increase of Covid-19 which coincided with the timing of the data collection phase, online focus groups were deemed appropriate. In line with the Technological University of the Shannon's (2019) ethics policy, all research participants were made aware that participation in the study was completely voluntary and participants gave informed consent.

Contrary to common beliefs, focus groups that are conducted online are a valuable tool. The assumption that moving a focus group online will cause a difference in the data collected is a common misconception as Richard *et al.*, (2020) agree. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, online focus groups were becoming popular, and an accepted method of qualitative data collection as stated by Woodyatt, Finneran and Stephenson (2016). Daniels *et al.*, (2020) and Parry (2020) believe that during online focus groups participants can remain anonymous which helps mitigate their fear of judgement. It was very apparent that the participants of this study welcomed the online convenience and increased the response rate given that some attendees stated they would not be able to take part if the focus group was face to face.

To ensure all were familiar with Microsoft Teams details were included in the information sheets distributed via email in advance to participants. In a limited number of instances during the discussions, participants interrupted each other due to the lack of non-verbal cues. To address this, the moderator sought to ensure that attendees spoke in turn which did on occasion restrict the conversation flow.

4. RESULTS

Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set. The response rate of the focus groups was 70% as illustrated in Table 1. The coding for the data was generated using NVivo software version 2020. An inductive approach was employed to detect themes across the five focus groups. Six codes were created with 53 references as indicated in Table 2. As the data collection progressed, two external factor themes emerged, namely, behaviour of others and perceptions of safety. The first was coded as the behaviour of others and encompasses the impact that the behaviour of other has on attendees, including hooliganism, social media, and alcohol consumption. The second theme relates to the participants perception of safety. Three further sub teams which were found to alter the participants perceptions of safety including, Covid-19, political situations, and terrorism. The ensuing section offers insight on each of these themes.

Panel Group	Sector	Invited	Number of Participants	Response Rate
Focus Group 1	Entertainment	6	3	50%
Focus Group 2	Sport	6	4	67%
Focus Group 3	Culture	6	5	83%
Focus Group 4	Entertainment	6	4	67%

Focus Group 5	Sport	6	5	83%
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Table 1. Focus Group Information

Themes	Frequency	References	Description	Example Quotes
Alcohol Consumption	5	11	The consumption of alcohol at events and how participant perceive these events	“You know, especially if it's going to be drink fuelled. There's just, you know some instances where you know yourself fighting could occur”. “I wouldn't be as keen on festivals kind of for our age group because a lot of people would be drinking and stuff like that”. “If someone's intoxicated or just irritating you in general here to enjoy the event last”.
Hooliganism	5	11	Referring to the violent and rowdy behaviour of attendees in a crowded area	“Hooligans are one particular group that would really put me off wanting to go to an event”. “Rowdy, drunk football fans are a nightmare, a nightmare”. “If you know you're going to a soccer match and the people are all going to be rowdy, you'd want to be prepared for that”.
Terrorism	5	9	This factor focuses mainly on the participant driven perception of the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.	“Terrorism, especially with like the Manchester bombing that happened a few years ago just because it was like an arena setting, that plays at the back of your mind”. “I wouldn't really like choose to go to an event at Manchester Arena just because of what happened there”. “Even the Ariana Grande concert here a few years ago, I suppose that's the most recent. If you were to kind of walk into event now, you kind of there's I say assess the situation around you kind of like, OK, are we OK here?”

COVID-19	4	7	The effect the Covid-19 pandemic has had on attendees' consumption of events.	"I still actually haven't been into any like large, crowded places really since COVID. So, like crowded kind of venues like that, I would definitely stay away from still". "You know, I wouldn't even think about COVID now, really". "I was at a concert before Christmas and November and myself and my friend that went, we both wore masks even though no one else really did. But we felt more comfortable wearing a mask".
Political Situation	5	8	This focuses mainly on the war between Ukraine and Russia, and how the war has caused an increase in ticket prices for events.	"Russia and Ukraine involved in the war at the moment, but I wouldn't want to a football game there in the morning for example. And you know, I think that that'll be something to like, take into account as well." "Maybe surrounded by strong opinions like a soccer match or debate, something like that, that I would find that very like God worrying like, you know, just what. I guess it's an unpredictable situation, isn't it?" "I'd take the cost of it into consideration, so ticket prices or the cost of what it's going to cost me to get there in terms of transport and all that, that would be a big factor for me anyway".

Social Media	4	7	How participants perceive events through social media.	“You know, throwing flares at the stadium like that kind of stuff. Like I would have never known of any. That only for social media, you know. So, it's definitely a massive, massive role in my opinion”. “Only way I'm seeing them is through your tick tock, Facebook, Instagram” “They create the perception, don't they, because they have so much power”.
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Table 2. Description of Emerging Themes

4.1 Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol at events was the most frequently mentioned external factor identified by participant Most events permit the consumption alcohol. However, it was noted that in events such as festivals and sporting events can promote such behaviour by participants, which can lead to not only unruly conduct by the crowd, but also highlight safety concerns amongst participants. In focus group 2, Participant 1 identified that the events they attended which permitted alcohol, frequently ended in physical violence.

“You know, especially if it's going to be drink fuelled. There's just, you know some instances where you know yourself fighting could occur”.

Focus group 2, participant 2 illustrated how the consumption of alcohol at events fabricates an uncomfortable atmosphere where they stated that they were ‘*uneasy about attending events where alcohol was consumed*’. A female participant described how she can feel uneasy in the company of male attendees’ consumption of alcohol at sporting events.

“I'm a bit nervous going by myself cause quite a lot of the guys drink and they're all quite a lot bigger than me and I'm a bit like, do I really want to be trying to buy later drunk guys by myself”.

Another participant highlighted that the presence of alcohol at cultural events promotes feeling of insecurity and safety concerns (see figure 1), and the position they put themselves in when at an event. This participant advised that “*if you know alcohol is going to be present at an event, then you are putting yourself in an unsafe situation, as well as the people that you are with*”. This response suggests that prior to attending an event, attendees not only reflect on their own safety, but also those that are with them.

“If people are like, you know, people are going to be taking drugs or like drinking too much and like, it's just kind of putting yourself not in a safe place, but other people too”.



Fig. 1. Alcohol Consumption Word Cloud

The theme of alcohol consumption at events pertains strongly to hooliganism at events, and indeed how alcohol can be a triggering factor to such behaviour from event attendees.

4.2 Hooliganism

The focus groups came to a consensus on the external factor of hooliganism. Hooliganism is an issue that is very much prominent in today's society (Jennings, 2022). Hooligans are often associated with what is defined as an 'Aggressive' or 'Hostile' crowd, where participants tend to be unorganised and are easily lured into an unlawful conduct. Such behaviour can lead to a particularly unsafe situation to be in. one participant specified hooliganism as a factor that would deter them from attending an event.

"Hooligans are one particular group that would really put me off wanting to go to an event".

Corresponding to the sub theme of alcohol and events, one participant describes what it is like being around such event attendees'

"Rowdy, drunk football fans are a nightmare, a nightmare".

Another participant stressed that if one is attending a sporting event where hooligans are present, they should be prepared. conveying that notion that potential attendees' do consider such external factors which may cause f harm before partaking in an event.

"If you know you're going to a soccer match and the people are all going to be rowdy, you'd want to be prepared for that".



Fig. 2. Hooliganism Word Cloud

Figure 2 provides an insight regarding the thoughts that come to mind when the focus group panels explored hooliganism at events. The word cloud not only suggests what type of events hooligans may be associated with (soccer matches), but also the category of people (older men and drunk football fans) that the research participants consider engaging in hooliganism at an event.

4.3 Terrorism

Amongst all 5 focus group discussions, terrorism was considered a significant threat with all focus groups referring to the Manchester Arena attack, at the Ariane Grande concert in May 2017. Although more recent attacks have taken place, this study highlights how the Manchester attack is still prominent in the minds of event attendees. This act of terrorism highlighted both the vulnerability and challenges of securing event venues. Notably, terrorism was a factor that all focus groups identified as an external factor that attendees evaluate before attending an event.

“Terrorism, especially with like the Manchester bombing that happened a few years ago just because it was like an arena setting, that plays at the back of your mind”.

Similarly, participant 5 in focus group 3 discussed how event when the decision has been made to attend the event and the individual is now partaking in the event setting, they ask and assess as to whether or not they are in a safe place and calculate their options while in the venue itself.

“Even the Ariana Grande concert here a few years ago, I suppose that's the most recent. If you were to kind of walk into event now, you kind of there's I say assess the situation around you kind of like, OK, are we OK here?”

While the Manchester Arena bombing was discussed in each focus group, focus group 1 identified that Irish people are ‘ignorant to the idea of a terrorist attack taking place in the country’. Two of the three participants in this focus group believed this was due to ‘the country being neutral when it comes to politics’. Two participants admitted that they do not take terrorism into consideration before attending events in Ireland, however noted it is a topic they reflect on before attending events abroad, specifically in the United Kingdom. Participant 1 of focus group 3 portrayed his strong feeling while discussing the Manchester Arena attack.

“I mean like are you expecting a bomb like the Manchester Arena concert one? No”.



Fig. 3. Terrorism Word Cloud

A mixed response to the influence of attendees’ consumption of events persisted. 67% of participants acknowledged they think of such incidents before and when choosing an event to attend. Interestingly, Participant 1 of focus group 2 disclosed how they only contemplate such an issue while at an event in a venue. This is thought-provoking as to think of such an act occurring, something needs to have reminded them of such a threat.

4.4 COVID-19

Covid-19 generated a mixed response amongst the participants. 55% of participants agreed that Covid-19 is still an element they consider before attending an event. This uncertainty could be due to the pandemic being relatively under control in contrast to the situation the world, and the events sector were in two years ago. However, as the focus groups progressed, it became evidently clear that individuals are still hesitant of crowded events. 13% of participants had not been to a crowded event since the beginning of the pandemic, which focus group 1 participant 2 confirming.

“I still actually haven’t been into any like large, crowded places really since COVID. So, like crowded kind of venues like that, I would definitely stay away from still.”

Earlier safety seeking behaviour was mentioned, where attendees are actively searching for the safest area to be at an event. The focus group participants prompted this hypothesis by depicting how they now seek and desire outdoor events. It is possible that attendees favouring outdoor events over indoor venues is the new normal for the industry. This discussion was very strong in focus group 4, where there of four participants agreed with the following statement.

“I find places that have an outdoor area I quite like because you don't feel as confined.... and now my mindset is like ohh, outside is safe and like that's where I'm going to draw to rather than indoor events.”

While a ‘new normal’ appears to exist as a result of the pandemic, it is participants appear are eager to go back to the ‘old normal’, whereby there is no mask wearing and venues are at full capacity without people social distancing. However, this ‘old normal’ that participants are yearning after is influenced by the actions of other around them.

“I think in more recent times where there are definitely more comfortable because everyone is kind of getting back to normal, you see other people gathering and everything. So because they're doing it, you kind of think ohh yeah, it's OK, it's safe enough.”



Fig. 4. Covid-19 Word Cloud

This subtheme resulted in mixed response themes to appear in the focus group discussions due to the everchanging regulations during the period that the panel discussions took place. While participants are still cautious, it appears to be more towards crowds and crowded areas rather than the pandemic itself. The word cloud (Figure 4) suggests several categories that participants stressed during their discussion on Covid-19.

4.5 Political Situation

A complex and delicate sub theme to emerge during the focus groups was the political situations which are occurring around the world at the moment, including the war between Russia and Ukraine. As a result of this conflict, economies around the world are seeing a major increase in prices in everyday life thereby reducing discretionary spending such as on events. Consequently, the price of events is a significant factor that recurred in almost all discussions, as illustrated in Figure 5.

“I'd take the cost of it into consideration, so ticket prices or the cost of what it's going to cost me to get there in terms of transport and all that, that would be a big factor for me anyway.”

When the panels discussed what factors, they take into consideration before going to an event, focus group one participant three explicitly stated how they would not want to go to an event in Russia and how the outcome of the current war would ultimately have an influence on whether they would support Russian events again.

“Russia and Ukraine involved in the war at the moment, but I wouldn't want to a football game there in the morning for example. And you know, I think that that'll be something to like, take into account as well.”



Fig. 5. Political Situation Word Cloud

Similar to the terrorism factor, political situations may not be occurring in the country where the event is to take place but can still influence attendees' consumption of events. Regarding the theme of politics, the geopolitical happenings in the world at the moment especially in Russia are causing attendees to rethink the event they are going to event and seek if it has a relation to Russia. Not only that, but such external factors also have a sequential effect in terms of inflation in other countries.

4.6 Social Media

The theme of social media was discussed amongst four of the five focus groups, particularly in relation to how attendees become aware off external factors affecting events. Focus group three discussed the power that social media hold, and its ability to rapidly disseminate information. As a result of this 'power', the participants further debated how these social media platforms create perception (as Figure 6 portrays). This is a worrying statement for event organisers, as it suggests that the intended projected image, they create for an event can easily be overturned due the influence of social media.

“They create the perception, don't they, because they have so much power”.

The power of social media was also discussed in Focus group 1 with three of the participants emphasising how the likelihood of them even being aware of external factors affecting events would be minimal unless they consumed them through social media.

“The only way I'm seeing these incidents is through TikTok, Facebook, Instagram”.



Fig. 6. Social Media Word Cloud

Participant 1 of focus group 5 agreed with this argument stating, *“You can't hide from it. You know you can't hide your event. There's always going be pictures and videos”*. This expression indicates that avoiding social media is difficult as attendees will always capture memories from an event, be they positive or negative.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

Whilst literature in the area of event management and terrorism, Covid-19 and war are increasing, there is still an evident dearth of research examining each factor from the event attendees' point of view, despite the growing incidents occurring in society. Qualitative studies are absent in this area of research, which is influenced by the time-consuming nature of these methods. From five focus group discussions with 22 participants, results indicate that attendees are very aware of the external factors associated with events and depicted how these factors are affecting their consumption of events. This knowledge suggests that event practitioners should be aware of such factors and spend time on marketing their events to address such issues when necessary.

There was a lack of consensus amongst participants regarding Covid-19 and how specifically it affects their consumption of events. On the one hand, some participants did convey Naguy's (2020) theory of 'coronaphobia', showing anxiety at even speaking about attending events with large crowds for fear of contracting the virus. On the other hand, findings strongly suggest that the majority of participants are longing for social interaction and being back at full capacity crowds, proving Zuckerman's (1979) sensation seeking theory to be accurate. In this case, attendees are putting themselves at risk for enjoyment purposes. This lack of consensus is expected as society is now at what seems to be the end of the pandemic with most government enforced restrictions now lifted.

5.2 Implications and Future Research

This research offers a number of tentative external factors that influence event consumption. The findings of this study provide event organisers with greater insight into how attendees' perceptions of events are established and change as a consequence of increased awareness of security issues and perceived prevalence of security threats. This study considered how events can provide the necessary level and quality of experiences and still ensure attendees will feel safe and secure. In other words, this research provides event organisers with solutions to these issues without comprising the enjoyment of the attendee's event experience. For example, what is published on social media is highly influential to event attendees both during and after an event. Event organisers need to take more care in monitoring what is being published on social media regarding their events.

This research extends both our theoretical and empirical understanding of the relationship between event security and attendees' perception by building on the literature in this field of study. Furthermore, exploring this research topic provides practical assistance for event organisers in terms of informing event security provision and marketing strategies. As such, these findings contribute to problem identification within the event sector.

Given the large recurrence of hooliganism and alcohol consumption perceived amongst focus group participants, further research to evaluate the interrelationship between alcohol consumption and hooliganism, and how these two factors impact consumption of events is warranted. Such research is necessary given recent events such as the Champions League Final in Stade de France receiving criticism due to Liverpool supporters' behaviour. Such studies would assist in adding to the body of knowledge available on such incidents, while also helping event practitioners to identify problems and protect both their attendees and the reputation of their events. To extend this line of enquiry, the research outcomes of this study could inform the establishment of guidelines for event policy, local authorities and event practitioners regarding hosting events. In addition, future studies identifying and distinguishing the specific hooliganism and alcohol consumption elements that potentially impact an attendee's perception and consumption of an event could further enhance this important area of study.

5.3 Conclusion

The severity of external factors namely, terrorism, Covid-19, and war affecting and occurring in the events industry are unfortunately ever-growing. With such incidents multiplying, attendees' perception and consumption of events is greatly impacted. This study articulates and assesses safety and security issues when attending an event from attendees' perspectives. This input from attendees informs event planners, organisers and policy makers on what attendees are looking for at events and advise on how

to make attendees feel more comfortable and be more secure at events. Additionally, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge on the impact the war between Ukraine and Russia is having on the events sector, revealing how attendees perceive political situations as an external factor.

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