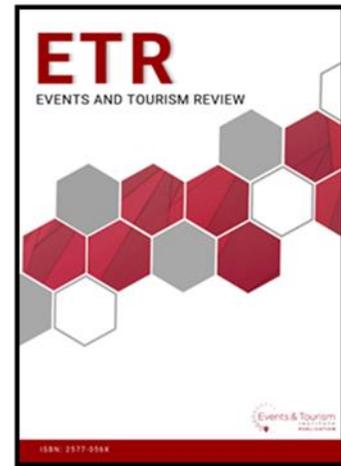


Sustainability, Social, and Technology Development Trends in Events

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Recommended Citation

Singh, N. (2020). Sustainability, Social, and Technology Development Trends in Events. *Events and Tourism Review*, 3(1), 1-6.

Abstract

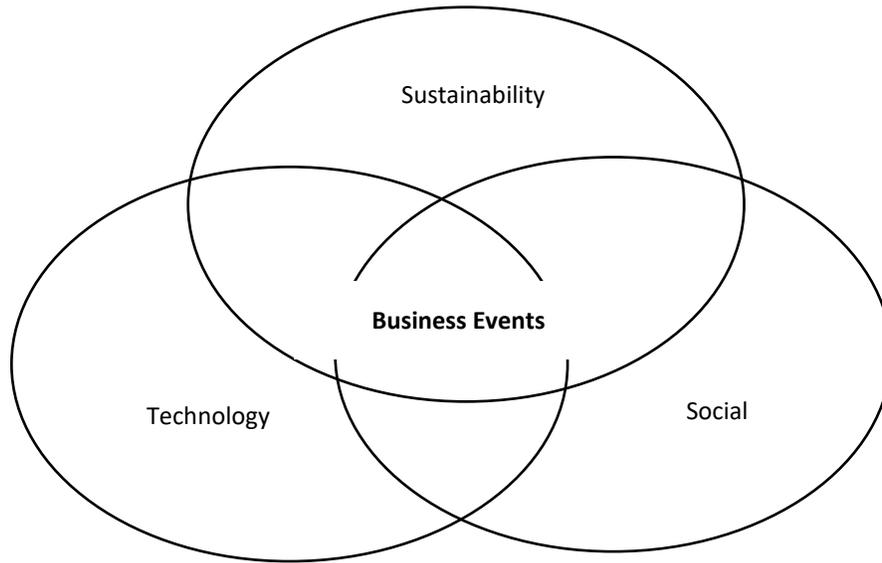
Events have become an important segment of the hospitality and tourism industry. Events are recognized around the globe for their positive impact on the economy of the region, tourism, urban regeneration, culture, education, and community development. There are three major trends that are observed in the event industry: sustainability, social, and technology development. While these trends are benefitting the industry there are concerns and challenges that need to be addressed. In this paper, key facts about these trends are discussed. It is suggested that research on these three trends will enhance this new and emerging discipline and business event industry.

Keywords: Business Events, Sustainability Trends, Social Development Trends, Technology Development Trends

Introduction

Events have become an important segment of the hospitality and tourism industry. Events are involved in almost all aspects of hospitality businesses like tourism, lodging, transportation, food and beverage, catering, and retail, providing direct and indirect benefits, such as income, employment, and investment (Getz & Page, 2015). Events are recognized around the globe for their positive impact on the economy of the region (Jago & Shaw, 1999). Events have an impact on tourism, urban regeneration, culture, education (Mair & Whitford, 2013), leisure time and surplus income (Allen, O'Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2002), and community development (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2006).

Recent reporting from the Events Industry Council (Events Industry Council [EIC], 2018) shows that 1.9 million meetings were held in the United States in 2016, resulting in more than \$330 billion (USD) in direct spending with over 250 million participants. Regarding numbers of people attending conferences, it can have anywhere between hundreds to thousands of people in one place from one to five days. These gatherings have an economic impact but simultaneously have many negative implications too. For example, there can be large amounts of waste generated from these gatherings, negatively impacting the environment. Moreover, with growing sustainability and technology trends and awareness among consumers, conference organizers are concerned and exploring possible ways to overcome the negative image and make conferences effective and efficient (Booker, 2017). Thus, there are three major trends in business events development: sustainability, social, and technology trends. These trends need further attention of researchers to strengthen the industry and develop knowledge in this discipline.



Sustainability Trend in Events

Meetings and conferences have been criticized for having a negative impact on the environment being resource-intensive (Hoyer & Naess, 2001). While travel-related carbon emission is on top, paper waste is the other major source of negative impact on the environment from this sector (Case, 2013). This statement summarizes the reason sustainability is being considered a priority by event professionals, and recent trends confirm this. Sustainability has been one of the most important trends in the event industry (Case, 2013). Recent examples from Rio and London Olympics show the International Olympic Committee (IOC) committed to building a sustainable future by delivering innovations in event planning, staging, and design (Olympic, 2016). An event professionals survey (Pelham, 2011) concluded there was “no time to wait” for embracing sustainability as both government and corporate clients request sustainable events. This was in line with growing environmental awareness and concern among consumers. A recent study by Fenich, Scott-Halsell, Ogbeide, and Hashimoto (2014) found that millennials, a key target segment of the events industry, are highly focused and interested in “sustainability” and “green” initiatives. Forced by such demographic preferences, event organizers have started organizing paperless events that reduce cost, facilitates transactions, and protect the environment (Orantes-Jimenez, Zavala-Galindo, & Vazquez-Álvarez, 2015).

Social Trend in Events

Communication and interaction are core activities of human life, such as meetings and conferences in the work arena. Zelinsky (1994) pointed out this social trend due to business

meetings and called the USA as a "conventionland". He pointed out that staging conventions are an emerging phenomenon that needs site-specific amenities to attract visitors to cities. In short, business meetings on one hand have an economic impact and on the other, satisfy the social needs of pleasure and fun (Zelinsky, 1994). Events Industry Council, the global apex body of events industry, in its recent report on 2018 Global Economic Significance of Business Events, mentioned that in just one year, 2017, 1.5 billion participants from more than 180 countries participated in different business events (Events Industry Council, 2018). This is almost 21 percent of the total world population. This social trend has a huge economic impact every year. In 2017, it resulted in \$2.5 trillion of output (business sales), and 26 million jobs. With \$621.4 billion of direct GDP, business events stand as the 22nd largest economy in the world. The event landscape has undergone a drastic change in the last decade, and technological tools such as mobile applications and social media are helping to create economies of scale, operational efficiency, and customer engagement in such social gatherings (Meeting Professionals International [MPI], 2014, 2015, 2016).

Technology Trend in Events

A survey of the meetings industry experts revealed that events are increasingly becoming tech-savvy by using state of the art technology (Incentives, Business, Travel, & Meetings [IBTM], 2013). A survey of "managing event technology ecosystems" by MPI on how event professionals currently adapt to event technology found that 50% of meetings and event planners who responded agreed their technology budget in the past three years has increased (MPI, 2015). One such technology in use is a mobile conference app, which is defined as standalone software that can be operated through a mobile device to serve the needs of conference organizers, planners, and attendees (Singh, 2019). Mobile conference apps are used for different purposes before, during, and after conferences (Event Marketing Institute [EMI], 2015; Torres, 2017); for example, distribution of schedule, notification of changes, task management, feedback or polls, name badges for registration, and integration with social media. Research shows the top three reasons for its use are "ease of dissemination of information," "engagement of participants," and "convenience for not printing the handouts" (Aksentyeva et al., 2012). While it is heartening to see the technology adoption by the event organizers, it is upsetting to read that conference attendees are reluctant to use technologies such as conference apps because they do not find it attractive (Singh 2019; Schrier, Erdem, & Brewer, 2010). Therefore, it looks like while the technology trend is accepted by the event industry, it is yet to be fully embraced by the participants or event attendees.

Conclusion

As discussed above, the three major trends of the event industry are quietly visible in action. While it is benefitting the industry some concerns and challenges need to be addressed. For example, how to minimize the resource-intensive nature of the meetings. One solution can be to use technology to minimize the negative impact on the environment (Esfahani, Nilashi, Rahman, Ghapanchi, & Zakaria, 2015). Recently, the conference app was used in a five day UNEP conference that provided cost benefits (USD 30,189) and helped in a huge amount of

waste reduction (1,400 paper reams) for the environment (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2016). Due to recent trends, this sector has been characterized by “three highs” (growth, added-value, and innovations), “three larges” (output, employment opportunities, and industry associations), and “three advantages” (human resources, technological know-how, and asset utilization) (Aksentyeva et al., 2012), which reflects the importance of this sector on the economy, sustainability, society, and technology. It is proposed to do further research on the three trends, sustainability, social, and technology, to assess the intertwined nature of their relationships. Additionally, there is a need to establish new ways to create a balance between sustainability, social needs, and technology, to protect the environment and economic growth. Furthermore, there is a need to examine how hospitality and tourism educators are adjusting their curriculum to meet these three trends.

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