Chapter 11
Virtual Reality for Better Event Planning and Management

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ABSTRACT

Digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), will have an increasing influence on the way events are experienced and managed. To date, scholarship has focused predominantly on the possibilities that VR presents for event experiences by event attendees, and there has been limited consideration of the application of VR for event planning and management. In this chapter, the authors provide a brief overview of the growth and application of virtual reality technology in events. A case study of a private sector start-up in the Australian setting is examined with a focus on VR technologies, it is developing as an aid in event planning and logistics. Key opportunities and challenges of VR pertinent to event planning and management are identified, and the authors suggest a number of implications for industry practice and event education, alongside avenues for future research to support the development of VR in event management and education.

INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technologies have impacted the event management sector in a multitude of ways. We have seen practical advancements and scholarly interest in event management and ICTs the areas of management (including planning, marketing, delivery and evaluation) and participation experiences (including design, interactivity and co-design), consistent with developments in the tourism sector (c.f., Beck, Rainaldi & Egger, 2019). While the tourism literature has reflected a burgeoning interest in information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as augmented reality, mixed reality and virtual reality (VR) (Beck et al., 2019), the event management literature has been slower to respond (Backman, 2018; Mair & Weber, 2019). The scholarly study of ICTs and their current and potential application for the event management sector have not kept pace with industry developments. As such, there is a limited body of scholarship pertaining to contemporary and practical applications of ICTs to reflect critically on these advancements in the event management sector and to inform teachings of event management.

Responding to such a gap in the event management scholarship is important from a management perspective particularly given ICTs present ways to realise a range of cost efficiencies for event managers and stakeholders, as well as contribute to the quality of experiences and provide new and interesting ways to access events. It is also important we are reflecting ICT advancements in our event education. All aspects have become increasingly pertinent during the challenges experienced world-wide by the events and education sectors during COVID-19.

This chapter has been developed to push beyond broad comments regarding the potential of VR for the event sector by demystifying VR for the event sector, highlighting concrete opportunities for innovation and providing enough detail – in lay terms – to help people along on the innovation journey. Our team of authors includes academics and practitioners, working across areas of event management and VR, who have worked together to develop this book chapter to enlighten both event managers and software designers – so they each know enough about the other to identify opportunities and work together to realise innovation. As such, event practitioners, ICT developers, educators and students in these fields will find this chapter a useful resource for locating event management and VR within the broader ICT scholarship, gaining insight into the potential applications of VR in event management, and understanding implications from a range of perspectives regarding the potential roles for VR in event education and industry practice.

The objectives of this chapter include:

- To provide an overview of the extant literature pertaining to VR in events;
- To examine a case study of a private sector start-up in the Australian setting which is developing VR technologies as a tool for event planning and logistics; and
- To outline implications from the case study to be considered in event education and industry practice into the future.

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