

Proceeding Paper

# Hybrid Event: Utilization of Digital Technology in Organizing Events during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia †

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**Abstract:** This study examines the use of digital technology in hybrid events in organizing events during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The research methods used are descriptive-qualitative using interviews, observations, and literature research. The results showed that hybrid events could be one of the alternatives for holding events during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hybrid activities that combine digital and physical elements at the event are expected to bring several benefits, such as allowing stakeholders to participate physically and digitally and share the same experience at the event.

**Keywords:** hybrid event; event industry; digital technology

## 1. Introduction

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus (known as COVID-19) an international health emergency and declared the outbreak a pandemic. The virus has become the world's worst health scourge, affecting the entire global population. Almost every country, including Indonesia, is feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. On 2 March 2020, the President of the Republic of Indonesia officially announced his first case of COVID-19 in Indonesia [2,3]. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continued rise in the number of infected people, nearly all countries have taken measures to restrict the movement of their citizens to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus [4]. In Indonesia, movement restrictions began on 10 April 2020, calling on everyone to stay home and severely restricting trade, business, and social activities [5]. This has caused significant economic losses in various sectors of the industry.

One of the affected industries is the events industry, where this industry is engaged in organizing events that gather many people in one area. The Indonesia Event Industry Council (IVENDO) said that the development of the event industry as a modern tourism product today cannot be separated from the influence and changes in people's lifestyles. When the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic became more prevalent, and the implementation of social distancing status was imposed, social interactions became disrupted, and people were not allowed to gather; this resulted in restrictions, tightening, delays, and even the cancellation of various events. If you refer and compare with the report of the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI), which estimates the duration of 4–6 months for the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, then what happened to the event industry is actually much worse [6].

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a major threat to many of the events scheduled to cause an unprecedented global crisis in the sector [7]. From January to April 2020, the event industry, which is also part of the tourism industry, lost a lot of its revenue. Based on data from the Director of Tourism Meetings and Exhibitions of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Iyung Masrurroh explained that 96.43% of events in 17 provinces had to be postponed, and another 84.20% were canceled. The potential deposit loss throughout



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Indonesia reaches a minimum of IDR 898 billion and a maximum of IDR 2.64 trillion. Meanwhile, the creative industry workers affected were 54,871–90,463 workers, so the potential loss is estimated to reach IDR 2.69 trillion to IDR 6.94 trillion [8,9].

Due to manpower constraints, we are unable to host events anywhere, so we need to find alternative solutions that can cope with the losses incurred. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Industries and organizers need to find the right strategies and anticipate changes in events to emerge from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One possible strategy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, is to use technological developments to combine offline and online activities to make the event fit for purpose [10]. Currently, the literature research on hybrid events is still very limited, so this study will focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted event organizations and how the use of digital technology will impact hybrid events. It is hoped that this study will serve as an additional reference for the study and use of events by organizers.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Hybrid Event

Hybrid events are a new type of event that requires professional meetings to develop creativity, strategy, execution, and measurement, as well as combining technology with traditional events in person to create a new type of experience and content delivery [11]. Hybrid events combine technology with traditional event practices to create new experiences for visitors, as well as a place to deliver content to visitors [12]. Hybrid event is an event concept that brings together physical and virtual meetings. Communities can get together physically while offline and interact socially online to get in touch further. Thus, offline events support online events and vice versa and produce compatibility and togetherness for a long time. During the hybrid event, there were only a few people physically present at the venue, while a larger crowd could attend online. Events that are run in a hybrid manner must be packaged carefully so that visitors who attend physically or virtually can feel the same way. In terms of intensity, it also increases because events held with two systems create a larger and wider interaction because they affect each other [13].

Combining the functionality of face-to-face and virtual events into hybrid events allows event organizers to have a broader picture to engage stakeholders. In addition, the hybrid event contains at least one group of face-to-face participants who are digitally connected with other participants in several different locations [14]. Ref. [15] states that hybrid events are also one solution that can be used, such as when there are non-physically present participants or audience members. (a) The participant is unable to participate for health or safety reasons; (b) Participants who have minimal and limited travel expenses and are unable to attend the event venue; (c) Due to limited venue capacity, not all participants will be present at the venue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to change the way they do business overnight, resulting in years of change in months. This impact can be seen not only in the digitization of interactions with customers and suppliers but also in the increasing share of digital and digital-enabled products offered by companies' product portfolios. According to a global survey of executives and senior partners conducted by McKinsey, many respondents believe most of the changes made will be long-lasting [16]. The technological shifts mentioned in the McKinsey report are particularly noticeable in the events industry. Many organizers have been forced to cancel, postpone, or hold events digitally [17].

### 2.2. Digital Transformation in Event

It is clear that the pandemic has moved the world significantly online, changing the way business is conducted in all sectors. The rapid pace of digital transformation is accelerating and creating value in new revenue streams. Digitization is an evolving topic in today's industry. There have been many important developments in the event management industry in recent years. Consumer online purchasing and remote meetings are becoming increasingly popular due to their convenience and effectiveness as today's communities

become more familiar with the Internet and its benefits on a daily basis. Similarly, technology has improved event management. Physical events are irreplaceable, but the event management industry has introduced new options: virtual and hybrid events [18]. Digital implementations with offline components have created more opportunities for better and more sustainable ways to bring communities together. Digital technology can help you take advantage of an event experience that allows both live and online attendees to participate and interact [19].

Event management and hospitality leaders must strategically choose their digital transformation goals. Everyone needs to streamline processes and deliver a relevant and meaningful participant experience. High-speed wireless Internet is the cornerstone of modern technology and technology in your office or event room. This enables organizations to future-proof their approach, measure results, and achieve return on investment (ROI). Consider his five effective ways and reasons for digitizing business activities at all levels [20].

1. Complete Business Processes In the Cloud
2. Leverage Hybrid Event Technology
3. Use Event Digitalization for Data Collection and Insights
4. Showcase Human-Centered Digital Tech Tools
5. Personalize the End-to-End Experience

Ref. [21] argues that there are 7 event technology trends, each of which has meaning for event planning professionals. The technology trends of the event are:

1. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Trends in event technology with virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are having a major impact on events, taking engagement to the next level and connecting live and remote experiences like never before. Event planners can integrate her onsite VR headset to bring attendees off-screen and engage them in presentations using 360-degree video and interactive data visualizations. Digital attendees can also participate in a hands-on experience, making everyone feel like they are together. Same room, vendors, and exhibitors are increasingly using VR to differentiate themselves from the competition with an immersive booth experience. Attendees can drop in, put on a headset, and dive into the virtual world.
2. Streaming and simulating. Participants have come to expect the highest quality streams, especially when tuning remotely. Explore comprehensive solutions that let you easily switch between virtual and hybrid events, sync multiple locations with live viewers, seamlessly combine live and recorded video, and integrate your favorite streaming services. Simulates, on the other hand, offers another streaming solution that is perfect for hybrid events. Event content can be pre-recorded and scheduled to go live at a specific time. Simulating greatly reduces the risk of synchronizing multiple videos in real-time during a live event.
3. Contactless check-in. One solution is to use contactless check-in software. This is much easier to implement than you might think. An event technology provider will provide a check-in machine, and attendees simply scan their QR codes with their phones upon arrival. The software will send the participant's badge to a nearby printer for easy badge retrieval. Contactless check-in not only improves safety and health measures, but it is also much easier and faster than traditional check-in procedures. You can finally say goodbye to long lines and bottlenecks.
4. Event charts and digital floor plans. Event organizers are increasingly turning to event diagramming software to create true-to-scale 3D representations of their event spaces. Features such as drag-and-drop functionality, 3D walkthroughs, seat, and stage design, and booth and vendor mapping save time in event preparation and provide event organizers with the ability to promote their event to potential sponsors. Powerful tools are available. Event organizers can use the event app with digital floor plans to quickly create interactive maps for personal and hybrid event experiences.

Attendees can click a breakout room in the event app to instantly view speaker profiles and full session topics or tap a sponsor's logo to automatically view their stands on the exhibit hall map.

5. Gamification of events. Gamification presents a great opportunity to introduce friendly competition into the event mix to enhance engagement efforts and increase fun. Leading event management platforms often include customizable replay features, allowing event organizers to answer trivia questions at the end of a session, visit exhibitor booths, and more. Attendees enter the appropriate code into the event app to earn points. Promote your leaders regularly and offer irresistible prizes.
6. Wearable technology. Most event management platforms provide some level of event data and metrics, but modern wearable event technology goes one step further, tracking core event data without impacting the attendee or exhibitor experience. Wearable technologies, usually in the form of wristbands or "smart" badges, covertly track various event metrics, including: Exhibitor Hall and Visitor Traffic. Organizers use this technology to monitor staffing levels and make rapid changes in real-time to address bottlenecks. Organizers can also determine when keynote speakers and prominent guests will arrive, grant entry or access to VIP areas, monitor social distancing, and ensure that attendees will arrive safely. It is also useful for measuring the time spent participating.
7. Multi-purpose brand event app. Mobile apps have long been a popular event technology solution for events of all kinds, and for good reason. Event planners can easily present agendas, speaker information, links to live streams, venue maps, event sponsors, and more from a lightweight, mobile-friendly application. The best event apps are white-label and fully customizable, allowing you to upload your brand colors, logos, and icons to create a professional and uniquely branded event application. Attendees can network and connect with others, as well as speakers and sponsors, using app features such as chat, polls, and session Q&A.

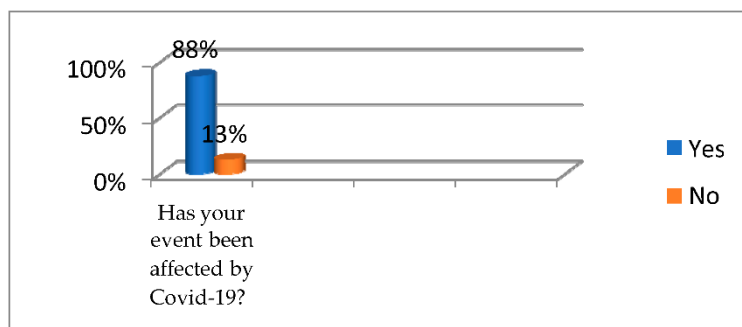
### 2.3. Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine how digital technology is used in hybrid event organizers. This can be learned by looking at how event organizers design hybrid events, so it is important to understand events from an event manager's perspective. The data collected in this report will be discussed and evaluated for a broader understanding of the issue. This report is therefore written with a qualitative approach as it is an appropriate way to analyze the experience and subjective situation [22]. The focus of qualitative research by Bryman and Bell [23] is on understanding and interpreting the realities of the participants under study. Data for this study had been accumulated via semi-established interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain insider expert information within the field of study.

To participate in event industry insights, we decided to conduct expert interviews with industry experts to access key knowledge about event organization and evaluation of digital and physical event formats [24]. Interviews were conducted with representatives of each selected event who were believed to have relevant insights into the construction of the digital version of the event and the outcome of the event. Additional interviews with independent event experts were conducted to compare findings from interviews with event representatives.

## 3. Results

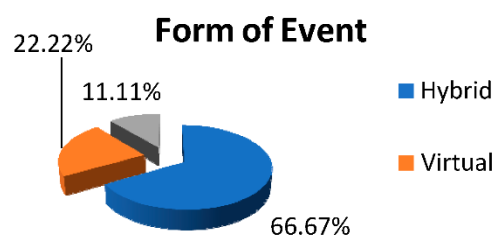
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on organizing events. One of the impacts is on the implementation of events in Indonesia. Respondents are event-organizing companies in Indonesia that have at least two national or international events per year. The following is an overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the holding of events. Please refer to Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Organizing Events.

The results showed that as many as 88% of respondents stated that there was an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their company’s business, namely organizing events, and a total of 13% of respondents replied that the COVID-18 pandemic did not affect the business of the respondent companies. These results are reinforced by the results of interviews that have been conducted, namely that restrictions on social, business, and trade activities are obstacles in organizing an event where the event is made with the main purpose of gathering many people in a place for the same desire. Meanwhile, on the other hand, event organizers who are not too affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia have other business lines besides organizing events.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, event organizers are trying to adjust to existing conditions, such as large-scale restrictions, government policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a weakening economy. The strategy of organizing events in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic includes being made in the form of limited face-to-face and virtual events or combining face-to-face and virtual events at the same time (known as hybrid events). The results of the study illustrated that 66.67% of respondents made hybrid events a form of organizing the events they held. The argument that respondents conveyed was that their event would have more beneficial value for participants and visitors, and the goals and objectives of organizing the event could be achieved. In addition to the hybrid form, as many as 22.22% of respondents prefer virtual events. Due to opinions related to cost efficiency and human labor in organizing events. Meanwhile, 11.11% of event companies choose to hold events face-to-face because they prioritize the importance of the core purpose of organizing events. This face-to-face event is generally held with a limited number of participants and implements strict health protocols. The discussion is in accordance with Figure 2 below.

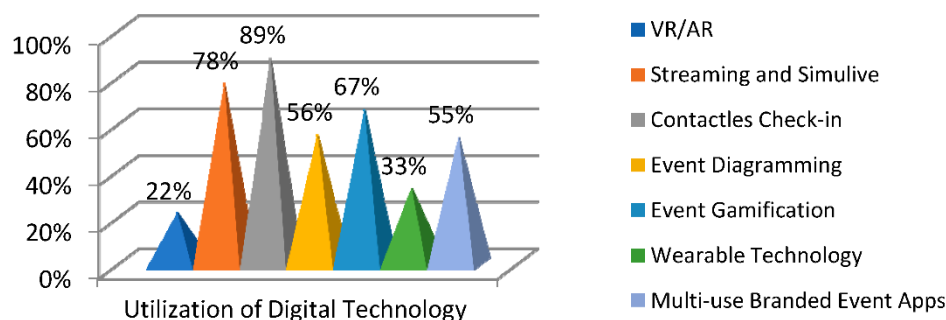


**Figure 2.** The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Organizing Events.

Holding events in a hybrid manner provides opportunities for companies to expand information and improve the quality of the events they hold. The use of technology can be an alternative to providing more value to an event. Some of the digital technology trends that can be used in organizing events are the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), streaming and simulating, contactless check-in, event diagramming and digital floor plans, event gamification, wearable technology, and multi-used branded event apps. Based on the results of observations, not all digital technology trends have been implemented by the exhibition organizing company. Figure 3 below is the result of



the analysis of the observations that have been made of the use of digital technology in hybrid events.



**Figure 3.** Utilization of Digital Technology.

The data show that the most widely used digital technology trend in organizing hybrid events is contactless check-in. Contactless check-in is applied to the registration process for participants or visitors. Event participants or visitors can register themselves through the digital network feature that has been prepared by the organizer. In addition to contactless check-in, the digital technology trend applied by the organizers is streaming or simulates, where event participants or visitors can directly follow the event virtually. This system was created to accommodate participants or visitors who cannot attend in person at the event venue. In an effort to attract more participants and visitors to participate in being part of a hybrid event, organizers often create game activities digitally that can be participated by the public. The game is made by utilizing interesting digital technology; therefore, the trend of event gamification is one of the digital technologies that are in demand in organizing events. The next digital technology trend that began to develop was event diagramming and digital floor plans. This digital technology is generally applied by event organizing companies, especially for exhibition and music events that require a special room arrangement.

The implementation of hybrid events is currently also starting to develop mobile applications to support the implementation of an event. It is undeniable that almost everyone today has a gadget that contains many features and applications. People are getting used to using gadgets, which are also used by event organizing companies to introduce, inform and even sell event products that will be carried out. Examples of the implementation of multi-use branded event apps are applications on mobile phones and official event websites. Digital technology that is currently still under development to be used in organizing events is the use of wearable technology as well as virtual reality and augmented reality. The development of digital technology in the form of them requires experts and also a lot of financial capital, so it is still rarely used by event-organizing companies.

#### 4. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world has had a major impact on many industries, including the event industry in Indonesia. One of the negative impacts is the restriction on the number of people gathered in one place, which has an impact on organizing an event. Many event-organizing companies then suffer losses and even failures in carrying out events. These conditions force event-organizing companies to adapt and make adjustments so that they can continue to run their business. One alternative solution that can be performed in the continuity of organizing events during the COVID-19 pandemic is to organize an event in the form of a hybrid event. Currently, this is considered an appropriate alternative for organizing the organization of events. Hybrid events combine digital elements and physical elements as the basis for organizing events. The implementation of hybrid events is expected to have several advantages, including allowing stakeholders to

be able to participate both physically and digitally and still be able to take part in the same experience in an event even though it is present in different ways.

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