

# Introducing Event Experience (EX) as an Approach to User Experiences in Relation to Events

Victoria Rolandsson and Charlotte Wiberg \*

Department of Informatics  
Umeå University  
Umeå, Sweden

\*Email: charlotte.wiberg [AT] umu.se

**Abstract—** The increased use of IT and digital media in relation to events has made events more complex as entities, and thus harder to grasp, both in terms of physical and temporal aspects. In order to approach this the concept of Event Experience (EX) is introduced. It includes three perspectives from which to view events – the service, social and technological perspective. However, to attain a rich picture of an object of study, two or more of the perspectives are often needed. Accordingly, the social and technological perspectives were combined in a 2 x 3 matrix, and analyzed based on three examples of contemporary events. This facilitated an increased understanding of the complexity of events, as well as showed the matrix usefulness in terms of judging and predicting outcomes of decisions having to be made by event providers.

**Keywords;** User Experience; UX; Experience Design; XD; Event Experience; EX; Events;

## I. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology and digital media is today spreading into all kinds of fields. One of these is events, i.e. sports events such as football or hockey games, award events and galas, or larger arena events, such as for instance rock concerts. With this, the event becomes a much more complex entity today, compared to before the use of IT and digital media became widely spread. Examples of different types of events show a massive use of IT and digital media – both by the user, attendee or participant of the event, as well as the event provider. As a result, the event experience is becoming denser as well as prolonged in terms of temporality [1], and the aspect of IT and digital media in relation to the events of today has become so prominent that it can no longer be overseen as a core aspect.

However, this altogether changes the event as an easily graspable, and in time and place, finite entity. It is neither completely to be seen as only happening during the exact time limit of the core event, e.g. the football game or gala, nor as something happening only at this particular place. The vision of what an event is is blurred. As a consequence of this, it is not as easy as before to fully understand its consequences, to foresee if it will be a success or to have full control of details. As an event provider you are no longer in charge of the event as a whole. In this paper we argue that in order to understand this phenomenon – the contemporary event – we need to have a

holistic view of it. It will be beneficial if prior knowledge, such as concepts and ideas from related research fields like, for instance, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), is used to shed light on the technology dense event experience. To further investigate IT enhanced event experiences, a large number of similarities with the HCI concept of User Experience (UX) could be found. With this in foreground, we introduce the concept of Event Experience (EX) in this paper. This is introduced and elaborated upon by using it in analyses of scenarios taken from typical examples of contemporary events. Finally, some conclusions are drawn and suggestions of future work are proposed.

The paper is structured as follows; first, three examples of event experiences are introduced. This is followed by a description of User Experience (UX) and Experience Design (XD), further grounding for the following introduction of the notion of Event Experience (EX). This is developed by sharing three perspectives in order to shed light on EX. Two of these perspectives are combined into a 2 x 3 matrix, which builds the foundation for analysis of details in EX. Here, some pinpointing examples are shared, in order to pedagogically make it possible to fully understand the potential of the framework. Finally, the potential of the notion of EX and the presented 2 x 3 matrix are discussed as being able to refine our possibilities to judge and predict outcomes of decisions in the design of events and EX.

### A. Concert experience

To attend a concert is a significantly different experience each time, as most people go to different concerts with different bands or artists, rather than the same repeatedly, or at least a different tour by the same artist. Though, it is worth noting that two experiences never will be an exact replica of each other, for neither staff nor guests. However, for the artist as well as the crew, from stage builders to light and sound technicians, this is a repeated event in new settings and with new conditions each time. This will complicate the streamlining of the process, as it is difficult to predict problems in relation to the setting, and even more so as a large portion of technology is used.

The experience in relation to a concert may begin long before the actual event takes place. Tickets have to be bought and collected, which may be done from an online distributor

and any travel and housing may need planning, which most often will include communication between fellow concert attendees. Phone calls, text messages and e-mails will probably be sent during this period, both in relation to coordination, but also as a social tool to building up anticipation of the upcoming event.

At the concert face-to-face interaction occurs between the attendees, staff and the main attraction i.e. the band or artist. Initially, tickets have to be checked, beverages and snacks are bought, and some may need assistance in finding their seats. Then the music starts pumping out of the loud speakers, the artist enters the stage in an extravagant way, while the large digital screens framing the stage are flashing with colors, text and pictures. The crowd are joined in a unison cheer of excitement. Behind the scenes, invisible to the audience, sound, lights, digital screens and special effects are managed by staff to offer the best possible experience, visually as well as aurally.

### *B. Gala experience*

To attend a gala may not be a common experience for most people, rather it is something that occur a few times during a lifetime, if even at all. Some galas take place on an annual basis, while other is more of a one-time thing. The program for an annual gala will differ each year, in terms of food, entertainment and in some cases, theme. For the event provider, there are a lot of preparations and planning to be done, as galas often have a large amount of guests and a detailed schedule to follow.

A gala is a fancy event, often with a dress code. It can include some kind of award ceremony most often followed by a three-course banquet dinner and ending with dancing. Being a guest at a gala may begin with a digital invitation asking to save the date. This may be followed by a physical invitation in the mail, including a reference to an online form to fill in, covering which guests will attend, any allergies etc. The information is collected in a back-office support system, which among other things may handle seating arrangements as well as guests' special requirements.

At the gala, the environment is built up to mediate a certain atmosphere, of luxury for example. The guests are offered an entertaining and magical evening, something out of the ordinary. Digital screens may be used to welcome and give information about where people are seated, as well as enhance what is happening on stage. Some galas have photo booths, offering guests to take pictures to perpetuate the experience.

Guests interact with each other as well as staff, and technology such as screens and photo booths. Behind the scenes, staff works to prepare food and arrange for what is to happen on stage, which of course should be hidden to the guests in order to not disturb the experience. However, it is of utter importance that the detailed schedule is followed.

### *C. Theme park experience*

To experience theme parks of different kinds are also a typical event experience, and an especially useful example for the purpose of this paper, as it is often very technology dense. It is an event only for the guest, as oppose to the event

providers, for which it is an ongoing every day thing. This may require a special type of experience design for the providers. However, for the guest, at least for a newcomer, it is rarely any difference from an event, given only one time.

A theme park often has a theme, as the name suggest. It could be cinema, cartoons, wax dolls of famous people, water, or traditional roller coasters and carousels. However, the latter more lean towards being amusement parks, which as a concept, is overlapping with theme parks.

Lately, theme parks have developed a very strong use of IT-support and digital media, such as cross-media concepts [2] where media productions cross over from a primary to a secondary platform, such as for instance when a spectator suddenly are included in the movie, being one of the characters, or when game concepts become movies or, even more spectacular, physical settings. Another central concept is, so called, mixed reality experiences [3, 4, 5] where 3D-glasses and specially designed environments supports and extends the experiences of the guests. One could sit in a chair that hardly moves at all, but with 3D-glasses, wind fans, water from ceiling, pokes in the back automatically built into the chair and slightly tilting of the floor – one could feel like being in a very extreme ride in a waterfall in the jungle with snakes hanging over the head, touching the ear. As the cinemas and wagons are used over and over again, very expensive technique can be built in to really extend the spectators experience in the attractions of the theme park. It really uses all of the senses to get the audience attention.

Commonly for all three examples, is the growing use of guests' private devices, e.g. smartphones, which have developed to be a quite salient part of most event experiences. One of few exceptions might be going to the movies, and even here, they are used in close relation to the event – before and after – even if not during. When the lights go off in the cinema, so does the phones, and when the lights are turned on again, yes, so are the phones as well. Accordingly, it is nonetheless a part of the overall experience.

## II. RELATED WORK

When it comes to experience in relation to social contexts and also in relation to IT and digital media, there are a number of potential areas to cover when it comes to related work. A selection was made based on the object of study being events. Since the specific type of events covered here are in different ways communicated, extended or exposed in digital media, that is an aspect we found important to cover when it comes to research disciplines. From this perspective, the most natural area to see as a first choice, when it comes to IT research, is User Experience (UX) [6, 7, 8]. This area is born out of Human-Computer Interaction and is nowadays a natural base for all discussions when it comes to experience of IT. As a further extension, the field of Experience Design (XD) [9] has developed, with a specific focus, as the name suggests, on the design of services and products. More about these fields below:

### A. User Experience (UX)

User Experience developed as a countermovement, to the prior Usability focus within the Human-Computer Interaction community [10]. Historically, HCI's main focus was task- and work related, in general concerning effectiveness and efficiency, and rather seeing satisfaction as a byproduct [11]. However, as technology has developed, Usability has become more or less standard, leading products to be expected to work without errors or major flaws. The next step, in relation to the development of products, has lead towards offering experiences through products [12] and going beyond the instrumental [10]. Accordingly, User Experience has become a major area of research within HCI. The phenomenon can be summed up as follows: "User experience differs from 'experience in a general sense', in that it explicitly refers to the experience(s) derived from encountering systems [13, p. 6]. 'Encountering' is clarified as "using, interacting, or being confronted passively" [13, p. 6] and 'system' "is used to denote products, services, and artifacts – separately or combined in one form or another – that a person can interact with through a user interface" [13, p. 6]. Additionally, the importance of focusing on the social construction in terms of behavior and attitudes in groups experiencing a situation together, with a focus on the role of a specific system, is also of great importance [13].

### B. Experience Design (XD)

Experience Design (XD) is a practice that relates to creating high quality experiences for users of products and services etc. [c.f. 14, 15, 16]. Amongst others, but maybe most importantly, the Experience Design field draws knowledge from User Experience (UX), as any interaction with a system and the experience that arises, is UX. The main idea of the experience approach is to use the experience that a design is intended to offer, as a point of departure, instead of the product or service itself [9]. The question to answer is rather why we use a product, than what we do and how [9, 17]. However, it is important, from a design perspective, to recognize that the experience does not arise from thin air, and thus the experience still have to be created through the manipulation of different components [9].

As events can be viewed as a service that is designed to offer a certain experience, even if the experience is subjective and as designers we can only get as far as offering an intended experience [18] or an experience opportunity [19], we find UX and XD to be natural points of departure. The concepts offer a holistic view of the object of study, i.e. event experiences. Even though the experience is something intangible [20] we still have to use actual components in order to create that intended experience. A growing part of these components is digital technology, which make the design and understanding thereof, increasingly important. However, an event is not only built on technology, it includes other aspects as well, such as it being a designed context and a natural meeting place for people.

### III. EVENT EXPERIENCE (EX)

Event Experience aims at researching the components within an event, such as the environment, people, communication, and products, in terms of interrelations and, in time, experience impact. Generally events are understood as complex entities, but through the increased use of digital technology, events have become even more complex and holistic in their nature. In order to approach this, we will propose three perspectives, which we find fruitful to use in the design and analysis of Event Experience. Through the perspectives, we can view events with different glasses, and thus see how the different parts connect and overlap with each other. In many cases, two or more of the perspectives are needed in order to attain a rich picture of the object of study. However, it is worth noting that the list is not necessarily limited to the proposed perspectives. Next, the perspectives are listed and further explained.

- The service perspective
- The social perspective
- The technological perspective

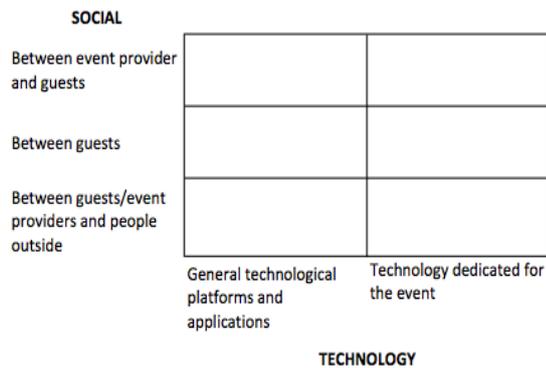
The service perspective refers to the actual service offered by the event provider, including the context and design thereof, in which the event is to take place, as well as staff working with and at the event. Some parts of the service will be visible to the guests, while others happen back-office and will only appear in the case of something going wrong.

The social perspective refers to contact and communication between different actors within the event. It can occur between the guests themselves, either between people present at the particular event, or between guests and others that are not present. The communication can also occur between guests and event providers, i.e. staff, as well as between event providers and people outside the event. Communication may happen face-to-face or be mediated through the use of technology.

The technological perspective refers to all technology used in relation to the event. This includes technology designed and/or implemented by event provides, and accordingly being a part of the designed event, as well as technology brought to the event by the guests, e.g. smartphones.

As previously stated, the perspectives are often intertwined, i.e. we may need to combine two or more of them in order to attain a rich picture of a certain object of study. An aspect related to the service, may take the form of a digital technology, such as an online invitation, and the environment designed for the service may facilitate a social aspect between users attending the event, such as a VIP lounge.

As Event Experience has its roots in User Experience and Experience Design, the main focus of our research is related to experiences and technology. Accordingly, in this paper further attention will be put to zoom in on the relation between the technological perspective and the social perspective. A 2 x 3 matrix is used to visualize the relation.



**Figure 1; Social and Technology dimensions**

The model is to be understood as follows; social aspects can occur between event provider and guests, between the guests themselves, or between guests/event provider and people outside the event. This is facilitated by the use of different kinds of digital technology. The technology is either a general platform or application, or designed and dedicated for the specific event.

In the next section, the model will be further presented. This will be done in relation to the examples presented in the introduction, in order to offer a clear picture of the use and necessity of the Event Experience-concept.

#### IV. ANALYSING EX

When analyzing an event based on the service, social and technological perspective, it becomes clear that we cannot separate, for example, the technology from the service, when trying to attain a rich picture. The perspectives are intertwined and together create the experience that arises. As previously stated we will offer a particular focus on the social – technology perspective. We will go through the matrix, frame by frame, starting in the upper left. Examples will be provided based on the examples in the introduction.

##### A. *Between event provider and guests – General technological platforms and applications*

Communication between the event provider and the guest can occur in different ways, one being through general platforms and/or applications. This refers to all kinds of technology that is not designed for that particular event, i.e. it is not connected to the event, but can still be used in relation to it, that is; before, during and after the event. When a guest is the initiator of the communication, general platforms and applications can refer to phone calls and e-mail, for example. In the gala-example, guests will contact the event provider with questions about dress code, seating arrangements, and special arrangements due to disabilities etc. When it is the event provider that is the initiator of the communication in relation to technology, phone calls and e-mail can be used as well, and an

other example could be a posted picture and text on the social media network Instagram, reminding that an event is to take place at a certain time.

##### B. *Between event provider and guests – Technology dedicated for the event*

In the design of events, technology is often used in order to facilitate the information flow that most often need to occur between event provider and guest. When attending a large concert, for example, tickets can be scanned in a machine to check their validity, instead of having staff to check each of every ticket. Another example is back-office booking systems dedicated for galas or conferences, where guests provide the event provider with necessary information. No matter what kind of dedicated technology we are referring to, it is important that the guest’s interaction works smoothly. A pleasant interaction will have a positive impact, or at least a non-negative impact, on the overall experience, while an interaction that is experienced as complicated or unsmooth will have a negative impact.

##### C. *Between guests – General technological platforms and applications*

In today’s society a large part of the population owns a smartphone or have access to a computer with Internet connection. Guests at events often use general platforms and/or applications such as Facebook or Instagram to post or share pictures or text. At theme parks people take pictures to save as a memory. A photo of a couple of friends going on a carousel can be posted on Facebook, with the friends being tagged in and a comment about how much fun they are having. The experience is lifted up to shared attention in a digital format, where the communication between the guests can continue.

##### D. *Between guests – Technology dedicated for the event*

In the design of events, technology is not only used to facilitate for the event provider in terms of information flow. Technology is also designed and implemented to increase the experience for the guests. At concerts large digital screens are often used to offer better vision to people sitting in the far end of the arena, and to add visual effects to the show. This is also done at sports events, where short reviews of important incidents in the game as well as the current score may be shown. Another example can be seen at galas, where photo booths sometimes are installed. The guests are offered the possibility to take high quality pictures to perpetuate the experience. It is also a natural place for people to meet and interact, regardless if they know each other previously to the event.

##### E. *Between guests/event providers and people outside – General technological platforms and applications*

Communication does not only occur between people present at an event i.e. guests or event providers. It may also occur between those present and others who are not present. This is of importance, as it also may affect the experience for the guests. A picture from a theme park that is commented in

positive manner by loved ones who is not present will of course have a positive impact, while disparaging comments will affect the experience negatively. Additionally, event providers may have contact with people outside the event. Police may have to be contacted if a theme park-guest starts acting in a threatening way, or if a gala-guest gets too intoxicated. Contact between event provider and suppliers occur as well, usually through e-mail or phone calls. If this sort of contact works well, the guests should not be affected. On the other hand, if it does not work, the guest might be affected as it can disturb the overall experience.

#### F. Between guests/event providers and people outside – Technology dedicated for the event

As for technology that is designed for the specific event, it is not only for event guests, as it also can be used as a communication tool for people outside it. If an event, such as a gala, is broadcasted on television, viewers can be offered the opportunity to share their thoughts, for instance through text messages or Twitter, which then is displayed in the bottom of the screen. This can also be displayed to the gala guests, while they the possibility to access it through other kinds of digital technology as well. Guests themselves can also use technology dedicated for the event to communicate with people outside. One way is through the use of hashtags announced by the event provider.

### V. CONCLUSION

The baseline in this article is the need for a better understanding of event experiences in the new era of events, i.e. where events are extended by IT and digital media and therefore becoming much more complex as entities. There is a need for a rich picture and in order to attain this, the three aspects, or perspectives, of events were highlighted; service, social and technological. The idea was to combine these perspectives into matrices in order to better analyze aspects of event experiences. This was done in different types of events and examples were discussed. On the basis of this, it could be said that the usage of – and even more – the combination of these perspectives, truly gave a richer picture of event experiences. Accordingly, the possibility to judge and predict outcomes of decisions is facilitated. For instance, the notions presented in the paper can be of use when considering introducing a new type of digital media into event context. Based on the proposed perspectives, insights in terms of possible outcomes are facilitated, as it generally will affect the experience within more than one of the perspectives. In other words, event providers need to ask themselves how a digital media affects guests, from a social perspective as well as a service perspective, and thus the perspectives are combined to give a picture, as rich as possible.

Furthermore, with a situation where events are becoming more and more complex with the usage of IT and digital media the event provider risk to loose more and more control, while guests themselves take on the increased possibility to affect the overall experience, through for example, social media. This could be seen as a huge problem from the event provider point

of view. Especially as one of the core focal points for a provider is to have full control and to be able to foresee everything within an event. Of course, spontaneity is sometimes seen as something positive from provider's side, However this is often something that is a result of a situation that did not really turn out as planned or what is seen as a planned spontaneity – something that is really difficult to do with a convincing result. With less control, this sense of control gets more or less lost. However, instead of only understanding this as a risk or a disadvantage it could be seen as a potential advantage if preparations are made properly for this new state-of-mind. As an event provider it is important to harness the benefits of digitally extended events and instead of seeing lack of control as something only bad, embrace the potential new opportunities to interact with the audience. Otherwise we will suffer its disadvantages, which is that we are not fully in control of our own events as event provider. The knowledge that there is a choice could in itself be the key to success when it comes to providing high quality Event Experiences (EX) in the future.

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