International Journal of Advanced Research in Commerce, Management & Social Science (IJARCMSS)
(An International Quarterly Multidisciplinary Open Access Double Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Journal)
ISSN :2581-7930 (Online), Impact Factor (Cosmos): 7.270 & PIF (I2OR): 5.010, Volume 09, No. 03(III), July-September, 2026, pp 25-32

Event Marketing in the Digital Era: Examining Its Influence on Customer Experience and Buying Decisions

Chanchal Mishra[1*] | Dr. Arpit R. Loya[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Prestige Institute of Management and Research, DAVV, Indore.
[2]Sr. Assistant Professor, Prestige Institute of Management and Research, Indore.

[*]Corresponding Author: imichanchalmishra@gmail.com

***Citation**: Mishra, C. & Loya, A. (2026). Event Marketing in the Digital Era: Examining Its Influence on Customer Experience and Buying Decisions. International Journal of Advanced Research in Commerce, Management &Amp; Social Science, 09(03(III)), 25–32.*

Abstract

Event marketing has moved decisively into a digital and hybrid register since 2022, with brands layering livestreaming, augmented and virtual reality, gamification, and social amplification onto or in place of purely physical gatherings. This paper examines how digitally mediated event marketing shapes customer experience and buying decisions through a structured secondary data analysis, synthesising industry survey data (Freeman, EventTrack, Splash, Statista, CEIR), market-sizing reports (IMARC Group), and peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2022 and 2026 (Feng et al., 2025; Setiawan, 2022; Altschwager et al., 2024). The synthesis finds consistent secondary evidence that event attendance, whether physical or digitally mediated, raises purchase likelihood and brand trust: industry survey data place the post-event purchase-likelihood lift at roughly 66 per cent and the brand-trust lift after live interaction at 77 per cent, while India's virtual events market, valued at USD 6.70 billion in 2024, is projected to reach USD 31.41 billion by 2033. At the same time, the secondary data reveal a persistent in-person premium: 80 per cent of surveyed attendees rate in-person events as the most trusted marketing channel, a segment of the literature that has not been overturned by the growth of digital formats. Drawing on Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework and Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello's (2009) brand experience scale, the paper develops an integrated conceptual model in which digital event marketing shapes buying decisions through the mediating channels of customer experience and brand engagement, moderated by event format, consumer involvement, and brand familiarity. The paper closes by identifying where the secondary evidence base remains thin, particularly on India-specific, digitally mediated event outcomes, and proposes this as a direction for future primary research.

***Keywords**: Event Marketing, Digital Marketing, Customer Experience, Buying Decision, Brand Experience, Secondary Data Analysis.*

***JEL Classification:** M31, M37, D12, L82.*

Introduction

Event marketing, understood as the practice of using live or mediated gatherings to build brand relationships and influence purchase behaviour, has been a fixture of marketing strategy for decades (Close et al., 2006). What has changed substantially since 2022 is the medium through which that gathering happens. Post-pandemic recovery in the events industry has not returned event marketing to its pre-2020 form; instead, it has produced a durable hybrid default, with brands running livestreamed launches, AR-enabled product trials, gamified booth experiences, and virtual or hybrid conferences alongside, or instead of, purely in-person events. India's own virtual events market was valued at roughly USD 6.70 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 31.41 billion by 2033, growing at a compound annual rate of 18.70 per cent (IMARC Group, 2025), a scale of digital adoption that makes the question of how these formats actually affect consumers a live, practical one for Indian marketers.

This paper takes a secondary data approach to that question. Rather than collecting new survey responses, it draws together and synthesises data already gathered by others: large-sample industry surveys conducted by event-technology and research firms (Freeman, Splash, EventTrack, CEIR), market-sizing studies (IMARC Group, Statista), and peer-reviewed empirical research published mainly between 2022 and 2026. This approach has a specific advantage for a fast-moving, practice-driven field like digital event marketing: industry survey houses field large, repeated, well-resourced consumer and marketer surveys that an individual academic study could not easily replicate, and reading these alongside the peer-reviewed literature gives a fuller picture than either source alone. It also has a specific limitation, discussed candidly in Section 8: industry-sourced figures are not always methodologically transparent about sampling and response rates in the way peer-reviewed studies are required to be, and this paper treats the two source types differently in how much analytical weight each is given.

The paper proceeds by reviewing the theoretical foundations of event and experiential marketing, synthesising secondary data on event marketing's documented relationship with customer experience and purchase behaviour, and developing an integrated conceptual model relating digital event marketing to buying decisions through the mediating channels of customer experience and brand engagement. It closes by identifying where the secondary evidence base is thin and where primary research is still needed.

Literature Review

- **From Experience Economy to Digital Event Marketing**

The theoretical starting point for event and experiential marketing remains Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy thesis, which argued that businesses increasingly compete by staging memorable experiences rather than merely delivering goods or services, with customer participation and immersion as defining features of that shift. Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing framework and Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello's (2009) subsequent brand experience scale operationalised this insight for empirical research, defining brand experience as the sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, and validating a four-dimensional measure, sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural, across six studies. This scale remains the dominant operationalisation of customer or brand experience in the literature reviewed here and underpins the mediator construct in this paper's conceptual model.

Digital event marketing extends this logic into mediated formats, using livestreaming, AR and VR activations, gamification, and second-screen social sharing to reproduce, or in some cases substitute for, the immersive quality of physical events. Secondary market data confirm this is now mainstream practice rather than an experimental fringe: global experiential marketing spend was estimated at USD 128.35 billion by the end of 2024, surpassing pre-pandemic 2019 spending of USD 121.87 billion (Marketing Charts, as cited in ATN Event Staffing, 2025), and 83 per cent of surveyed marketers report that events are critical to business growth (Splash, 2024).

- **Event Marketing, Engagement, and Purchase Intention: Peer-Reviewed Evidence**

Close et al. (2006) established one of the field's foundational findings: that event marketing engages consumers by linking attendees with the sponsor, the surrounding community, and the brand simultaneously, a three-way link that later work has treated as the mechanism through which events convert attention into loyalty. Setiawan's (2022) systematic review of 40 Scopus-indexed studies built on this to propose an engagement-driven model of event marketing, in which attendee engagement, shaped by the event's content, the attendee's involvement, and event-brand image congruency, mediates the relationship between event participation and downstream outcomes including purchase intention, word-of-mouth, and brand equity. Altschwager et al. (2024), surveying attendees of six Australian wine-brand events, empirically confirmed that customer event engagement facilitates broader brand engagement within branded event experiences.

Feng et al. (2025), examining live-stream commerce specifically, found that experience marketing and a sense of virtual community jointly shaped user purchase intention through the mediating role of satisfaction, indicating that digitally mediated events can generate a functionally similar experience-to-purchase pathway as physical ones, at least in the live-commerce context their study examined. This finding is directly relevant to the present paper's focus, since it is one of the few peer-reviewed studies to test the experience-to-purchase mechanism specifically within a digitally mediated event format rather than a physical one.

- **Secondary Data on Event Marketing Effectiveness**

Large-sample industry surveys provide a substantial, if methodologically distinct, body of secondary evidence on event marketing's relationship with purchase behaviour. Freeman's 2024 Attendee Intent and Behavior survey found that 77 per cent of consumers reported increased trust in a brand after interacting with it at a live event, and that 80 per cent of respondents rated in-person events as the most trusted marketing channel available to marketers, a five-percentage-point increase from the prior year (as reported in Splash, 2024). EventTrack's 2025 survey, a large annual industry study of event marketers and attendees, found that 66 per cent of consumers said they were more likely to purchase a product or service after interacting with a brand at an event, and that free samples, event swag, and discounts were the most commonly cited reasons for attendee engagement at brand events (as reported in ATN Event Staffing, 2025). Splash's 2024 survey similarly found that 60 per cent of companies running a blend of in-person, virtual, and hybrid events rated in-person gatherings as the most effective format for generating revenue, even as those same companies continued to invest in digital and hybrid formats for reach.

Table 1 consolidates these and related secondary data points, distinguishing peer-reviewed sources from industry survey sources, with the original surveying organisation and year noted for each figure.

- **The Indian Context**

India's digital marketing and events landscape has expanded rapidly across the 2022-2026 window this paper focuses on. Digital advertising expenditure in India rose by an estimated 15 per cent in 2023 to approximately Rs. 39,714 crore (roughly USD 4.76 billion), with digital's share of total advertising spend projected to rise from 40 per cent in 2023 to 42 per cent in 2024 (Pitch Madison data, as reported in IBEF, 2024). India's virtual events market specifically was valued at USD 6.70 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 31.41 billion by 2033 (IMARC Group, 2025), while the country's event management software market, a proxy for digital event infrastructure adoption, was valued at USD 372.3 million in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 1,533.5 million by 2034 (IMARC Group data, as reported in industry sources). These figures indicate that Indian brands are investing in digital event infrastructure at a pace consistent with, or exceeding, the global trend documented in Sections 2.1 and 2.3, even though India-specific peer-reviewed research on how these digitally mediated events affect customer experience and purchase decisions remains limited relative to the volume of market activity, a gap this paper returns to in Section 8.

- **Customer Experience as a Mediator of Buying Decisions**

Beyond the event marketing literature specifically, customer experience is well established in the broader consumer behaviour literature as a driver of purchasing decisions. Industry-reported figures suggest a large majority of consumers factor overall experience into purchase decisions rather than price or product features alone, with one widely cited industry figure placing this share at 73 per cent (Medallia, 2024), a pattern broadly consistent with, though less rigorously measured than, the Brakus et al. (2009) finding that brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty both directly and indirectly through brand personality associations. Applied to the event context, this suggests customer experience functions as the theoretical bridge between an event, whatever its format, and the buying decision it is meant to influence.

Theoretical Framework and Research Gap

This paper draws on two complementary theoretical foundations. Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy thesis, together with Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience operationalisation, explains how staged events, physical or digital, generate the sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural responses that constitute customer experience. Close et al.'s (2006) engagement framework, extended by Setiawan (2022), explains how that experience converts into engagement and, subsequently, purchase-relevant outcomes. The secondary data reviewed in Section 2 confirm both mechanisms operate at scale, but leave a specific gap the peer-reviewed literature has not yet closed: whether the in-person trust and effectiveness premium documented in Section 2.3 (the 77-80 per cent figures from Freeman and Splash) reflects something inherent to physical presence that digital formats cannot replicate, or reflects the relative immaturity of digital event design, which secondary market data (Section 2.4) show is still scaling rapidly. This paper's conceptual model, developed in Section 4, treats event format as a moderator precisely because the secondary evidence does not yet resolve this question.

Conceptual Model and Propositions

Figure 1 presents the proposed model. Digital event marketing, encompassing hybrid and virtual event formats, AR/VR activation, gamification, livestreaming, and social sharing mechanics, is modelled as the primary predictor. It is expected to relate to buying decisions through two mediators: customer experience, drawing on the Brakus et al. (2009) four-dimensional framework, and brand engagement and emotional connection, drawing on the Close et al. (2006) and Altschwager et al. (2024) engagement tradition. Event format, consumer involvement, and prior brand familiarity are positioned as moderators of the digital-event-marketing-to-mediator paths, consistent with the Section 3 discussion of the unresolved in-person/digital effectiveness gap.

Based on the secondary data and literature reviewed above, the paper advances five propositions for future empirical testing. P1: Digital event marketing is positively associated with customer experience, consistent with the Feng et al. (2025) finding that experience marketing predicts purchase intention in digitally mediated (live-stream) settings. P2: Digital event marketing is positively associated with brand engagement, consistent with the engagement mechanisms documented by Close et al. (2006), Setiawan (2022), and Altschwager et al. (2024) in physical event settings and plausibly, though not yet directly confirmed, extending to digital ones. P3: Customer experience and brand engagement each mediate the relationship between digital event marketing and buying decisions. P4: Event format moderates the strength of the digital-event-marketing-to-customer-experience relationship, such that the relationship is stronger for hybrid formats (combining digital reach with some in-person element) than for fully virtual formats, consistent with the in-person trust premium documented in secondary industry data (Sections 2.3). P5: Consumer involvement and prior brand familiarity each moderate the strength of the digital-event-marketing-to-brand-engagement relationship.

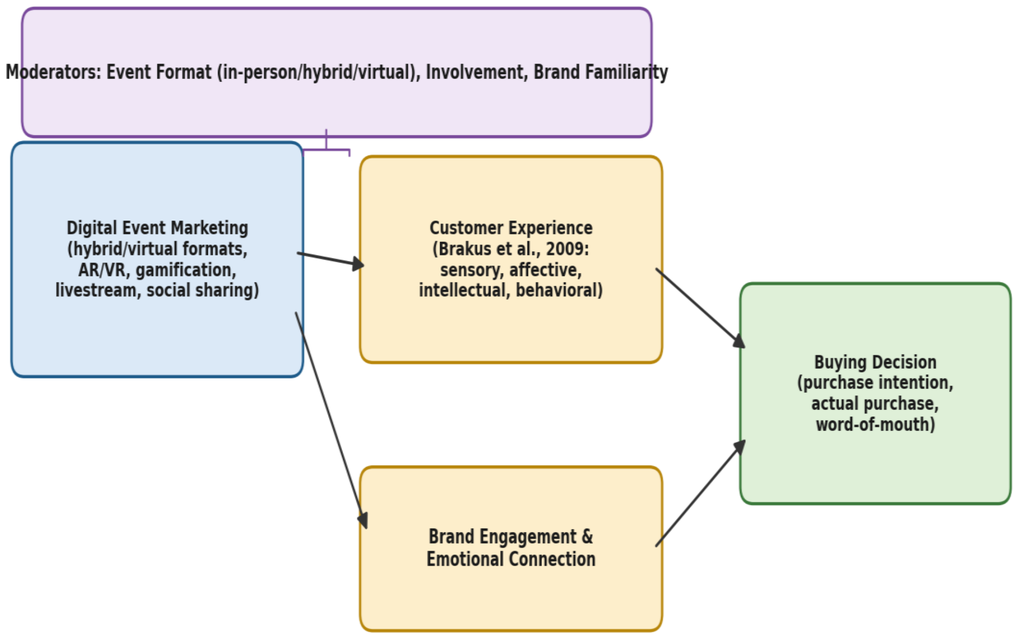

Figure 1: Conceptual model of digital event marketing, customer experience, and buying decisions.

Secondary Data Sources and Methodology

This paper's methodology is a structured secondary data review and synthesis, appropriate for a fast-evolving, practice-led field where large-sample survey data already exists in volume but has not been systematically integrated with the peer-reviewed academic literature. Sources were drawn from three streams. First, peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2022 and 2026 addressing event marketing, experiential marketing, brand experience, or digitally mediated commerce, identified through targeted database searches and cross-checked against citing and cited works (Close et al., 2006; Setiawan, 2022; Altschwager et al., 2024; Feng et al., 2025). Second, large-sample industry survey data from established event-industry research organisations, specifically Freeman's Attendee Intent and Behavior survey, EventTrack's annual industry survey, Splash's marketer survey, and the Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) index, each of which surveys several hundred to several thousand marketers or attendees annually and is widely cited within the event marketing industry as a benchmark data source. Third, market-sizing and expenditure data from IMARC Group, Statista, and Pitch Madison/IBEF for the Indian digital advertising and events market specifically.

Data extraction followed a consistent protocol: for each secondary source, the original surveying or research organisation, sample characteristics where disclosed, and year of data collection were recorded alongside the statistic itself, and figures were only included where the original organisation and year could be identified, rather than relying on secondhand aggregator citations alone. Where a statistic appeared in multiple aggregator sources with slightly different framing, the earliest identifiable original source was used. This paper does not claim the industry survey figures meet peer-review methodological standards; Section 8 addresses this limitation directly and specifies where the secondary evidence base would benefit from independent, methodologically transparent primary research.

Findings from Secondary Data Synthesis

Table 1 consolidates the key secondary data points synthesised for this paper, organised by theme and source type.

Table 1: Secondary Data Synthesis: Event Marketing, Customer Experience, and Buying Decisions (2022-2026)

Finding	Source Type	Source & Year	Relevance to This Paper
66% of consumers more likely to purchase after interacting with a brand at an event	Industry survey	EventTrack (2025), via ATN Event Staffing	Supports P1/P3: event exposure to purchase-relevant outcome
77% of consumers report increased brand trust after live event interaction	Industry survey	Freeman (2024), via Splash	Supports P2: engagement/trust as mediating mechanism
80% of attendees rate in-person events as the most trusted marketing channel (+5pp vs. 2023)	Industry survey	Freeman (2024), via Splash	Supports P4: format moderation, in-person premium
60% of companies rate in-person gatherings most effective for revenue generation among hybrid event portfolios	Industry survey	Splash (2024)	Supports P4: format moderation
Global experiential marketing spend reached USD 128.35B by end-2024, surpassing 2019's USD 121.87B	Market data	Marketing Charts (2024), via ATN Event Staffing	Contextualises scale of event marketing investment
India virtual events market: USD 6.70B (2024) to a projected USD 31.41B (2033), 18.70% CAGR	Market data	IMARC Group (2025)	India-specific context; motivates Section 8 research gap
Experience marketing and virtual community jointly predict purchase intention via satisfaction in live-stream sales	Peer-reviewed study	Feng et al. (2025), PLOS ONE	Direct peer-reviewed support for P1 in a digital format

Attendee engagement mediates event participation and purchase intention, word-of-mouth, brand equity (40-study Scopus review)	Peer-reviewed review	Setiawan (2022)	Supports P2/P3 mechanism in physical events
Customer event engagement facilitates brand engagement (6 Australian wine-brand events)	Peer-reviewed study	Altschwager et al. (2024)	Supports P2 mechanism empirically
India digital advertising spend grew ~15% in 2023 to ~USD 4.76B; digital share of ad spend rising from 40% (2023) to 42% (2024)	Market data	Pitch Madison, via IBEF (2024)	India-specific digital marketing context

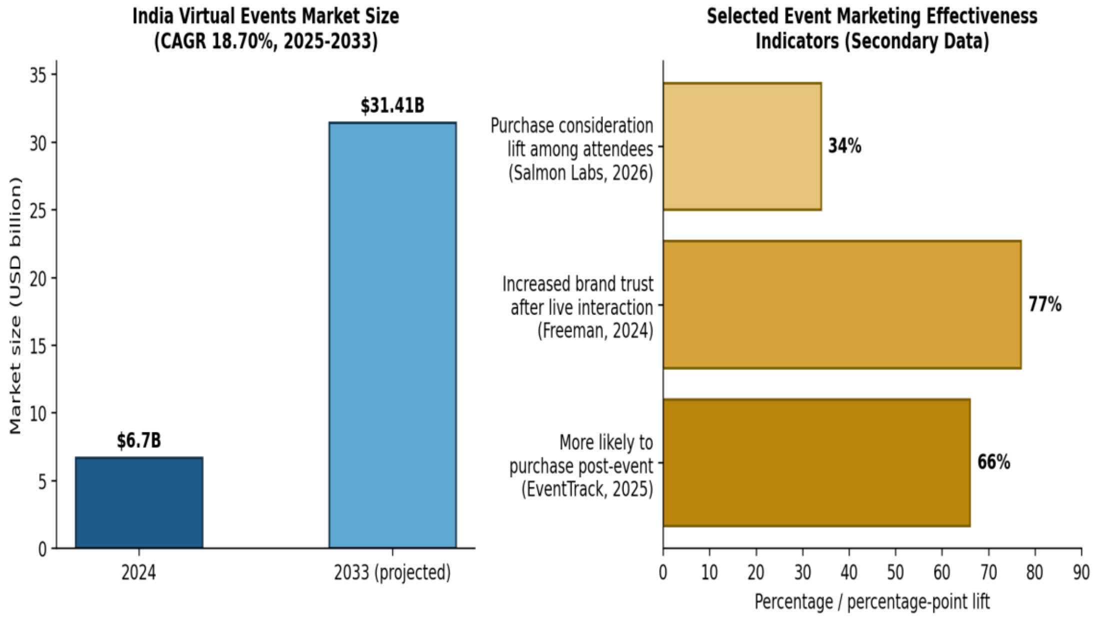

Figure 2: India virtual events market growth and selected event marketing effectiveness indicators, compiled from secondary sources (IMARC Group, 2025; EventTrack, 2025; Freeman, 2024; Salmon Labs, 2026).

Three patterns emerge from this synthesis. First, the evidence is consistent, across both peer-reviewed and industry sources, that event attendance of any format raises purchase-relevant outcomes: the EventTrack (66 per cent more likely to purchase), Freeman (77 per cent increased trust), and Feng et al. (2025, live-stream purchase intention via satisfaction) findings all point the same direction despite covering different event formats and using different methodologies. Second, the secondary data do not support treating physical and digital events as equivalent: the Freeman and Splash figures on in-person trust and revenue effectiveness (Sections 2.3) consistently show a premium for in-person or hybrid formats over fully virtual ones, even as overall event marketing investment, including in digital formats specifically, continues to grow (Figure 2). Third, India-specific secondary data (Section 2.4) demonstrate large and growing market investment in digital event infrastructure, but the peer-reviewed literature synthesised in Section 2 contains no India-specific study directly testing the customer-experience or purchase-decision mechanisms this paper's model proposes, a gap distinct from, and more specific than, the general secondary-data limitations discussed in Section 8.

Discussion and Implications

Read together, the secondary data and peer-reviewed literature suggest that digital event marketing does generate customer experience and influence buying decisions, but not, on the current evidence, through an identical mechanism to physical events, and not yet with fully comparable strength.

The persistent in-person trust and effectiveness premium found across multiple independent industry surveys (Freeman, Splash) is difficult to attribute to a single cause from secondary data alone, but two explanations are consistent with the broader literature reviewed here. One possibility is that physical presence engages the sensory and affective dimensions of the Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience scale more directly than most current digital formats can, a reading consistent with Pine and Gilmore's (1999) original emphasis on immersion as a defining feature of staged experience. A second, non-exclusive possibility is that digital event design and measurement are simply less mature than physical event practice, given how recently, and how rapidly, the format has scaled (Section 2.4), in which case the gap may narrow as digital event design improves rather than reflecting a permanent limitation of the medium.

For marketers, particularly those operating in the Indian market where digital event infrastructure investment is scaling quickly (Section 2.4), the practical implication is that digital and hybrid formats should be evaluated for what secondary data currently shows they do well, extending reach and enabling the kind of interactive, community-oriented experience Feng et al. (2025) documented in live-stream commerce, rather than assumed to be a like-for-like substitute for the trust-building function physical events currently perform better according to available data. A hybrid strategy that pairs digital reach with at least some physical or high-touch element, consistent with proposition P4 in Section 4, is the approach the secondary data currently favour over a wholesale shift to virtual-only formats.

Limitations of the Secondary Data and Directions for Future Research

This paper's reliance on secondary data carries specific limitations that should be stated plainly rather than implied. Industry survey sources (Freeman, EventTrack, Splash, CEIR) are, in most cases, not published with the full methodological transparency, such as detailed sampling frames, response rates, and margin-of-error reporting, that peer-reviewed academic surveys are required to disclose; this paper has treated their findings as indicative of broad, repeated industry patterns rather than as precise population estimates, and has been explicit throughout about which figures come from industry sources versus peer-reviewed studies. Second, several of the effectiveness statistics in Table 1 come from event-industry organisations (Freeman, Splash, CEIR) that have a commercial interest in demonstrating event marketing's effectiveness, a conflict of interest this paper cannot independently verify or correct for using secondary data alone, and readers should weigh these figures accordingly. Third, and most specific to this paper's original research aim, India-specific peer-reviewed research directly testing the customer-experience-to-buying-decision mechanism in digitally mediated event settings is largely absent from the literature synthesised here; the Indian secondary data available (Section 2.4) describe market scale and investment but not consumer-level experience or purchase mechanisms. This is the most direct and specific gap this paper's synthesis points toward, and closing it would require a primary survey study of Indian consumers who have engaged with digitally mediated brand events, following the general model and hypotheses set out in Section 4, once resources allow such data collection to be undertaken.

Conclusion

Event marketing has moved into a digital and hybrid default since 2022, and the secondary data reviewed in this paper, spanning peer-reviewed studies, large-sample industry surveys, and market-sizing reports, converge on a reasonably clear picture: digitally mediated events do generate customer experience and influence buying decisions, with effect sizes in industry data (a 66 per cent post-event purchase-likelihood lift, a 77 per cent brand-trust lift) that are too consistent across independent sources to dismiss, even allowing for the methodological limitations discussed in Section 8. At the same time, the same secondary data show physical and hybrid formats retaining a measurable trust and effectiveness premium over fully virtual formats, a gap this paper's proposed conceptual model treats as a testable moderation effect rather than a settled conclusion. India's rapid investment in digital event infrastructure, evident in the secondary market data reviewed in Section 2.4, has outpaced the peer-reviewed research base examining what that investment actually does for Indian consumers' experience and purchase decisions. Closing that specific gap, through primary research building on the model this paper proposes, is the clearest next step the secondary evidence points toward.

References

1. Altschwager, T., Conduit, J., Karpen, I. O., & Goodman, S. (2024). Event engagement: Using event experiences to build brands. Australasian Marketing Journal. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582221127317

2. ATN Event Staffing. (2025). 20 experiential and event marketing statistics you need to know in 2025. https://atneventstaffing.com/experiential-event-marketing-statistics-2025/
3. Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: What is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? Journal of Marketing, 73(3), 52-68. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.3.052
4. Close, A. G., Finney, R. Z., Lacey, R. Z., & Sneath, J. Z. (2006). Engaging the consumer through event marketing: Linking attendees with the sponsor, community, and brand. Journal of Advertising Research, 46(4), 420-433. https://doi.org/10.2501/S0021849906060430
5. Feng, Y.-L., You, Y.-Q., Guan, S.-S., Yuan, Z.-N., & Chen, X.-Y. (2025). The influence of experience marketing, sense of virtual community, and satisfaction on user purchase intention in live stream sales. PLOS ONE, 20(12), Article e0334231. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0334231
6. IBEF. (2024). The meteoric rise of digital marketing in India: Key insights. India Brand Equity Foundation. https://www.ibef.org/blogs/the-meteoric-rise-of-digital-marketing-in-india
7. IMARC Group. (2025). India virtual events market size, share and forecast 2033. https://www.imarcgroup.com/india-virtual-events-market
8. Medallia. (2024). Digital customer experience trends to watch in 2024. https://www.medallia.com/blog/digital-customer-experience-trends/
9. Pine, B. J., II, & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). The experience economy: Work is theatre and every business a stage. Harvard Business School Press.
10. Schmitt, B. H. (1999). Experiential marketing. Journal of Marketing Management, 15(1-3), 53-67. https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870496
11. Setiawan, B. (2022). Defining event marketing as engagement-driven marketing communication. Gadjah Mada International Journal of Business, 24(2), 133-158.
12. Splash. (2024). 72 event marketing statistics for 2024. https://splashthat.com/blog/event-marketing-statistics.

❑❑❑