3   Event participants

This chapter explores how events communicate with their audience and examines the different types of event participants in order to define the expectations and communication strategies aimed at actual and potential first and secondary users, including citizens, visitors, companions, and spectators. The users of the event belong to different audiences, and, for this reason, the actions must be personalized and aimed at different targets.

At the end of the chapter readers should be able to:

■ Know and distinguish the different types of participants of the events, for the purpose of identifying the potential and actual targets.

■ Examine and understand the needs, expectations, and motivations of the various targets in order to set up good differentiated, personalized communication.

■ Understand and examine communication actions, strategies and consequences based on the different targets that are involved.

Typology of participants

When organizers plan an event, they think about the types of participants that might be interested. For this reason, events are generally conceived in specific ways and intended for target niches defined by their interests and expectations. This might include conferences on particular themes, or concerts presenting different musical genres, such as pop or jazz, or subgenres, such as electropop, dance pop or pop rap, acid jazz, cool jazz, free jazz, bebop, or fusion. In many other cases, events are constructed in a generalist way, and aimed at audiences of indistinct ages, cultures, and interests. In these cases, broad themes are explored that respond to the objectives of the organizers and that can intercept different targets. This is the case, for example, with festivals. They only specify the general theme of the event (whether musical, literary, or scientific, etc.) and include collateral events complementary to the main event. Each deals with specific aspects that may interest different targets with varied characteristics. In this way, each collateral event can be addressed to one or more targets (e.g., fans of romance, mystery, horror, science fiction, comics, or children's books). This type of planning increases the value of the event and encourages the aggregation of different people. Mostly, individuals do not participate in events alone but in the company of family, friends, and people with whom they share interests so they can share the experience, increasing the snowball effect in the propagation of the value of the event itself (Krackhardt & Porter, 1986).

Before getting into the different categories of participants, another consideration concerns the way people participate in events. Participants can be *spectators* when

they passively follow the event on social networks or on free-to-air and stream-ing TV channels, *visitors* when they physically go to the venue, or *partakers* when they are actively involved in the event in physical or virtual environments or in a combined way (physical and virtual). Partakers thus comprise an active cluster of the traditional categories of spectators and visitors. In addition to following the event, they may want to try out the offerings, share their emotions and opinions, evaluate the activities offered, and express their opinions to the organizers and other participants. Visitors can also be spectators and enjoy the event in a mixed way, while remaining passive, i.e., participating little. Spectators often follow the event out of curiosity, but if they become passionate, they also tend to become more involved. Likewise, visitors can begin as casual and, over time, become loyal fans who return to the event repeatedly. These positive conversions of behavior toward an event also depend on the perceived authenticity of the offer, the consist-ency with their expectations, and the ability of the event-related communications to create valid situations that increase their interest and involvement (Alexiou, 2020; Mair & Weber, 2019).

In communication, these differences are important in determining the omnichan-nel degree, i.e., choosing the most appropriate channels to reach the different types of participants before, during, and after the event (Del Vacchio et al., 2020).

The goal of event communication is to make everyone participate as much as possible, regardless of one's presence at or distance from the event (a theme that will be further explored in the second part of the book). The differences between the types of participants affect how information is prepared and differentiated: for example, visitors need to receive details on how to get to the region, buy tickets, organize their visit, and find the host venue. They should be able to follow real-time updates on services and programs using apps.

Attendees need information on viewing times and the different channels offered to follow the event and be stimulated to participate in forums, chats, and commu-nities. Physical and virtual partakers want to know how to participate in contests, give their feedback, enjoy particular experiences, access virtual environments, navigate the metaverse, or meet their favorite presenters or other participants to share moments of entertainment. Face-to-face confrontation, collective involve-ment, and participation in group activities are physical and digital opportunities that amplify the emotions and experiences lived in person. For this reason, par-takers want to be involved in person or remotely to share the cheering that takes place in the stands of a stadium or the chorus during a concert; the opportunity to test products or services; the chance to partake in games during sports events, fairs, and festivals; or their enjoyment of immersive services with generous digital content.

On a communicative level, therefore, it is more important to consider the inter-ests that direct people toward an event rather than their degrees of involvement because the latter can be improved by communication in the various stages of development of the relationships with participants. On the contrary, if people are not predisposed to do so, it is much more difficult to intrigue and attract them and make them partake. Hence, the main difference that needs to be investigated is between primary and secondary targets, as each of the types considered so far can fall into either of these two categories (Allen et al., 2022).