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# Student experiences of facilitating knowledge exchange: Developing an understanding of responsible events through blogwriting

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## ABSTRACT

To encourage greater awareness of responsible events, a group of final year Events Management students based in a UK Higher Education institution researched a range of contemporary issues affecting the events industry. The results were presented as an interactive online blog to facilitate an exchange of knowledge with peers and event professionals. Although limitations to the approach are identified and discussed, the evidence suggests that this is an effective learning strategy that encourages debate beyond the university classroom and enables a greater awareness of the need to create and manage events responsibly.

*Keywords:* Sustainable events; Responsible events; Blog writing; Knowledge exchange; Pedagogy; Event management

## 1. Introduction

Academic studies in events management at undergraduate level have tended to focus on the importance, diversity, planning and operation of events with little consideration for responsible or sustainable issues (Getz, 2010; Holmes, Hughes, Mair, & Carlsen, 2015). This article explores the experiences of a group of final year undergraduate Events Management students who created, promoted and managed an online blog to facilitate an exchange of knowledge between peers and events professionals on the theme of responsible events. The contribution to knowledge of this paper is a critical reflection of the use of blog writing as an effective pedagogy to facilitate an exchange of knowledge on the theme of responsible events and sustainability. The paper is presented as a case study to demonstrate the effective use of student-led knowledge exchange through discussion of responsible events.

## 2. The importance of responsible events

Event managers and festival organisers create a range of experiences that can educate and inspire as well as entertain. The industry is skilled at engaging with audiences and communicating a range of messages and ideas in innovative ways. Not only do event managers and festival organisers have the tools and the skill set to communicate effectively with others, but by their very nature should be seen to be leading the way in terms of promoting a range of sustainable and responsible practices.

Sustainability is a concept that suggests a balance between the consumption of resources and their renewal (Holmes et al., 2015; Jones, 2009; Raj & Musgrave, 2009). Sustainability has multiple meanings reflecting how various stakeholders have promoted their own understanding of its contributions to the environment, economy, society, management, wellbeing and social justice. This makes sustainability a difficult concept to define and as such it often conceals as much as it reveals (Orr, 1992). At its heart is the recognition that it is about meeting the needs of the present population whilst ensuring that future generations can meet their own needs without depleting or degrading the stock of resources upon which we all depend (Brundtland, 1987).

Sustainability may largely be an aspiration and the need for its inclusion in daily working practices may not be fully realised (Musgrave, 2011). Within event management it is unlikely that an entire event can be considered sustainable as there is likely to be some degree of waste produced, even if this waste is then recycled or reused. Goodwin (2017) highlights this concept, albeit from a tourism perspective. By replacing the word 'tourism' with 'events', the relevance of responsible events in helping to achieve a sustainable future becomes clearer:

"Responsible events is not the same thing as sustainable events. Sustainability is the goal, a goal which can only be achieved by people taking responsibility, together with others, to achieve it. Responsible events is about taking responsibility for making events sustainable, it is about what people do to address the many specific challenges we face" (adapted from Goodwin, 2017).

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Responsible events can therefore be regarded as a subset of sustainable events that extend beyond concern for the environment, society and economy to include greater acknowledgement of social justice, ethics and global citizenship. It requires a change in mindset from one of unlimited resources, from 'plenitude to limitation, efficiency to equity' (Musgrave, 2011, p. 259). It can also be argued that there is a 'duty of care' towards an event, its performers and staff, the audience, the suppliers, the immediate community, the environment and the business. This means that events do not just operate following sustainable guidelines or policies but actively take responsibility for their creation and implementation. The key values that inform the framework for this discussion are the three values of sustainability: environmental, social and economic (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012; Holmes et al., 2015). These are also referred to as the 'triple bottom line' approach where organisations, including events, evaluate their impacts and account for their actions (Getz, 2009). The three key areas of sustainability place the individual at the centre of responsible thinking as "societies consist of organisations which in turn are made up of individuals, and sustainability is about a better quality of life for all these individuals" (Cavagnaro & Curiel, 2012, p. 236).

Event managers have the potential to better manage their own use of resources as well as educating and inspiring others. Events can help broker an exchange of knowledge by facilitating meetings, conferences and exchanges of ideas that potentially bring key stakeholders together (Lightowler & Knight, 2013; Ward, House, & Hamer, 2009). This may help to create new multi-disciplinary or even trans-disciplinary approaches that strive for a collective understanding of issues and problems by adopting various approaches to create new insights, knowledge and decision-making (Brown, Harris, & Russell, 2010).

The experience economy, which includes events management, both consumes resources and generates negative impacts on the environment and communities in the processes of production and consumption of services. There is a moral obligation on behalf of event managers, festival organisers and their audiences to reduce negative impacts and promote the positive benefits that are derived from products and services (Adema & Roehl, 2010; Laing & Frost, 2010). This coincides with a growing consumer preference for ethical and sustainable products and services (Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010).

As event businesses adopt sustainable operating practices, policies and procedures they will require staff who are familiar with the management systems, the reasons why they are put in place and an understanding of their benefits. Evidence suggests that event management companies increasingly require students who are literate in sustainability to demonstrate good practice and deliver sustainable products and services to enable them to compete in the market place (Carnicelli, 2014; Holtum, 2014). Without a working knowledge of sustainable practices future graduates may be left behind. The role of a university is to both challenge and inform society's social and political norms, and ultimately help to make its communities a better place in which to live. Graduates are a key part in achieving this ambition and our role as educators is to expose students to ideas and debate enabling them to decide for themselves their own course of action and how they may lead their lives (Hales & Jennings, 2017; Hartman, DeMars, Griscom, & Butner, 2017; Sterling, 2012). Graduates should possess critical minds and confidence, equipped with: their own ideas of a good society; an awareness of their respective place within the world order; and a knowledge and skill set to forge their own careers and influence the lives of others; and through their actions they have the potential to shape the future (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013).

### 3. A call to action

In 2016 the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmarks for Events Management were reviewed, which emphasised the importance of sustainability with a need to equip UK graduates with the necessary skills to manage events responsibly to, "recognise and respond to moral, ethical, sustainability and safety issues which directly pertain to the context of study including relevant legislation and professional codes of conduct" (QAA, 2016, 5.2 ix). The subject benchmarks further articulate that students should "demonstrate a critical awareness and understanding of how core values, for example, ethics, sustainability, creativity, strategy, and continuous improvement, relate to, and are reflected in, events (QAA, 2016, 6.2 iv) as well as, "appreciate the ethical and sustainability issues associated with the financial support, operation and development of events (QAA, 2016, 6.5 iii).

These statements coincided with the production of a report by Powerful Thinking, *The Show Must Go On*, which provided an environmental impact statement and vision for the UK festival industry (Powerful Thinking, 2015) and was produced in response to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris in 2015 (UNFCCC, 2017). The report contains a series of startling facts that are based on environmental impacts from 279 UK summer music festivals which attracted 3.17 million festival goers in 2012 and as a result created 23,500 tonnes of waste with only 32% being recycled. UK summer music festivals use 5 million litres of fuel to power the events of which only 15% is biodiesel, the remaining 85% is diesel produced from non-renewable sources. Most visitors arrive at the festivals by car accounting for 80% of a festival's total Co2e emissions, not including travel by artists, staff and crew. Co2e is an abbreviation of 'carbon dioxide equivalent', an international measure of greenhouse emissions that includes other gases that contribute towards global warming. The carbon emission alone generated by the UK festival industry, excluding travel, is estimated at 19,778 tonnes of Co2 per year (Powerful Thinking, 2015).

The report not only outlines the environmental impact of UK festivals but also provides a blueprint for effective sustainable management of events by recommending: Sustainable approaches to energy; a standard approach to serve-ware and packaging; use of reusable cups; a standard approach to waste management systems; and the implementation of sustainable travel policies. Therefore, it is important that event managers are aware of such issues and are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and commitment to address them.

#### 4. Responding to the challenge

In response to the challenge of highlighting the importance of sustainable practices a new final year module in Responsible Events was created at the University which has since been incorporated into two further modules. The module descriptor explains the focus of study:

Responsible Events provides an opportunity for students to reflect on the demand for sustainable management practice, ethical conduct and greening strategies in the delivery of events across the range of sectors/scales. It will focus on the concept of best practice, taking the people, planet, profit model of environmental, social and economic responsibility and applying this to a range of event scenarios.

The indicative syllabus explores a range of key issues and approaches, as:

This module will take a dual perspective on responsible events firstly outlining the intellectual precepts that have informed knowledge in this area, and then focussing in on the practicalities of adopting greening strategies in the delivery of events. Whilst issues such as corporate social responsibility, industry standards and environmental sensitivity will be addressed this module conceives of responsible events as part of a total quality management (TQM) strategy and therefore aims to provide students with a range of practical skills and competencies that have utility in the industry, and further enhance their professional skills-set.

As a result, the learning outcomes suggest that on passing the module a student should be able to:

1. Demonstrate current and in-depth knowledge on concepts of responsible events management;
2. Appraise critically the range of sustainability models and evaluate their utility in adopting a responsible event management strategy;
3. Analyse how concepts of project, service and quality management can support the greening of events;
4. Develop a portfolio of techniques for greening events that could be applied in a range of event scenarios.

The assessment comprises of two items of coursework:

001: 40% Coursework: Individual, presentation and paperwork: 1000 words or equivalent

002: 60% Coursework: Individual, standard written: 2000 words or equivalent

(University of Gloucestershire, 2016a)

During the module, students were introduced to key themes and concepts that enabled them to focus on producing a piece of research that would be presented as a blog article. Internet blogs have grown in popularity in recent years (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008) and provide a useful platform on which to publish an individual's knowledge, opinion and facilitate collaboration with others (Chai & Kim, 2010). The challenge of researching, writing and managing a blog article is an exercise in problem-based learning (Liu, Horng, Chou, & Huang, 2017) as the blog provides an interactive asynchronous environment in which to share ideas (Savin-Baden & Wilkie, 2006).

The purpose of the first assessment was to contribute to a student-led blog, to identify a 'responsible' issue that would impact on the industry in the near future and to outline how events managers should respond. Students produced blogs on topics as diverse as waste management and recycling to water, transport, food, and social impact, many echoing the concerns expressed in *The Show Must Go On Report* (Powerful Thinking, 2015). Social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn were used to increase awareness of the blog and encourage an exchange of views and opinions with a professional audience. Readers of the blog articles were invited to leave comments which the students responded to, facilitating a dialogue and an exchange of knowledge. The blog site was designed as a pop-up, to be visibly active for two weeks during March 2016. During that time over 500 comments were posted on the site and over 2800 page views were recorded. As part of the assessment students were asked to present their blog to staff and to discuss its design and content. In addition, students submitted a narrated bibliography to reveal the academic underpinning and research that they used to create their blog post. The blog, *Eventure: responsible events*, is available online <http://eventsglos.wordpress.com> and although the site is 'closed' as the students are not actively monitoring their individual blogs, students' work and posted comments remain visible (University of Gloucestershire, 2016b). The blog site updates its content each year as new cohorts of students show-case their research into a range of issues affecting the events industry.

The second part of the assessment required students to reflect upon their experience of researching and writing a blog and facilitating an exchange of knowledge between themselves and a wider audience. Knowledge exchange is not just about creating a debate but learning and offering opinion that may challenge existing views. Event managers should be aware of what is current and what is changing in the industry, along with the various expectations of suppliers and consumers (Bladen, Kennell, Abson, & Wilde, 2012).

## 5. Knowledge exchange through blogging

Although there is no universally agreed definition of knowledge (Assundani, 2005), the definition of knowledge that is used in this paper is drawn from Beesley and Chalip (2011) and Werner, Dickson, and Hyde (2015) who refer to two types of knowledge; tacit, based on 'know-how' and explicit, based on 'know-what', that both exist within an individual (Nonaka, 1994). Explicit knowledge tends to be expressed in a structured way by a language or symbolic form of explicit communication, for example a training manual or written blog. Often tacit and explicit knowledge co-exist as one often depends on the existence of the other as there must be a degree of commonality and understanding between the knowledge seeker and the knowledge provider (Filipowski, Kazienko, Bródka, & Kajdanowicz, 2012). The processes involved in converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge is often time consuming and problematic in terms of convincing others and can be facilitated by interaction, in this case an on-line blog (Herschel, Nemati, & Steiger, 2001). A 'blog' can be defined as an abbreviated form of 'weblog', a frequently updated web-based journal consisting of a static page and comments presented in reverse chronological order. The content reflects not only the bloggers thoughts but also through posts and replies, a blog can become a shared space: "conversational, social and networked" (Garden, 2011, p. 488).

Knowledge can be transferred through formal learning situations such as a classroom or training session or can be informal through sharing, discussion, browsing and unstructured reading, for example by using a blog. Knowledge exchange is often purposeful (Werner et al., 2015) as it mobilises intellectual capital to deliver a specific outcome. For successful knowledge exchange to occur there needs to be a degree of participation by both parties; the broadcaster and the receiver. The information that is transferred needs to be evaluated and applied to an individual's own thought processes and networks (Beesley & Chalip, 2011).

The conceptual framework applied here is based on Bandura's (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory where personal development takes place through a process of learning from others, which may take place in a vicarious capacity using a range of media and technology. Social constructivism offers students an opportunity to discuss thoughts, ideas, and opinions through blog writing enabling the social construction of knowledge (Wang et al., 2016). Although learning can occur without a change in behaviour, Bandura's theory suggests that through open discussion and debate about key issues a greater understanding is achieved that then leads to a possible change in behaviour. As individuals share an interest in a topic then they begin to show deeper involvement and a growing sense of personal interest (Silvia, 2006). Deeper involvement may facilitate deeper learning as blog writing encourages higher-order thinking skills such as the evaluation and synthesis of ideas which in turn may influence behaviour (Hourigan & Murray, 2010).

Integrating web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs, in the teaching of higher education has the potential to increase interaction and collaboration between learners to co-produce as well as critically comment on existing knowledge (Liburd & Christensen, 2013). These technologies extend beyond the classroom leading to an exchange of a variety of viewpoints that may affect the level of personal engagement with an issue (Levy, Journell, He, & Towns, 2015). Blog sites are often seen as being informal yet using web-based solutions; companies and professional organisations are using such platforms for sharing knowledge. Social networking can enhance knowledge exchange through being focused and extending beyond the realm of co-workers and company structures that may result in the creation of new knowledge (Filipowski et al., 2012). Blogs can be used in an educational setting for a variety of purposes, for example they can be used as a method for teaching written accuracy and personal reflection (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Sackstein, 2015) as well as facilitating interaction (Richardson, 2006). Blog writing has been used to promote student learning and engagement with research and requires a different writing style compared with traditional academic writing (Hansen, 2016). Blog writing in an educational setting enhances learner engagement, motivates students to write, encourages reflective practices and offers a degree of ownership in a public on-line space (Thomas, 2017). Personal reflection based on written comment is an important part of blogging where learners create informed comments based on their beliefs, understanding, past practices and responses to issues (Chu, Chan, & Tiwari, 2012).

Students explored the processes of knowledge exchange by interacting with event professionals and other event students through their on-line blogs. Some students stated that the comments received challenged their thinking and as a result they had to carry out further research and/or seek advice before responding. In some cases, they ended up agreeing with the comments in the posts that challenged their original ideas. The students also effectively acted as knowledge seekers on other blog posts, gaining additional information on different issues within responsible events and leaving comments on a range of ideas (Caswill & Lyall, 2013). As such it can be demonstrated that students not only transformed their own views on a range of responsible issues but through interaction on the blog site were invoking debate amongst others. Transformative learning is a powerful tool in deepening understanding of often complex issues leading to potentially innovative ideas and greater awareness of common problems and as such the blog provides an opportunity for current knowledge to be challenged and potentially transformed (Brookfield, 2012).

The blog posts demonstrate how knowledge exchange is essential for the development of responsible events within the events industry. By facilitating knowledge exchange, event managers, consumers and students can engage in debating responsible issues and learn further information. However, whilst the blog posts are a successful facilitator of knowledge exchange, it could be argued that the knowledge shared through the blog may have provoked further research and curiosity, there is a potential lack of reliability. Both novice and professional contributors have the potential to influence opinions with little or no authorisation, and with no proof of identity or intent (Chang & Yang, 2013).

The process of reflection is important in encouraging students to consider a range of ideas and to research carefully before expressing their response. It also encourages students to consider ways in which knowledge exchange helps to generate new ways of thinking and for them, as future events professionals entering a dynamic industry, how to maintain currency in terms of knowledge and ideas, engage in debate and share best practice (Carlsen, Andersson, Ali-Knight, Jaeger, & Taylor, 2010; Dickson & Arcodia, 2010; Yeoman, Robertson, Smith, Backer, & McMahan-Beattie, 2014). This is important as responsible events continue to evolve in terms of

management practices, customer expectation and the expectations of governments and sponsors (Scheinbaum & Lacey, 2015). This evolution can be facilitated through closer collaboration between the academic community and practitioners to devise a collective vision of what is achievable in the longer term whilst identifying short term priorities (Jiang & Schmader, 2014; Millar, Hind, & Magala, 2012). Challenges of climate change and carbon usage remain and as such the events industry has a pivotal role, not just using events as an educational resource (Mair, 2014), but by the management practices of those events in providing a more sustainable future.

## 6. Method

The purpose of this study is to identify the student experiences of facilitating knowledge exchange by developing an understanding of responsible events through blog writing. The blog posts for responsible events have been analysed using thematic analysis (Guest, McQueen, & Namey, 2012) with the material coded to aid the collection of responses around a series of emerging themes (David & Sutton, 2011). Students provided written consent to participate in the study and agreed that their comments could be reported anonymously. The use of online comments in academic study is becoming a regular occurrence through practices such as netnography, and as such ethical issues in terms of anonymity and the management of data are well rehearsed (Kozinets, 2015). The identification of themes as an investigative approach is well established in social science research as the themes are disaggregated into what Silverman (2013) describes as 'fragments' which can then be regrouped under a series of thematic headings. The benefits of thematic analysis are that the approach enables multiple written expressions to be collected and summarised. Themes were selected based on their frequency of occurrence, although outliers were also noted. The researcher was also interested in instances where dialogue was present between the blog author and the reader. Themes could be extracted based on written replies, but deeper insight may be possible where there is a continuous exchange of ideas.

Evidence was also collected from the reflective essays and module evaluations written by the students who discussed their experiences of facilitating knowledge exchange: developing an understanding of responsible events through blog writing. However, it is acknowledged that the process of reflection can often be selective and as a result the context may not be fully revealed (Moon, 2004). The extent to which the experiences can be replicated and externally verified may raise a challenge; yet, the data suggests that the pattern of response is largely consistent.

The 18 students in the study were comprised of 15 females and 3 males aged between 21 and 26. Students were studying courses related to the subject of Events Management: 13 studying Events Management, 2 students studying Events Tourism Management, 2 students studying Combined Studies and 1 student studying Business Management and Events Management. Although the gender of the blog authors can be identified, the respondents were anonymous and as such their age, gender or professional status remain undisclosed. The comments received on the blog are from students at the University, students from other Universities and from events professionals who responded to requests using social media.

## 7. Exchanging knowledge

There were variations in the way that knowledge was exchanged on the blog site. Most of the comments written by those who had read and responded to the research posted on the blog supported or qualified the information being presented: The word 'agree' was used 187 times during the exchange of comments and the word 'great' was used 162 times:

"I completely agree that festivals need to educate people further on other methods of transportation to festivals. If festivals made it easier for people by running more shuttle buses or offering an incentive for people who get creative with their travel then maybe more people would seek other ways of getting to festivals. Great blog!" (Respondent A)

"Really interesting read, great points made that need to be considered!!!" (Respondent B)

Some of the respondents provided supporting statements that augmented the research presented. In this case the discussion of festivals and recycling is placed in a wider socio-economic context:

"This is a great article! It is always commented on in the aftermath of Glastonbury what a mess is left behind. With the amount of festivals and events we hold in Britain it would be a great start to reinforce the need for recycling, and for more effective recycling strategies from the government. The amount of useless packaging used for consumer goods is disproportional to what is actually needed and something needs to be done about it." (Respondent C)

Other comments challenged the blog authors by suggesting alternative approaches, pointing out aspects that had not been considered or simply disagreeing with the text. On the subject of food miles and the provision of local food:

"A very interesting read. But I feel the majority of festival goers are there with friends to have fun, drink and eat whatever is the cheapest and its source is the least of their worries as long as it is cheap and cheerful. If most people going buy cheap tents to just leave [them] (adding to landfill and more pollution most of the time) they are hardly going to give a thought to how many miles their processed burger has travelled." (Respondent D)

"This is a really interesting article with some good points! I agree that we are, as a generation, making healthier dietary choices but could it be argued that the healthy side of it this argument might not matter as much as... do people see events as 'cheat days' and want to just eat cheap and convenient junk food? Certainly, event managers should take more responsibility for ensuring that

food at events is healthy and sourced appropriately. However, healthier options tend to be pricier. Maybe this is something that event managers need to look into, ways of making convenience food at events healthy and affordable?" (Respondent E)

The blog does not just initiate a reader-response but can also encourage an exchange of views between the community of people who are reading and responding to the debate. In this case the student blog author responded to Respondent E by politely suggesting that they had misinterpreted what was being suggested. Blog authors need to be aware that their words may be interpreted from a variety of perspectives and need to apply a sense of decorum:

"Thank you for your detailed comment. I understand your point that consumers may see events as 'cheat days' and this is not entirely a negative however, I don't necessarily think this is the main argument for concern. I certainly agree that event professionals should devise ways in which environmentally produce can be affordable for all consumers. To continue, target markets are a concern here as you have discussed above. Promoting sustainable food on a global level from both a governmental and health perspective could undoubtedly target and educate a wider audience with the hopes of attracting more consumers to eat sustainably." (Blog author A, female)

Some readers may have regarded the blog as an official representation or that it conformed to a predetermined set of expectations and instead wanted to know what the blog author personally believed about the topic:

"Very interesting blog. I believe festival attendees should be responsible for their own waste and their own actions. If a person chooses to attend a music festival it should be their own responsibility to clean up after themselves. However, saying that, I think it would also help matters if the organisers of such events pushed and encouraged attendees to respect the environment by, for example, providing more accessible waste bins at events. What is your personal opinion as an events manager?" (Respondent F)

In response the student blog author provided an insight into their personal opinion:

"Thank you for your comment... Your thoughts are interesting and from research, I think a fair amount of people have similar views. Personally, I believe that it's all about balance - I think that festival organisers need to create an environment that makes it easy for attendees to be more responsible. If there are more incentives, accessible waste bins, etc. along with banning of plastic bags and single-use water bottles then perhaps festival goers would act in a 'greener' manner." (Blog author B, female)

## 8. Student experiences of blog writing

Student evaluation of the module suggests that they have benefitted from the experience of facilitating knowledge exchange through their written blogs. A module evaluation completed by 12 out of the 18 students registered, highlighted that blog writing was "one of the best things we have done at University" (Student A, module evaluation, male) with "a chance to showcase our work" (Student B, module evaluation, female). Some students "would like a class on using WordPress" (Student C, module evaluation, female) and "clearer instructions on how to write a blog" (Student D, module evaluation, female) as blog writing demands a different writing style that can be considered to be more persuasive; encouraging argument and debate (Kathpalia & See, 2016). For many this is the first time that they have created a written blog and as such they have developed a new range of skills as well as becoming more aware about the need to ensure that events are planned and managed responsibly.

Further reflective comments were evident in the second assessment where students were asked to reflect on their experiences of responding to feedback on their blog. Some students expressed how they benefitted from transformative learning and engagement with others. Written comments sometimes challenged the student's own perception of the topic and sometimes highlighted omissions or provided other avenues for consideration:

"One particular comment that challenged my perspective on the subject was 'I think that attendees should take responsibility as well as the event managers'. I previously had only considered waste prevention and management strategies from the view that the responsibility should lie with the event manager" (Student E, reflective essay, female).

A general lack of awareness of the issues being debated and a sense of surprise was a recurring theme in many of the student's reflective essays. Topics being presented were often considered to be insightful and providing information that the reader was potentially unaware of. This provides a sense that the written blogs are informative and are able to disseminate research beyond the University classroom:

"It became clear that many individuals had not previously been aware of the topic... with people describing the blog as an 'eye opener' and 'thought-provoking'. Many of the comments expressed shock and responders said they had never realised the full effects of the impact of this topic" (Student F, reflective essay, female).

Students found that some comments posted on the blog could be critical and potentially controversial. Although the author of the comment could be trying to incite a reaction, in most cases the comments were constructive. Critical comments can motivate blog authors to revise their work, whilst helping them to be aware of their audience (Lapp, Shea, & Wolsey, 2011); "When I received comments, it encouraged me to research further and edit my blog. I found critical comments the most valuable element of knowledge transfer, when the aim is to progress responsible events" (Student E, reflective essay, female). Part of the motivation for blog writing is a personal sense of enjoyment, altruism and reputation gained through a sharing and exchange of knowledge (Hsu & Lin, 2008). Fortunately, none of the comments received were defamatory or abusive but steps were in place to moderate comments before

posting onto the site. Both students and tutors had editing rights to allow them to control potential misuse of the blog.

It was important that the students developed a professional voice when writing their blogs. Blogs need to be clearly written, accurate, informative and accessible. It was important that the blogs reflected research rather than just opinion which would also be of interest to a wide audience, "It was essential for the author to be able to find a professional voice which could be channelled throughout the blog to access wider networks and circles that would be interested in the topic and enthusiastic to exchange knowledge" (Student G, reflective essay, female). Over time a blogger may claim a distinctive sense of identity through their writing and through the co-production of information they are disclosing and by the way they respond to developments in the industry as well as direct comments received via the blog (Vaast, Davidson, & Mattson, 2013).

However, the number of comments received may not necessarily reflect the quality of the written blog but may give an indication of its perceived popularity. Amongst the cohort of students there is evidence where some did not receive as many comments on their blogs as others, but this was not an indication of a lack of critical thinking or that knowledge exchange did not take place. A study by Kun, Bado, Smith, and Moore (2013) revealed that levels of critical thinking amongst a focus group remained constant with or without peer commenting. Just because a blog does not receive many comments does not necessarily mean that it has not been read or has not made an impact. Yang (2009) discovered that blogs contribute to the development of critical thinking skills and the majority of the posts by readers were descriptive in nature; they became critical and reflective only after being challenged by the instructor or in this case the blog author. Not all blogs were successful in demonstrating an exchange of views. Some students had unrealistic expectations of what they could achieve. Some anticipated a lively debate or posted comments to reveal a new insight into the issue being discussed. In some cases, the level of discussion was minimal:

"Not many people challenged responsible issues that occurred in the blog apart from one or two comments... Where this happened my reply to the comment asked questions about what they would do or if they had any other ideas to try and spark knowledge transfer but this didn't seem to take off" (Student G, reflective essay, female).

Low participation may be due to the nature of the topic being discussed, the format and presentation of the blog, or a simply a lack of engagement by the individual when promoting the blog to peers or professionals (Lee & Bonk, 2016).

Although some students were successful in demonstrating knowledge exchange between peers, it was noted that "the effects of knowledge exchange cannot be directly measured, or at least there is no agreed way to measure them" (Student H, reflective essay, female) as "there is no way to say if exchange has truly occurred or been successful" beyond the comments posted on the blog (Student I, reflective essay, male).

Some students expressed frustration about not knowing where to target their social media as it was "hard to find where event professionals were interacting and how to get my blog to the right people" (Student I, reflective essay, male). It is important to focus on researching and producing relevant content, but it is also important to know how to promote the content and gain visibility amongst event professionals. Some students questioned whether event professionals have sufficient time or the inclination to research blog sites unless they are relevant to a topic that they themselves are researching (Student I, reflective essay, male). Instead, several students inadvertently described discussions taking place on a variety of social media platforms that they had become engaged in. Although this suggests that knowledge exchange is taking place across a variety of platforms, it did not necessarily assist the students in capturing such comments on their blog. Some students did make use of such communication to promote their own blog site during such written exchanges; however, other students were more passive. It is generally accepted that the use of social networks in professional environments facilitates an increase in knowledge exchange (Pan et al., 2015) but there is more to learn about where and when these exchanges take place and the affect that these have on the individuals concerned and the organisations that they engage with.

## 9. Discussion

Knowledge exchange has a vital role to play in the future development of responsible events through sharing ideas and best practice. It is recognised that changes need to be made to make events more sustainable (Powerful Thinking, 2015) but how organisations will instigate such a change is not always clear. Academics, students and event practitioners should work more closely in developing responsible events (Millar et al., 2012) with knowledge exchange being seen to help solve a range of problems in adapting to changing business conditions (Scott & Laws, 2006). However, some organisations may choose not to participate or to closely guard their operating policies and procedures in fear of revealing their commercial advantage, thus hindering an exchange of knowledge. Yet Senge (1990, p. 139) makes the point that "organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning but without it no organizational learning occurs".

Student-led blogs provide evidence that knowledge exchange can play a key role in the development of responsible events within the events industry by facilitating knowledge exchange between event professionals, consumers and students. By using a blog site being supported by the use of social media, students had a greater potential to demonstrate meaningful and 'deeper' knowledge exchange and encourage more stakeholders to participate (Murdock, Shariff, & Wilding, 2013). Through direct interaction they were able to engage in debating a range of issues and discover new insights into responsible event management. It enabled students to demonstrate scholarship through producing and promoting their own research whilst inviting others to comment. This provides a set of positive learning experiences beyond the presentation of research to actively defend, debate and, in some cases, re-evaluate their position on a given topic.

However, whilst the blog was regarded as a success by all who participated, it could be said that whilst the knowledge shared was insightful and provoked further debate, there was a potential for a lack of reliability and validity. Blogs allow both novices and

experts to make contributions with little or no authorisation, and potentially with little or no proof of identity (Chang & Yang, 2013; Du & Wagner, 2006). There was no proof that the comments were made by events managers. There is also little to establish whether the comments posted on the blog by readers are genuine, they are assumed as being factual but could be opinion with little or no evidence of being accurate (Du & Wagner, 2006). Yet what is important is the process by which students demonstrated that their own research is of value and that debate can extend beyond classroom discussion to encompass the wider events management community. There are positive benefits to the individual with regards to the development of writing skills and self-reflection. As such these ideas can challenge existing conventions and provide an opportunity for debate and an exchange of knowledge.

Professional associations have a significant responsibility in facilitating knowledge exchange amongst event professionals. Professional associations act as a bridge to allow information to be transferred and exchanged between the wider events profession and their members (Dickson & Arcodia, 2010). Higher Education also has a pivotal role to play in facilitating knowledge exchange and transferring knowledge into practice (Hawkins, 2006; Lightowler & Knight, 2013). Within Higher Education it could be argued that the fundamentals of responsible events and sustainability should be embedded across a range of curricula providing a greater range of opportunities for knowledge exchange and an awareness of the importance of this topic which would in turn encourage the use of the holistic, interdisciplinary, and transformative approaches to learning (Cotton, Bailey, Warren, & Bissell, 2009).

## 10. Conclusion

By introducing responsible and sustainable practices into the events management curriculum within a UK Higher Education institution, graduates of the course will be better placed to respond to future challenges. By engaging in dialogue with peers and other events professionals, students can demonstrate that they themselves are part of a wider community and have an active role to play in its future. The importance of knowledge exchange through blog writing in defining a set of issues to address within the management of events is a powerful method of co-production. Through multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches, debates with other communities beyond events management may yield new insights into these issues and may provide alternative approaches. Although there is potentially a lack of clarity regarding the problems that need solving amidst a constant state of change; through encouraging awareness and debate regarding the need for responsible events, attitudes may begin to change by nurturing collective aspiration towards a more sustainable future.

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## Declarations of interest

None.

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