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HOW CONFERENCES HAVE TO CHANGE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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1. Introduction

Dimmed light, a large hotel meeting room: Hundreds of people in linear rows of uncomfortable chairs are facing the stage, where a nervous man holds his 45min keynote on the importance of creativity and innovation to stay on top of your business. In the meanwhile, the jaded audience secretly thanks Steve Jobs for having been a creative and innovative guy so that they can obtain some real news, play a little game or answer their emails on their iPhones as the 95 overloaded PowerPoint slides proceed, one after the other.

I am assuming, many of the hundreds of million people that frequently attend conferences in this world have already gone through a similar experience. Take the iPhone and the PowerPoint away from the scenario - and this same situation could have taken place a hundred years ago. Many conference organizers nowadays put speakers on stage that talk about the importance of innovation and creativity to master the changes in the digital era. Ironically, at the same time, the vast majority of conferences are run in a way that has been developed centuries ago. The conference design is still focused on talking heads in keynotes and panel discussions while interactive parts among the audience are limited to coffee breaks, dinners and the drinks at the hotel bar. However, the digital era has brought many changes to how we learn, how we inspire each other, how we build relationships and how we influence the products and services that we use.

My hypothesis: Most conferences have not adapted their framework and program design to match the 21st century flow of information & communication, triggered by the Internet. Throughout this paper, I want to explore in what ways physical conferences can and must take over a new role in the digital era. My special focus is hereby set on business conferences that target the music industry.

I will start my thesis with an exploration of the current conference industry landscape. Within this context, I will also depict the relevance of business conferences for the music industry. The following chapter will provide a snapshot of several changes that the digital era triggered in the 21st century along with the rising spread of the Internet.

Hereafter, I am going to evaluate what effects the outlined changes in the digital era have already had on the conference landscape – with a deeper analysis again on business conferences for the music industry. Finally, I will derive the components of an updated conference model 2.0 that reflects the changes in the digital era before I conclude with on outlook on the music industry conference market.

Of course, the changes related to the digital era are not the only drivers that will influence and shape the future of conferences. There are numerous other fields and societal transformations which might have a similarly strong impact on the way we conference: Changes in our education systems, research from adult learning theory, the scarcity of natural resources and the rising ecological awareness, new trends in design and participatory architecture, demographical changes, the shifting roles of emerging markets, the global economical development – the list could go on and on.

But in order to stay within the set scope of this thesis, I will deliberately leave these other influencers out of my examinations and projections onto the future development of conferences. Thus, this thesis doesn't strive to draw a comprehensive and holistic picture of how conferences have to change, but merely focuses on the implications that are directly associated with the global spread of the Internet and social media in the digital era.

As there are hardly any substantial scientific sources on the methodological design of conferences and as "the practice of conferences […] seems to be further ahead than the theoretical explorations of the subject"[1], I am going to include sources of a more practical nature from industry practitioners in this thesis. Besides, where suitable, I will also incorporate my own observations and experiences as a frequent conference organizer and participant during the past six years.

[1] Nicoline Jacoby Hansen, *Conferences as Dramaturgical Learning Spaces: Phd Dissertation* (Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitetsskole, 2010), p. 18.

2. The conference industry

2.1. An introduction to the industry

The desire for people to meet and confer, share ideas and information, negotiate and build relationships is something that can be tracked back to the early days of civilization.[2] According to Adrian Segar, the first conference formats that come close to the formats that we know today have emerged over 400 years ago[3]. While in the early days, conferences were used primarily for political and religious purposes[4], nowadays, we see a wide range of applications.

Whether you think of electrical bicycles, string instruments, mobile Internet, political corruption, co-working or space research - there seems to be almost no topic one can imagine that has not been covered yet by a dedicated conference somewhere on this planet.

Consequently, an entire industry has evolved around the organization, communication and hosting of conferences. In the beginning of the 20th century, big cities increasingly started to open up *convention bureaus*, attracting and supporting conference organizers to host the conference in their town. As many conferences last several days and as large events attract thousands of attendees - usually most come from out of town - conferences can generate substantial revenues for local hotels, conference centers, restaurants, transportation services etc. This leads to increased taxes on a local, regional and national level and to an explanation why a lot of political protagonists actively support, subsidize and speak at conferences. And this also clarifies why on most continents conferences are being looked upon as being economically a part of the (business) tourism sector.[5]

While there are no comprehensive statistics that measure the turnover of the conference industry on a global scale, one can extrapolate the market size and economic importance by matching different studies. The study of the Convention Industry Council in 2011 explored the figures in the U.S. market, where the meeting industry supports 1.7 million jobs, creates $ 263 billion in spending, a $106 billion contribution to the national GDP and $60 billion in labor revenue each year. In 2009, 51 million people attended 270.000 conferences in the U.S.[6] According to different studies from the International Congress and Convention Association and from the Union of International Associations, the United States only make up ca. 11-15%

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[2] Tony Rogers, *Conferences and Conventions: A Global Industry*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2007), p.
[3] Adrian Segar, *Conferences That Work: Creating Events That People Love* (Marlboro, Vt.: Booklocker.com, 2010), p. 7.
[4] Tony Rogers, p. 4.
[5] Tony Rogers, p. 19.
[6] 'The Economic Significance of Meetings to the U.S. Economy', ed. by Convention Industry Council, 2011 <http://www.meetingsmeanbusiness.com/>.

of the global market.[7] Although other regions certainly have lower local costs for labor, lodging, travel etc., the global meeting market could exceed $1 trillion.

This indicates that the conference industry as making up a major part of the meeting industry has reached a great economic and global significance.[8] Yet, it is still a cluttered industry, with non-standardized formal education, various different industry associations and different terms and vocabulary.

Although the terms *conference, symposium, colloquium, convention* and *congress* might have a different meaning in different regions and among different associations, the words are often used synonymously. Various industry associations have taken attempts to standardize the vocabulary and differentiate the meanings. Yet, most industry professionals, according to Rogers, haven't adapted their proposed usage scenarios as outlined in the 'International Meetings Industry Glossary'.[9]

As this thesis wants to explore how conferences have to transform in the digital era, it remains important to define in this context what a conference is and what it's not.

So as I mention the term conference throughout this thesis, I refer to an activity that

- Is held face-to-face
- Gathers people from different organizations / work places
- Has a minimum of 50 people involved
- Aims at creating an (informal) learning environment
- Involves various content modules
- Lasts at least half a day

Now, there are also various types of conferences being organized by different parties out of diverse aspirations with different audiences attending.

Again, a standardized categorization among the industry professionals doesn't exist, yet this chart created by Hansen offers a suitable overview:

[7] 'International Association Meetings Market 2000-2010', ed. by International Congress and Convention Association, 2011 <www.iccaworld.com> [accessed 18 April 2012]; Tony Rogers, p. 16.
[8] Tony Rogers, p. 18.
[9] Tony Rogers, p. 21.

Type	Participants	Time	Primary Aim
Research Conference	Researchers	2-4 days	▪ Present information ▪ Share knowledge among peers
Professional/ Business Conference	Employees from different organizations	1-2 days	▪ Present information ▪ Share knowledge among peers ▪ Develop new knowledge
Corporate Conference	Employees from the same organization	1-2 days	▪ Calibrate the company vision and values ▪ Build and maintain employee loyalty ▪ Build relationships among employees
Sales Conference	Customers (existing and potential)	1-2 days	▪ Sell a product/service ▪ Build and maintain customer loyalty ▪ Present product information
Association Conference	Members (existing and potential)	2-4 days	▪ Present information ▪ Share knowledge among peers ▪ Develop new knowledge ▪ Build relationships among participants ▪ Discuss beliefs and values ▪ Decision making
Political Conference	Delegates	1-2 days	▪ Present information ▪ Discuss beliefs and values ▪ Decision making

Table 1: conference types by Nicoline Jacoby Hansen[10]

As this is an analytical model, in reality we often see mixtures between the different types of conferences. But as most of the music industry conferences can be categorized as business / professional conferences, this will be my area of focus throughout the thesis.

2.2. The traditional conference model

Now, what does an average business conference look like? If someone attended four two-day business conferences in a row from different fields – the automotive industry, the solar energy sector, the food industry and the music business, one would meet presumably entirely different audiences and face challenges that are distinctive to the respective industry. Yet, at each conference one would go through a remarkably similar methodological design during the two days:

Opening speeches, keynotes from well renown industry professionals, lunch, further lectures (possibly happening in parallel break-out sessions) on current business challenges and best practice case studies, a coffee break, closing panel with all keynote speakers on one stage,

[10] Hansen, p. 38.

evening event with a networking dinner in an exclusive location and some entertainment on the side. Next day: Further keynotes and panels, featuring more industry experts and usually one disruptive lecture from a person outside the industry (e.g. a successful sports coach or a comedian).[11]

The usage of this default conference design framework comes with key advantages for attendees, speakers and organizers alike:

- The attendees know what to expect and get to consume content in a lean-back manner
- The names of the celebrity keynote speakers in the programs help the people with budget responsibility at corporate organizations to justify the spending on the attendance fees
- The speakers are flattered as they are promised a fixed amount of mass attention on stage during their keynote and/or panel discussion
- The model can be easily scaled as the conference's popularity increases by booking bigger venues and hosting more sessions in parallel
- Most meeting planners, conference venues and technical suppliers are specialized on this conference model, it requires little training and adaption efforts

Usually, business conferences – unlike e.g. research or association conferences - are organized by third party conference corporations with the purpose to (also) generate profit.[12] The deal is simple: The organizing conference corporation creates an event with the assumption that it will be of value to a certain audience, sets a price tag to attend and starts to market the conference to potential customers. On the other side, the potential attendee (or someone at his/her organization that covers the costs / wants the person to attend) evaluates whether the expected individual or organizational gained value will exceed the investment (ticket price, travel expenses). But what is it that attendees expect from a conference?

2.3. The attractiveness of conferences

In the first place, it has to be stated that every conference attendee arrives with an individual agenda and distinct questions and expectations. Yet, certain patterns can be identified. The following aspirations appear to be the major objectives among business conference attendees:

- Learn about new trends and developments

[11] Michelle Boule, *Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences, and Trashing the Talking Head.* (Chicago: Information Today, Inc., 2011), p. 10.
[12] Hansen, p. 24.

- Discover new solutions for challenges that one is currently facing
- Establish new and cultivate existing (business) relationships
- Seek reassurance and peer group approval, especially relevant for individuals working primarily alone
- Meet and experience *industry celebrities* face-to-face
- Get a break from everyday life and find inspiration
- Have a joyful experience, refresh one's own motivation

As scientific research based knowledge concerning attendees' expectations is still lacking in the industry, this list has combined observations and suggestions from different sources: conference literature, attendee surveys and industry professionals' experience.[13]

Human beings who are invited as speakers might share the listed objectives, though they are being offered additional reasons and incentives to attend:

- Gain of reputation by being framed as a designated expert on stage
- The opportunity to market the products / services of one's company in a more or less subtle way to a relevant, often high level audience
- Free attendance of the conference
- Optional: substantial financial compensation. Whereas most speakers from corporations don't receive a speaking fee, many independent professional speakers charge 1.000 – 50.000 euros for one lecture.

Now, looking upon conferences from a broader and sociological perspective, they fulfill an interesting function in our society.

Business conferences, organized by third parties, can be considered a third place - a place apart from one's own working and living world. In this theoretically neutral environment, people from different cultures, disciplines, organizations and generations can gather to meet, mingle, inform, inspire and learn from each other. It is also a place to tackle shared problems and discuss and evaluate individual and collaborative solutions. According to Oldenburg and Brisset, a third place creates an environment where "unrelated people relate"[14]. A third place

[13] Hansen, pp. 41–42; Boule, p. 8; Matt Moore, Katie Chatfield and Beth Etling, 'The Future of Conferences', *ABC*, 2009 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/the-future-of-conferences/3091184> [accessed 18 April 2012]; Robin Good, 'The Future Of Conferences And Events: Critical Viewpoints From Gerd Leonhard, George Siemens And Nancy White', *Robin Good's Master New Media*, 2009 <http://www.masternewmedia.org/the-future-of-conferences-and-events-critical-viewpoints/> [accessed 21 April 2012]; Segar, p. 10.

[14] Ramon Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett, 'The Third Place', *Qualitative Sociology*, 5 (1982), 265–284.

can thus take over an important role for the progression of individuals, organizations, industries and societies as it provides an unbiased platform for communication and collaboration.

2.4. Conferences and the music industry

This paper is focusing on conferences that target the music industry. Subsequently, it's an interesting question to ask: What role do conferences play in this particular industry? One of the first gatherings of industry professionals at international scope was Midem, starting off in 1976[15]. Since then, Midem has remained to be the world's largest trade fair focused on the music industry, featuring an extensive embedded conference program. But apart from Midem, at least 30 conferences worldwide with international relevance have been established as annual gatherings for the music industry according to conference directories like *NARIP*, *Music Nomad* or *The Music Network*.[16] Some conferences are attached to trade fairs, some are weaved into a festival with music live performances while other gatherings take place as sole conferences.

Despite its relatively small market turnover compared to other industries on a global level, the music industry seems to have triggered an active conference market. Several circumstances can help to explain this development:

Technology dependency: Since its roots 200 years ago, the music industry has always been severely influenced by the emergence of new technologies – whether it was the gramophone, vinyl, the copy machine, radio, TV, cassettes, CDs, MP3, iPods, social media, smartphones, music apps and now Internet based streaming services.[17] In many cases, key protagonists within the industry – especially on the recording and publishing side – fought and still fight against new uprising technologies. This behavior is rooted in the fear that consumption patterns of music could change with a new technology, potentially leading to inclined revenues from existing structures. Nonetheless, players in the music industry seem to increasingly realize that they have to cope with new technological developments and phenomena in our society at an early stage. A timely understanding of new technologies helps them to forecast how

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[15] 'Reed Midem - History & Key Figures' <http://www.reedmidem.com/v3/WhoAreWe/HistoryAndKeyFigures/en/> [accessed 18 April 2012].

[16] 'NARIP - Upcoming Industry Events' <http://www.narip.com/index.php?page_id=3134&page=1> [accessed 18 April 2012]; 'Music Industry Conferences/Trade Shows', *Music Nomad* <http://www.musicnomad.com/Support_Your_Music/Music_Industry_Conferences_Trade_Shows> [accessed 18 April 2012]; 'International Music Industry Directory', *The Music Network* <http://www.themusicnetwork.com/directory?category=MUSIC+CONFERENCES%2C+TRADE+FAIRS%2C+INDUSTRY+EVENTS+AND+AWARD+SHOWS&sub_category=INTERNATIONAL> [accessed 18 April 2012].

[17] Patrik Wikström, *The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 43.

this particular technology might effect how people produce, consume, recommend and pay for music content and related services. Thus, conferences can take over an important role of setting up an environment where music industry players learn about new potentially relevant technologies, interact with protagonists from the start-up scene and discuss and ideate ways how the industry can benefit from new innovations.

Importance of networking: Dan Kimpel recapitulates in his book *Networking Strategies for the New Music Business*: "Every single deal I've ever seen go down in the music business has been the direct result of a personal contact."[18] Although the importance of networking resonates with many other industries, too, it appears to be of particular importance within the music industry. The following facts could deliver cue points. Firstly, there is an oligopoly market structure among record labels and music publishers in the industry, urging people to know the dominating key players. Secondly, the music industry creates and deals with highly emotional products, which might translate into the desire of emotional relationships among industry players. Thirdly, unlike most other industries with a 200+ year history, the music industry has not seen dedicated educational programs for industry professionals until the beginning of the 21st century. Hence, the industry is mostly still made up of lateral entries from other career paths, spoiling the need of co-creating and exchanging knowledge in an inter-organizational manner. Consequently, conferences can provide compelling environments to establish new and cultivate existing relationships face-to-face among the industry. In addition to live music shows, award ceremonies and trade fairs that also resemble important networking interfaces, conferences offer great content based networking opportunities – allowing participants to build relationships through learning with and from each other.

Increased crossover business: The music industry is getting increasingly intertwined with other industries. Revenues from the usage of music in film, TV, advertisements and games have increased and reached a greater importance in the core industry due to declining record sales.[19] Consequently, professionals in the music industry need to enhance their knowledge of structures and people from other fields of the creative industries – and vice versa. In order to foster this exchange, several conferences like *SXSW*, *Transmission* and the *C'n'B Convention* that originally started out as music industry focused events have broadened their scope and

[18] Dan Kimpel, *Networking Strategies for the New Music Business* (Boston: Cengage Learning Emea, 2005), p. 11.
[19] Ann Harrison, *Music: The Business: The Essential Guide to the Law and the Deals, 5th Edition* (Great Britain: Virgin Books, 2011), p. 108.

nowadays serve as gatherings for the creative industries at the intersection of music, film and interactive content.

In summary, conferences in the music industry have become important platforms for music industry players (and those striving to become such) as they potentially foster the exchange of knowledge and help to build relationships – also across industry sectors. One thing that most conferences tackling the music business have in common: They feature programs and speakers that, over and over again, emphasize the importance of creativity and innovation within every business organization – in order to cope with the changes in our digital era. Yet the question remains: How creative and innovative have conferences been themselves? Have they adapted to the digital era in order to suit the (changed?) needs of their participants in the best manner? Before I will address these questions in chapter 4, I am first going to give a snapshot of relevant changes that the digital era has actually triggered in the next chapter.

3. The changes in the digital era

3.1. Setting the focus

We all read and hear this in many places: we are entering a digital era. Or some state: we have already entered it. Although hundreds of books and papers have been written about the transformation into the digital era (or age) and its effects, there is no common agreement in the literature as to when that era started and what changes it includes. Therefore, I can and have to set my own focus.

Throughout this chapter, I am going to describe several shifts and developments evoked by the rise of the Internet and social networks since the beginning of the 21st century. These circumstances are changing how individuals and organizations communicate and collaborate. Knowing that an extensive analysis would exceed the scope of this thesis, I am focusing on the changes, which might have an impact on how conferences are planned and conducted (in the future).

Of course, not everyone in the world is connected to the Internet. From a global perspective, 32,7% of the world's population was expected to have access to the Internet by the end of 2011. Within the developed world, roughly two out of three persons are online. In the United

States, the ratio is four out of five.[20] The following diagram visualizes the growth rate of Internet access between the years 1997 – 2007:

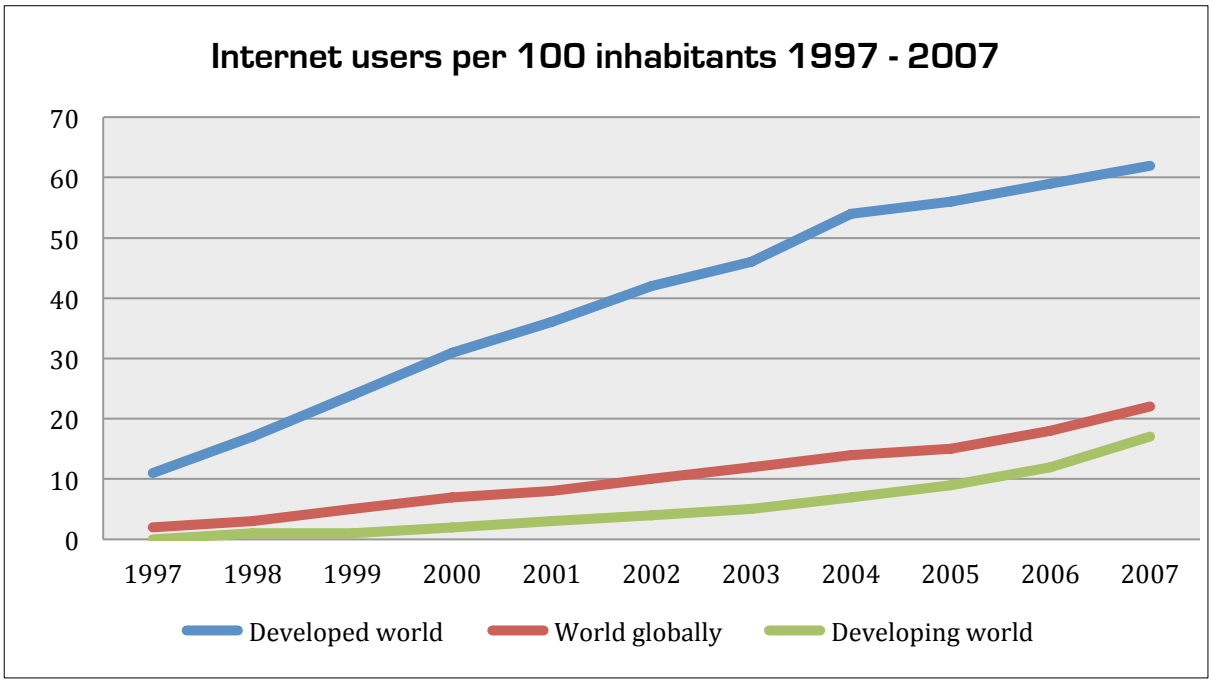


Table 2: Internet users per 100 inhabitants 1997 – 2007; adapted from http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/ict/graphs/Internet.jpg

Combining this data with the most recent statistics mentioned before, one can assume that the availability of Internet access continues to grow, in the developing world even exponentially. Although there is no research data available, it can be assumed that the majority of people attending business conferences are likely to have access to the Internet nowadays. Furthermore, the trends described throughout the following chapters effect not only the people online, but also our society in general.

3.2. The information paradigm shift

Until the mid 1990s, it was a cumbersome process to access and gain niche knowledge on demand that wasn't made available through mass media. One had to go to libraries, bookstores or attend conferences and the acquisition of knowledge was often associated with substantial costs. Information was a scarce resource. People with extensive niche knowledge on one subject were able to monetize the pure possession of information.

During the past 10 years, there have been tremendous changes. A vast amount of previously exclusive information is now accessible through the Internet for free, often only a couple of

[20] 'World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats' <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> [accessed 18 April 2012].

clicks and a Google search away. The democratization of knowledge has started in almost every discipline and on every subject. An increasing amount of Software and Hardware get published with an Open Source Code. Top Universities, including Stanford and Harvard, make some of their lectures freely available for online streaming. Conferences and professional speakers upload or live stream their keynotes and panel talks. And even in the scientific landscape, where journals and publishers alike tried to prolong the traditional publishing mechanisms with great effort, information starts to get increasingly circulated for free on the Internet through open access publishing.[21] Information, previously a scarce resource, metamorphoses into commodity. With this transformation, the roles of experts shift as well: it's now – more than ever - about identifying and filtering relevant sources, connecting the dots and relating information to other fields. The detailed bits and pieces of information can be accessed and stored in the online cloud.

Yet, the information paradigm relates to three different aspects. First, a global pool of knowledge becomes accessible through the Internet. Secondly, new business models emerge (e.g. based on contextual advertising) that allow organizations to make previously exclusive content accessible for free, like *Google books*. [22] Thirdly, and this might cause the biggest long-term change, the separation between designated information creators and information consumers is being revoked. With platforms like Wikipedia and quora.com, through discussions via Twitter, Facebook and on Blogs, knowledge is increasingly being co-created. The long tail of knowledge in our society is leveraged as potentially everyone with access to the Internet can contribute bits and pieces of information about a particular topic or propose ideas to tackle a certain problem. According to Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers, the one-way flow of information is over.[23]

3.3. Customized and social inspiration

Not only do we have information on demand at our fingertips, but the Web also serves as an infinite source of inspiration. We can get customized recommendations what to read, watch, listen to, attend or buy - based on different variables. Search engines, shopping services, encyclopedias and video platforms often filter the content automatically and present recommendations by incorporating previous searches, clicks, our user profile data and information that our browser transmits (such as time and location). We can also manually filter content that

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[21] Michael Nielsen, *Reinventing Discovery: The New Era of Networked Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 6.
[22] see 'Google Books' <http://books.google.de/googlebooks/about.html> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[23] Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers, *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2010), p. 21.

might inspire us based on our current mood, chosen topics of interest or the timeframe we have available to get enthused – whether we are sitting at work, on our coach at home or on the train with our mobile device.

Yet, the most relevant shift to how we get inspired was triggered through the emergence of social networks. Recommendations from our peers and those people that we trust have always been the most valuable ones. According to studies, 78% percent of consumers trust peer recommendations.[24] With social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, people are now able to share the content that is inspiring to them with their peers and followers through a single mouse click in an effective, yet – in comparison to email – non-obtrusive way. Search engines, shopping sites, entertainment platforms and conference directories have already started to add a social layer on top of their services. This layer is connecting the specific items and contents on the site with experiences and recommendations from the persons that one is connected with through the different social networks. These technologies allow everyone with access to the Internet to serve as a curator in his/her field of interest. The most successful online curators follow a concept of *reliable surprise.*[25] They frequently inspire their followers with recommendations and pieces of content that are surprising, but stay within a certain topical or stylistic framework.

3.4. A new breed of experts

In the 21st century, numerous individuals go beyond sharing and briefly commenting pieces of information on social networks. There are over 200,000,000 publicly available blogs worldwide.[26] Some of these bloggers have managed to create a well-recognized expertise on a certain field by elegantly linking relevant information and sources together, by adding own perspectives and arguments, by repackaging information for other fields and target groups and by actively triggering discussions and interactions with their audiences. Blogs often cross-reference each other, lifting their visibility collaboratively. Additionally, blog entries, Facebook posts and tweets (messages on twitter) increasingly serve as the frontend on trends and innovation for bigger and more traditional mass media - which in return reference the individuals and their blogs / online homes. This leads to the fact that individuals can be established as experts on a certain field practically overnight, sometimes even on an international level.

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[24] Erik Qualman, *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), p. 263.
[25] Klaus Schönbach, '"The Own in the Foreign": Reliable Surprise - an Important Function of the Media?', *Media, culture, and society*, 29 (2007), p. 349.
[26] Qualman, p. 263.

Hence, the social media era generates a new breed of experts that don't have to wait until the traditional hierarchal structures of educational institutions, political systems and corporations actively ennoble and promote their expertise and visibility in public.

3.5. Social network(ing)

Social networks on the Internet are transforming our communicational behavior in yet another way: They alter and ease the way we network and approach strangers. The explanation might be simple: Strangers are not perceived as strangers anymore if social networks reveal common friends, list shared interests and let other people dive into one's life through pictures and status updates. The generation that has been brought up with the Internet and social networks, often referred to as Digital Natives or GenerationY, is already used to the circumstance that most other people on this earth are just one mouse click away.[27] The older generations are increasingly discovering this opportunity as well. Social networks – in contrast to a corporation's organigram – don't show levels of hierarchy. Mothers, friends, interns, CEOs and rock stars are all connected to each other on a flat, vertical line, possibly lowering the psychological barrier to contact each other.

Stanley Milgram explored in an experiment, that we are all connected to each other through, at the most, six degrees of separation.[28] Although this has been known for many decades, with online social networks, people are now able to make practical use of the theory in an entire new way as the degrees of separation don't have to explored, but can be instantly visualized with one mouse click.

Dedicated social networks for business relationships like LinkedIn or Xing offer multiple ways how previously unrelated people can get in touch with each other – through topical discussions, shared interest groups, event invitations or virtual introductions of common acquaintances. Social networks resemble not only a tool to get in touch with one another, but also to communicate and sustain (business) relationships as they offer and display their users frequent conversation triggers, e.g. if a business contact has changed his/her job position, company or living place. While online social networking will certainly not substitute the established networking activities and channels, it can serve as a powerful medium to complement the networking experience.

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[27] Martin Klaffke, *Personalmanagement Von Millennials: Konzepte, Instrumente Und Best-Practice-Ansätze* (Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag, 2011), p. 45.
[28] Qualman, p. 228.

3.6. The ease of community building

The tools and platforms in the digital era support not only the process to build relationships between two people. They can be used to create and nurture entire communities.

Journalists, politicians and business people alike often refer to *the online community* when they talk about behavioral patterns of people on the Internet, thus creating the illusion that all 2.3 billion people with Internet access belong together somehow.[29] A community, by definition, is a space where people act together in the same environment, whereas the Internet could indeed embody such an environment. But according to Jono Bacon, the important qualification of a community is characterized through the collaborative creation of social capital, which he defines as "the collective family of positive interactions between two or more people. When you affect someone positively, it builds your social capital. This could include being generous, helping someone, sympathizing over a problem, or something else."[30] In other words: a community is an environment where people relate to each other through common interests, ideas, problems, goals or backgrounds, but also benefit from each other. Bacon states that the ultimate goal of communities is to create a feeling of belonging for its members.[31]

The Internet has great potential to provide people the opportunity to create social capital together and experience that feeling of belonging (together) even when they are spread apart in terms of time and place. It has never been so easy like today for people who want to create, maintain and monitor a community - whether it is a curated and closed or a loose and open one. Throughout the last 10 years, an almost infinite number of platforms, tools and services have emerged that support the development of intentionally planned or self-organized communities alike. Most of the large social networks offer extensive group functionalities to share content, communicate and collaborate among a subgroup of users. *Google hangout* for example allows dozens of people to take part in simultaneous videoconferences, free for everyone. White label solutions like *ning.com* or *buddypress.com* offer the opportunity to create and host a separate online community. In comparison to Facebook, Twitter & Co, those tools allow the community builders to keep complete control over the data and information being shared among the community users.

In summary, new technologies in the digital era are making it easer to create an online framework so that a valuable community can emerge. However, one fact shouldn't be ignored: many successful online communities where people experience the feeling of belonging

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[29] 'World Internet Usage Statistics News and World Population Stats'.
[30] Jono Bacon, *The Art of Community: Building the New Age of Participation* (Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2009), p. 6.
[31] Bacon, pp. 5–6.

have not evolved entirely organically, but are often based on active community management, too. This is embodied through one or several persons serving as dedicated community managers who facilitate conversations, set triggers for interactions and foster the creation of social capital.

3.7. Open innovation

Organizations of any kind – universities, foundations, NGOs and increasingly corporations have started to gather their users and members in dedicated online communities to build more personal relationships and go beyond the one-way communication scheme. The digital era has empowered the voice of the customer. Organizations now have to decide whether and how they want to actively engage in the discussions being led by customers about their products, services and activities. As previously mentioned, the social media (Blogs, Wikis, YouTube, Social networks etc.) have enabled Internet users for the first time on a large scale to not only consume information and content, but to also act as producers. What Alvin Toffler envisioned in 1970 by his concept of "prosumers", forecasting the increasingly merging and frequently switching roles between consumers and producers, has now hit reality.[32] This behavioral pattern translates to a rising number of users who want to influence the services and products they use and pay for.

Organizations, on the other hand, begin to realize that this shifting mindset doesn't necessarily embody a threat – it bears an enormous potential. The Silicon Valley icon Bill Joy articulated a fact that seems to be common sense in a world with 7 billion inhabitants: "There are always more smart people outside your company than within it."[33] Thus, a growing number of organizations have started to make use of the smart people outside their corporate borders and approach a concept called *open innovation*. Open innovation, as defined by Henry Chesbrough, is embracing the understanding that "valuable ideas can come from inside and outside the company and can go to market from inside or outside the company as well."[34] Open innovation goes beyond simple market research, collecting feedback what people like and what they don't. It actively involves interested and interesting (potential) users in the development, design and marketing of a service, product or an event through incorporating and leveraging the ideas of the community.

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[32] G. Ritzer and N. Jurgenson, 'Production, Consumption, Prosumption The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital "prosumer"', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10 (2010), 13–36.
[33] John Hagel and John Seely Brown, 'The Open Company - the Evolution of Management', *The Economist - The Ideas Economy*, 2011 <http://ideas.economist.com/blog/open-company> [accessed 25 April 2012].
[34] Henry William Chesbrough, *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2003), p. 12.

This can lead to several advantages. First, the inclusion of people with an outside view can trigger innovative features and lead to new or enhanced products or services. Secondly, the persons engaged in the creation of a product or a service are likely to turn into loyal customers / users of such. Thirdly, an open innovation approach can help an organization to scout, identify and directly interact with potential talents that might be interested in and suitable for a closer work relationship.

Open innovation processes require, however, a particularly sophisticated form of community management, especially if an organization calls out to a larger existing user base online, e.g. the users gathered around an organization's Facebook fan page. One of the biggest challenges for organizations involved in open innovation processes resembles the development of a fair reward model for the users' efforts that is perceived as incentivizing and not as exploiting.

3.8. There is no alternative to transparency

Open innovation activities of large consumer brands resemble suitable examples for the importance of transparency in the digital era. In 2011, the German brand *Henkel* initiated an open innovation campaign, asking users in their Facebook group to develop new designs for one of their top-selling products, the detergent *Pril*. In the same year, the German mail order house *Otto* set an open call to its online community. They were scouting a woman for the cover of their winter season catalog through a community competition.

Both companies were surprised as the top-ranked results voted by the online community featured solutions that they neither expected nor wanted. Henkel had to deal with a cover design, stating that their detergent "tastes like yummy chicken". Otto's open innovation competition ended up with a winning male student dressed up as girl. The interesting fact is how the two organizations dealt with the surprising results. Henkel tweaked the competition, altered the voting results and spontaneously introduced a jury as a new voting layer to eventually co-curate a design that - from the company's perspective – was more compliant with the market needs. Otto, on the other hand, dealt with the winning transvestite and accompanied the whole photo shooting process with prominent coverage on their various communication channels.[35]

While Henkel had to face a severe *shitstorm* (a description for an instant accumulation of negative feedback and criticism through social media channels[36]), Otto was praised for its

[35] 'Facebook-Marketing – Henkel Zeigt Mit Pril, Wie Man Es Besser Nicht Macht' <http://www.go-crowdsourcing.de/articles/facebook-marketing-henkel-zeigt-mit-pril-wie-man-es-besser-nicht-macht-0> [accessed 25 April 2012].

[36] Claudia Hilker, *Erfolgreiche Social-Media-Strategien Für Die Zukunft: Mehr Profit Durch Facebook, Twitter, Xing Und Co* (Vienna: Linde, 2012), pp. 207–209.

authentic behavior and the trust in the community by online users and traditional media alike.[37]

It is no news that customers and users value organizations and individuals that act and communicate in a transparent manner. Yet, it was and still is common practice within organizations and institutions to withhold information and tweak reality. But as Bennis, Goleman and O'Toole phrased it, the emerging technologies in the digital era such as blogs and Twitter seem to make "transparency all but inevitable"[38]. In many parts of our society, we no longer depend on professional journalists to reveal hidden information and uncover unethical behavior. Anyone has the potential power to bring down a CEO or a political party with a single tweet or a picture shared on Facebook. Thus, in the digital era, the opportunities for intransparent organizational or individual behavior diminish as we strive towards a democratization of truth.

3.9. Gamification

Although every human being has a play instinct that is rooted deeply into one's DNA, our civilization has sought to clearly separate work from play during the last centuries. While we encourage our kids to play, our working environments encourage us to remain professional.

Yet, this is changing and we are seeing the domains of work and play intersect again more often. Recent studies reveal that 55% of people would be interested in working for a company that offered games as a way to increase productivity.[39]

Adults don't lose their play instinct. This can be witnessed by watching business managers play all sort of games on their smartphones on airplanes, in cafés or during boring conference keynotes. Researchers thus cope with the question: How can we translate the engaging mechanics in games to other, more productive areas of practice?

This approach is usually referred to as *Gamification*. Kapp has proposed the following definition in his book: "Gamification is using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems."[40]

The emergence of smartphones, social networks and instant access to the Internet has fueled experiments to accomplish tasks and tackle challenges in a fun and social manner. Answering emails, doing accounting work, networking with unfamiliar people, helping coworkers with their problems and attending educational courses – all of these activities have been already

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[37] 'Facebook-Marketing – Henkel Zeigt Mit Pril, Wie Man Es Besser Nicht Macht'.
[38] Warren Bennis, Daniel Goleman and James O'Toole, *Transparency: How Leaders Create a Culture of Candor*, 1. Auflage (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p. 3.
[39] Karl M. Kapp, *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 2.
[40] Kapp, p. 10.

approached with the concept of gamification. What might generate real momentum for the gamification movement are the increasing opportunities to integrate a social layer: People don't have to compete against a simulated computer player anymore, but they can compete or build teams with colleagues and friends, all across the planet - and in real time.

3.10. Upcoming challenges

Despite all the promising trends that come along with the digital era, it is important to not only rave about the new opportunities. Therefore, I want to also briefly mention some of the upcoming challenges that might have an influence on the way conferences are designed and conducted (in the future):

- Some studies show that people who have been used to multi-tasking and web browsing since their childhood days have adjusted their attention span to shorter bits & pieces of content.[41] Hence, they might have trouble following longer conversations and presentations.
- Although increased transparency generally displays an advancement in our society, those who offer products and services to the public market, especially if they are targeted at a tech savvy audience, will increasingly have to deal with instant and transparent feedback through social media – whether good or bad.
- As content transforms into commodity on the Internet, it will get increasingly difficult to monetize the sole content if it can be accessed with similar ease for free somewhere else.
- With unlimited access to information and potential sources of inspiration, people feel growingly overloaded and overwhelmed. Our society is in search for new filters and sense makers that have adjusted to the digital era.
- As the success of our global knowledge based society depends more and more on steady Internet access, this deteriorates the development opportunities for those people who are unintentionally cut off from the Internet. This is referred to as the growing digital divide.

[41] K. Barnes, R. C Marateo and S. P Ferris, 'Teaching and Learning with the Net Generation', *Innovate Journal of Online Education*, 3 (2007).

4. The effects on the conference landscape

4.1. Will physical conferences become obsolete?

As we seem to live in a world, where we can get any kind of information and inspiration online, where we can identify and contact people with shared interests in a couple of mouse clicks, where we stay in touch with each other through social communities – one question arises instantly: Do we need physical face-to-face conferences nowadays at all? Why should we continue to invest huge amounts of time and money to attend a conference, molesting the environment by often travelling thousands of miles for a few days?

As a pragmatic approach, it seems suitable to look at the statistics how the numbers of conferences and attendees have developed as the previously described Internet phenomena kicked off on a broader scale.

According to the statistics of the ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), the numbers of organized conferences and overall conference attendees in the industry on a global scale have even grown substantially between 2001-2010.[42]

Taking into account that these statistics do not cover the entire conference market, one can still draw the conclusion: physical conferences seem to offer something that we don't want to miss out on. And the reasons could be fairly simple: People still need physical conferences as a highly engaging and intensive face-to-face environment where they can learn, discuss problems, build and maintain business relationships, escape the cubicles at work and get sparks of creativity and inspiration.[43] Suter, Alexander and Kaplan summarize in their paper: "It's the social context of the experience - not simply the content - that energizes a conference and makes it worth the effort and expense."[44] Despite the enormous progress in video conferencing technologies, holograms and virtual three-dimensional environments: There is no such thing as enjoying a beer together online. As long as technology will not allow us to communicate and make collaborative experiences with all five human senses in a virtual world, physical meetings can and will not be entirely replaced.

4.2. The adaption of music industry conferences

Now, if physical conferences seem to stick around: how have they adapted to the technological, communicational and societal changes in the digital era that were portrayed in chapter 3?

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[42] International Congress and Convention Association.
[43] Tony Rogers, pp. 310–313.
[44] V. Suter, B. Alexander and P. Kaplan, 'Social Software and The Future of Conferences Right Now', *Educause Review*, 2005, 47–59 (p. 48).

As music industry conferences resemble my focus group in this thesis, I analyzed the programming and structure of the latest edition of the ten following conferences that are listed as relevant international conferences in different online directories:[45]

- SXSW, Texas (USA)[46]
- SF Tech Summit, San Francisco (USA)[47]
- MUSEXPO, Hollywood (USA)[48]
- Popkomm, Berlin (Germany)[49]
- C'n'B Convention, Cologne (Germany)[50]
- midem, Cannes (France)[51]
- InTheCITY, Manchester (UK)[52]
- ALLTHATMATTERS, Singapore (Singapore)[53]
- WOMEX, Thessaloniki (Greece)[54]
- BIGSOUND, Brisbane (Australia)[55]

Therefore, I explored the information provided on the websites, evaluated online reviews on Blogs / Twitter / Facebook of participants, screened the media coverage, analyzed interviews with the conference organizers and/or attended the event in person myself. If the conferences are connected to an exhibition, I only focused on the conference part.
After having obtained an overview of the data, it seemed reasonable to me to explore how these conferences adapted to the changes in the digital era from three different perspectives:

The content perspective: Have the conference organizers discussed and tackled the themes and topics that are connected to the changes in the digital era?

The technology perspective: Have the conference organizers made use of the uprising technologies and innovations to enhance and enrich the conference experience for everyone involved?

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[45] 'International Music Industry Directory'; 'NARIP - Upcoming Industry Events'; 'Music Industry Conferences/Trade Shows'.
[46] 'SXSW Music' <http://sxsw.com/music> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[47] 'SF MusicTech Summit', *SF MusicTech Summit* <http://www.sfmusictech.com/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[48] 'Musexpo' <http://www.musexpo.net/MUSEXPO/index.php> [accessed 17 April 2012].
[49] 'Popkomm' <http://www.popkomm.de> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[50] 'C'n'B Convention' <http://www.c-o-pop.de/de/cnb-convention/about> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[51] 'Midem: Connected by Music - Midem' <http://www.midem.com/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[52] 'InTheCity' <http://www.inthecity.co.uk/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[53] 'AllThatMatters' <http://www.allthatmatters.asia/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[54] 'Womex' <http://www.womex.com/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[55] 'BigSound Australia' <www.bigsound.org.au> [accessed 18 April 2012].

The methodology perspective: Have the conference organizers adjusted the way how they create an environment for knowledge exchange and community interaction? Have they attuned their conference model and methodology to the digital era?

It would exceed the scope of this thesis to list all the observations from each perspective on every event. Besides, the accessible data doesn't allow for a scientifically accurate evaluation and comparison. However, one key finding can be safely extrapolated from the research: The various selected conferences have in common that they have leveraged the potential to adapt to the previously mentioned changes in the digital era in different manners, depending on the perspective taken. The following (simplified) diagram visualizes that key observation:

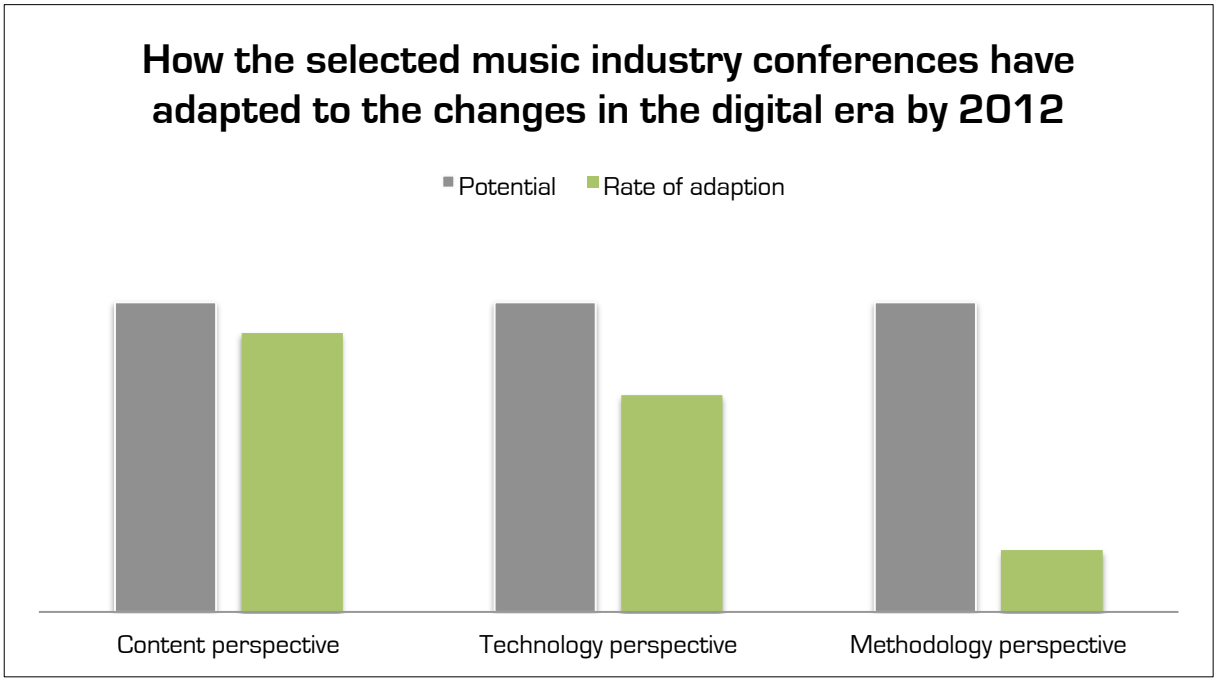


Table 2: Adaption of selected music conferences to the changes in the digital era

High adaption rate from a content perspective: The analyzed conference organizers seem to have a high awareness on the outlined changes in the digital era. The conference agendas reveal that many themes have been discussed and tackled, e.g. social media in the music industry, content as commodity, crowdfunding platforms and online community building for artists.

Medium - high adaption rate from a technology perspective: Each analyzed conference featured online registration and online tickets, WiFi and, of course, extensive use of Powerpoint slides on stage. Many of the conferences made use of social media like Facebook and

Twitter to communicate information before, during and after the conference. Several conferences live streamed their keynotes and panel discussions and/or made them available for on demand access after the conference. Some conferences also offered a mobile app for better on-site navigation and program updates and a few conferences created dedicated online communities to facilitate the exchange among attendees.

Low adaption rate from a methodology perspective: Each program of the ten conferences consists for the vast majority of keynotes and panel discussions. While some of the conferences have integrated workshops, those seemed to resemble mostly presentations among smaller groups of people - according to conference reviews from attendees and journalists. The ReThink and Midem conferences both hosted a Hackathon where coders built music related apps over the period of one or two days.[56] Yet, these elements were not interwoven with the conference program.

To sum it up, the analyzed music conferences have to a high degree talked about the changes in the digital era and made use of many of the latest technological opportunities. On the other hand, they have hardly adjusted their conference formats and didn't translate the outlined changes into a revised methodological conference framework. With few exceptions that could be observed particularly at the SXSW conference, there were no intentionally designed formats to foster knowledge co-creation, open innovation, gamification or peer inspiration taking place. The potential, which offline gatherings can take over in the 21st century, has not been leveraged.

Yet, this applies not only to the small amount of analyzed music conferences, but - according to industry experts like Gianfranco Chicco, Adrian Segar and Matt Moore - to the great majority of the millions of conferences worldwide on the market.[57]

4.3. The call for a fundamental remodeling

However, one might ask: why all the worries? If, according to the statistics, attendees are still coming and paying: why change a running system?

The mid to long-term implications of the digital era onto the conference market should not be underestimated. The music industry, or to be more precise the industry focused on pre-

[56] 'Hackers' Weekend - Music Conference | Boston - Rethink Music' <http://rethink-music.com/Events/Hackers-Weekend/> [accessed 18 March 2012]; 'Pitch Your Idea to the Hackers! - Midem' <http://www.midem.com/en/programme/hack-day/> [accessed 18 April 2012].

[57] Gianfranco Chicco, 'Report: 8 Trends For Better Events in 2012', 2011 <http://www.conferencebasics.com/2011/12/8-trends-for-2012/> [accessed 12 April 2012]; Moore, Chatfield and Etling; Segar, p. 4.

recorded music, has already experienced throughout the last decade how big of an impact the digital era can have on an established business model. Moore predicts that within the next five years the conference industry will experience what the music industry has already gone through: a rigorous transformation, sparked by new technologies and changed customer behavior.[58]

Richard Saul Wurman, previous founder of the TED conference series[59], presumably one of the biggest and most referenced conference brands in the world - states in an interview about his industry:

> „Most people build conferences out of the pieces of what they've been taught a conference is made up of. They use an outdated alphabet. It's like using an alphabet from the Middle Ages. They have panels, they have keynote speakers, they have introductions, they stand behind a podium, they speak for a certain amount of time - it's all made up of a kit of parts.“[60]

Apart from Wurman, an increasing number of key personas in the conference scene claims that the general model of business conferences is overdue for an update. Doc Searls, who is an experienced speaker and conference organizer alike, identifies mass habituation as one of the system's key problems and urges other conference designers to tackle this challenge:

> ”We're so used to the whole routine: picking up badges, grabbing coffee and cookies, sitting in rows behind tables with laptops flopped open, surfing the Web or answering e-mail while keynoting CEOs from sponsoring companies drone PR while the PowerPoint deck shuffles by, complaining about the absent power strips and bad Wi-Fi connection. The list goes on. And on.”[61]

Indeed, it is often surprising to see how many people don't follow the '*content on stage'*, considering the amount of timely and financial resources the attendees and their organizations, respectively, have invested in. But the question is: who is to blame if the majority in an audience has reached the attention span after the fifth keynote in a row? Brain researcher Andrea Sullivan claims that a dramaturgy that matches the capabilities of a human brain is the re-

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[58] Moore, Chatfield and Etling.
[59] 'TED Conferences' <http://www.ted.com/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[60] Christopher Durso, 'One on One with Richard Saul Wurman', *Convene (by PCMA)*, 2011.
[61] Doc Searls, 'Open-Sourcing Conferences', *LINUX Journal*, 2005 <http://www.linuxjournal.com/article/8392>.

sponsibility of each conference planner. She reckons that „the brain needs balance and variety“[62] in order for the attendee to stay productive and engaged.

Adrian Segar, inventor of the peer conference model, argues that the low engagement of attendees with the program is mostly caused by the lack of individual relevance. The responsible program committee often decides the content of a conference program six months and more in advance. This leads to the situation that the most recent challenges and trends, which might bear the highest relevance to the audience, are not covered within the program. Besides, Segar reckons, large conferences with 1000+ attendees have to be by nature so broad that they can hardly cope with any specific challenges – and if they do, it will be only relevant to a small percentage of the participants.[63]

The traditional one-way communication model of conferences, where an elite group of people, an alleged intellectual first class, speaks to the intellectual economy class sitting on chairs and deemed to listen, is questioned not only by an increasing number of conference attendees, but also among professional speakers who make their living that way.

Media futurist Gerd Leonhard, one of the busiest professional speakers within the global media industry, forecasts that the classical model where the audience is being lectured to by several CEOs in a row will be replaced in favor of participatory dialog formats.[64]

Stanford professor Roy Pea urges us to leave the focus on individual intelligence. New technologies have emerged with which collective and distributed intelligence can be leveraged. Pea reckons that the society around has changed; yet traditional learning environments - conferences serve as examples – are still carriers of previous patterns of reasoning.[65]

4.4. The emergence of unconferences

But what does a new kind of conference look like that is adapting to the changes in the digital era? In order to find answers to this question, one can get impulses from how people that actively shape the digital transformation design and conduct their physical gatherings to exchange knowledge and foster relationships.

This leads us to Sebastopol, north of San Francisco, back in the year 2003. At that time, Tim O’Reilly, an Internet visionary and technology publisher, triggered the first version of an event he called Foo Camp. O’Reilly and his team invited around 200 movers and shakers

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[62] ‘Brain Researcher Andrea Sullivan on Why She Loves Event Camp East Coast’, *EventCamp East Coast*, 2011 <http://eventcampeastcoast.com/2011/09/30/brain-researcher-andrea-sullivan-on-why-she-loves-event-camp-east-coast/> [accessed 20 April 2012].

[63] Segar, pp. 19–21.

[64] Good.

[65] R. D Pea, ‘Practices of Distributed Intelligence and Designs for Education’, in *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 47–50.

from the web technology field to camp for a weekend in the backyard of his publishing company's headquarter that hosted the event. O'Reilly provided the location, food and showers, the invited people got to participate for free. Yet, they had to bring their own towels and tents. A small detail, but it already set the spirit that this event was of a different nature and going to be entirely co-created. The goal was to create a nurturing and fun environment where interesting and interested people exchange knowledge and ideas, tackle pressing challenges and build (new) relationships. The Foo Camp claimed that it wanted to generate opportunities for cross-pollination. But unlike a traditional conference, O'Reilly didn't set any sort of programmed agenda. He only prepared an empty grid that featured time slots and rooms, as shown below.



Figure 1: Session planning at a Foo Camp (Photo source: http://bit.ly/foocamppic)

Once the people arrived, the crowd generated their own agenda. Everyone could propose a topic for a session that – depending on the amount of people interested – would then be placed in a certain time slot in a suitable space. In some cases, individuals started their session with a presentation of an existing idea or a project, leading to an open discussion afterwards. In other cases, the starting point for a session was just a single question or a phrased challenge that the session attendees were all interested in.[66]

The Foo Camp approach is based on a methodology called *Open Space Technology* (OST), which was triggered and developed by Howard Owen in the mid 80's.[67] It is a technology in an anthropological sense, delivering a framework for open communication and knowledge exchange. OST is built on the belief that a group of people, given a purpose and freedom, have the ability to self-govern, self-organize, and produce results. There are four principles that steer every OST gathering:

[66] Boule, pp. 67–71.
[67] Harrison Owen, *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*, Second edn (San Francisco: Mcgraw-Hill Professional, 1997), p. 8.

1. Whoever comes is the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. When it starts is the right time.
4. When it's over, it's over. [68]

The participants in an open space meeting gather in a big circle upon arrival and each person introduces him/herself in front of everyone. After that, the participants create their own agenda with subtopics. The group divides into different subgroups, each tackling a subtopic that is related to the overall purpose of the meeting. The subgroups take over the role of documenting the conversation and defining the next steps themselves. Owen's major aim was to create an environment where the people could develop the highest degree of passion and engagement possible, so he coined the *law of two feet: "*if [...] any person finds him or herself in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they must use their two feet and go to some more productive place."[69]

As described, the Foo Camp employed many of these elements from the Open Space Technology. O'Reilly added the grid to enhance the session planning experience, organized enough beer, frisbees and tech toys to ensure a good mood and installed free W-LAN, enabling the tech savvy participants to share their Foo Camp experiences and pictures in real-time. Everyone was encouraged to spread the word about Foo Camp. As O'Reilly managed to attract numerous well-connected, high profile participants like the founders of Google or Technorati, the event generated a lot of buzz on the Internet - also in mass media like CNN.[70] Since the event was perceived as a great success among the participants and organizers alike, O'Reilly has continued to host annual Foo Camps.

However, only those invited by O'Reilly can participate in a Foo Camp – as the acronym (Foo = friends of O'Reilly) already suggests. This caused some former participants to adapt the promising approach and to create the BarCamp Palo Alto in 2005, open to the public for 200 attendees on a first come first serve basis. The attendance still remained free as the costs for food and the location were covered through sponsors.[71] People loved the concept and the opportunity to take part in a highly valuable conference at practically no cost. From an organ-

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[68] Boule, p. 20.
[69] Owen, p. 98.
[70] 'When Geeks Go Camping, Ideas Hatch', *CNN*, 2004 <http://articles.cnn.com/2004-01-09/tech/bus2.feat.geek.camp_1_geek-google-popular-search-engine?_s=PM:TECH> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[71] K. Greenhill and C. Wiebrands, 'The Unconference: a New Model for Better Professional Communication' (presented at the LIANZA Conference : Poropitia Outside the Box, Auckland, 2008) <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/624/>.

izational point of view, a BarCamp - in comparison to pre-planned conferences with expensive speakers, printed programs, festive dinners etc. - can be put together in a relatively short amount of time with limited financial resources. These circumstances fueled other people to organize a local BarCamp version, while all the individual BarCamps can be centrally promoted on the official website www.barcamp.org. Looking back seven years later, the BarCamp model has turned into a worldwide movement: Local communities have organized BarCamps in more than 350 cities, on all continents. While the first BarCamps served as platforms for Web technology focused people, nowadays there are dedicated camps for all of society's major topics - whether it is politics, health, business, sustainability, art or education.[72] BarCamps are categorized as *unconferences* - a term that first appeared in 1998, but started to gain popularity with the rise of the BarCamp movement.[73] Yet, the term unconference is not limited to BarCamps. Today, the term refers to all conference-like events that…

- are based on the peep-to-peer exchange of knowledge
- are organized in a community-driven not for-profit manner
- don't feature pre-scheduled presentations
- collaboratively create the agenda with the participants
- rely on the "wisdom of the crowd" instead of the "wisdom of some experts"[74]
- have the goal to turn every attendee into an active participant
- openly share presentations and the session outcomes with everyone online

4.5. Unconferences in the music industry

As there are possibly only a few industries that haven't been touched at all by the movement of unconferences, the music industry landscape has seen several events in the spirit of unconferences emerge over the past four years. A global web research reveals four different formats that:

- are based on a peer-to-peer learning culture and an unconference ethos
- tackle the theme of music and involve people from the music business
- receive considerable attention online – which is part of an unconference
- have at least taken place twice, indicating some sort of success and acceptance

[72] 'Barcamp', 2012 <http://barcamp.org>.
[73] Greenhill and Wiebrands.
[74] Sigrid E. Kelsey and Marjorie J. Porter, *Best Practices for Corporate Libraries* (ABC-CLIO, 2011).

Music Hackday

Dave Haynes, founder of the format, claims that the "Music Hack Day is all about building the future of music - not just talking about it. The event has become the best possible showcase for the new developer ecosystem that is growing around music and technology."[75]

The music hackday is an event series where hacker and programmer gather to share their knowledge and collaboratively create new tools, services and apps to discover, consume, recommend, visualize, sell or remix music – all within the period of one or two days. Existing popular online music services like SoundCloud, Spotify, Last.FM, The Echo Nest, Rdio, HypeMachine etc. support the event and make their APIs (interfaces to 'talk' and connect with the services) available. Additionally, players from the traditional music industry like EMI start partnering with the hackday format as the usage of new online music services gets more important day by day. The hackers get to participate for free as sponsors cover the bills. All the hacks are documented in an online Wiki, serving as inspiration for further usage scenarios. Many of the hackers are reporting live from the hack days through Twitter, Facebook and other Social Media.

The first music hackday took place in Amsterdam in 2009. Since then, over 20 music hackdays on almost all continents have been held with the help and support from voluntary local organizers.[76]

Un-Convention

The not for profit Un-Convention organization, based in the UK, has set out to foster the independent music scene across the globe. An Un-Convention is a mixture between a music festival, a hub for conversations about the future of music and a hands-on peer-to-peer university where different protagonists from the independent music field learn from each other through collaborating on concrete projects, e.g. recording, producing and promoting a complete music album within the period of one day. Un-Convention is also a community where the members propose ideas for initiatives and workshops that could take place at the next event. Every Un-Convention is co-created with the local independent music community. The various events are organized in a franchise model: engaged local protagonists take over the initiative to organize an Un-Convention while they are getting support where necessary from

[75] 'History of the Music Hackday', *Music Hack Day* <http://sydney.musichackday.org/2012/?page=History> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[76] 'History of the Music Hackday'.

the core team in England. Over 30 different Un-Conventions have been organized across the globe since 2008.[77]

All2gethernow

As Popkomm, one of Europe's largest music trade shows, got cancelled in 2009, Berlin based web activists and music industry veterans spontaneously founded the non-profit initiative all2gethernow. The aim was to create a community-driven event platform for an exchange about the transformation of the music industry and its related fields. The program was designed in a participatory manner through frequent town hall meetings that were open to the public. While the first event caught a lot of attention and had many active participants as it served as a Popkomm substitute, the all2gethernow initiative had difficulties to keep the momentum going in the next year. In 2011, it partnered with Un-Convention to host a Berlin based chapter of the series.[78] Collaborations between different events seem to be easier to establish among community-driven formats compared to traditional conferences as those bear more competitive forces due to their commercial structure.

Future music camp

The future music camp, based in Mannheim (Germany), started out in 2009 as Europe's first BarCamp for digital music and the creative industry. Unlike most BarCamps, it is not organized by a cluster of individuals, but on behalf of the SMIX.LAB which is part of the Popakademie Baden-Württemberg, a university for popular music and music business. While it originated as a pure BarCamp in its first year, the organizers have gradually added more traditional conference elements like keynotes and company showcases to the program over the last three years.[79]

The development of the four different formats indicates: the unconference movement has already left its first footprints on gatherings in the music industry. The stakeholders seem to find value in participatory formats that foster more peer-to-peer interactions. Although it is too early to make reasonable predictions about the future of unconferences in the music industry, one can assume that their influence is likely to grow.

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[77] 'Un-Convention', *Un-Convention* <http://www.unconventionhub.org/> [accessed 26 April 2012].
[78] 'About - All2gethernow', *all2gether now | a new music & culture convention*, p. 2 <http://www.all2gethernow.de/about/> [accessed 18 April 2012].
[79] 'Future Music Camp 2012', *A modern barcamp and conference for the digital music and creative industy* <http://www.futuremusiccamp.com/> [accessed 20 April 2012].

However, one has to acknowledge the fact that the outlined community-driven gatherings – with the exception of the music hack day – all still intentionally feature predetermined talking heads on stage in certain parts of their program, something that the original BarCamp approach tried to fight and get rid of.

4.6. Conferences vs. unconferences

This last observation leads us to interesting questions: Are unconferences actually competing against the traditional conferences? And will community driven unconferences over time replace all traditional top-down organized conferences because the unconference approach is simply superior in the digital era?

In a BusinessWeek article about unconferences, Doug Gold, who runs a start-up in Massachusetts, predicts that "unconferences will totally displace the more staid, big, established conferences"[80], drawing a parallel to other crowd-driven movements that threaten to unseat highly profitable business models. George Siemens, an e-learning expert, supposes that it will be increasingly up to us individuals to create the (un)conference experience that we are longing for.[81] And Jay Cross suggests in his book that one could frame and communicate one's event in a traditional manner, listing loads of high-profile keynotes and wait until the opening ceremony to reveal that all speakers were bait, turning it into a complete unconference environment the next second.[82] While this is a charming idea, it is certainly not a sustainable and repeatable approach.

But besides the fact that many conference attendees, or their bosses, like to be impressed or want to be convinced by a predetermined line-up of attending experts, the organizers of unconferences are facing some additional challenges:

- They cannot financially compensate their efforts in an easy way as community driven events are expected to be of a non-profit nature. Consequently, unconferences demand a high level of voluntary commitment.
- Attendees of unconferences have gotten used to the circumstances that the access is either free or at a low-price. Thus, unconference organizers depend on the availability and generosity of sponsors, as those usually resemble the only income source to refinance the costs for venue, catering and the technical equipment.

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[80] Scott Kirsner, 'Take Your PowerPoint And…', *BusinessWeek: Online Magazine*, 2007 <http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_20/b4034080.htm> [accessed 20 April 2012].
[81] Good.
[82] Jay Cross, *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways That Inspire Innovation and Performance* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer & Co, 2006), p. 214.

- There is no opportunity to use one's instinct and experience to curate parts of the programming or influence the selection of participants if one wants to stick to the radical approach of an unconference where the control is left to the power of the community

Those circumstances point to the answer that not all traditional conferences will be replaced by unconferences. Yet, it is even questionable if curated top-down conferences are indeed competing against community driven unconferences. The fact that Tim O'Reilly and his publishing company are organizing the previously described annual Foo Camps and, at the same time, high-prized, key-note heavy, large conferences called *Web 2.0 summits* trigger the assumption: Both types of conferences can co-exist next to each other. Moreover, they might even nurture and complement each other from a conference ecosystem's perspective as one can observe that O'Reilly also integrates BarCamps into his top-down Web 2.0 Summit formats. [83]

Now, if the traditional conference approach cannot and does not need to be fully replaced: How can we update the established model to a **Conference 2.0**, a version that reflects the momentous changes of the digital era and draws inspiration from the unconference movement? This is, ultimately, the key question within this thesis that I am going to address in the following chapter.

5. The transformation to a conference 2.0

5.1. Overview of the transformation areas

The changes in the digital era as outlined in chapter 3 will presumably have an influence on almost every aspect of a traditional business conference. Some future implications will be of a surprising nature and unpredictable nowadays. In this chapter, I will focus on 15 areas where the current developments in the conference landscape already hint towards major changes. Thus, I am going to analyze and forecast what the transformation from a *conference 1.0* (the traditional conference model) to an updated *conference 2.0* (a conference that has adapted to the digital era and the Web 2.0) will – or at least could – look like for each of the 15 areas.

[83] Kirsner.

This table delivers an overview of the transformation areas:

Transformation area:	Conference 1.0:	Conference 2.0:
Celebrity experts	Experts use their attendance to hold keynotes in front of the audience	Audience deals with the input from experts in advance. Expert's attendance is used to lead conversations and discuss solutions
Keynotes	Keynotes primarily transfer knowledge	Keynotes primarily inspire, change perspectives and connect the dots
Audience curation	First come first serve	Compelling curation as a key offering
Audience feedback	Only post-event feedback opportunities are offered	Co-creation opportunities are offered, beginning pre-event
Audience interaction	Unfacilitated conversations during short breaks	Unfacilitated conversations during longer breaks and facilitated peer learning sessions
Approaching challenges	Time is used to present challenges and best practice solution approaches	Time is used to tackle challenges and prototype solutions
Facilitation style	Rock star facilitation	DJ facilitation
Documentation	Created by conference organizers post event	Co-created between conference organizers and audience, partly in real-time
Works vs. Play	Optional playful elements after official program	Playful elements are embedded in the program
Sponsor integration	Sponsors deliver talks and place marketing booths	Sponsors host conversations and offer interaction booths
Venue	Functional environments for talking heads	Inspiring environments for conversations
Global competition	Conferences compete through global celebrity names	Conferences differentiate through local learning experiences
Technology	Technology competes with humans	Seamless technology enhances the experience
Business model	Selling tickets to consume content	Selling different levels of learning and networking experiences, more transparency
Job understanding	Conference organizers are professional meeting organizers	Conference organizers are professional community builders & experience designers

Table 3: Overview of the transformation process

5.2. Celebrity experts

Experts with a celebrity status will still be needed as human magnets, drawing people to conferences. But since they are popular experts, their current keynotes can be watched on the web. A simple repetition on stage could be boring and a waste of resources if the audience is already familiar with the content. At a conference 2.0, the celebrity expert will use his/her physical presence to interact with the conference participants in the most engaging way possible. The participants will confront the expert with concrete ideas and questions, based upon pieces of content and information from the expert that the participants have dealt with ahead of the conference. Besides, many celebrity keynote speakers also have their own ideas how they would design one or several interactive slots with the audience so that they can bring in their experiences, skills and perspectives in the best valuable manner. A conference 2.0 thus also makes use of the methodological creativity und curiosity of a celebrity – a potential that vastly remains untapped as of today.

5.3. Keynotes

Keynotes will not die out, but their nature and purpose will change. At a conference 2.0, a keynote will no longer deal with countless slides of statistics and best practice use cases. Keynotes will be about delivering keys again, allowing the conference participants to open doors to new perspectives about the conference topic - perspectives, which one wouldn't have come across through Google. The principle of *reliable surprise* as outlined in chapter 3.4 will help conference organizers to curate inspirational keynotes. Besides, keynotes at a conference 2.0 will increasingly tackle the question: How do we filter and connect all the information around one topic? Here, different personas will take us on their individual journey of dealing with the information overload in the digital era.

5.4. Audience curation

Most conference organizers sell their tickets on a first come, first serve basis. While staying open to everyone certainly comes with several advantages, it will become increasingly important for conference organizers to master the art of audience curation and assemble an interdisciplinary and highly engaged crowd. A conference 2.0 will integrate more peer-to-peer learning – and this is only of value to the participants if they gather in a constellation where they can truly learn something from another. Besides, as we spend more and more time online and participate in virtual meetings, we want to encounter interesting and surprising people once we allow ourselves the luxury of attending an intensive physical meeting.

From the perspective of a conference organizer, a compelling curation can be a key differentiator from other conferences that deal with a similar topic and aim at the same target group(s).

5.5. Audience feedback

In many cases, the only way conference organizers and participants communicate with each other is through the evaluation sheet that is handed out after the very last session, about 5 minutes before everyone's cab to the airport arrives. In contrast, a conference 2.0 offers co-creation and feedback opportunities all along the event lifecycle. The type of eager users who enjoy taking part in open innovation endeavors should be identified and welcomed with open arms already during the planning phase. This allows the conference to be better tailored to the customers' needs and to incorporate smart ideas that the conference organizers might have not thought of themselves.

In the digital era, the audience doesn't withhold the feedback until they eventually get the evaluation sheet in the end. At technology related conferences, many conference attendees already comment on food, the organization, the facilitation and the speaker selection in real-time, usually with great visibility in their social networks. As nowadays authenticity is king, conference 2.0 organizers openly talk about how their event has been perceived and how they will use and build upon the feedback received.

5.6. Audience interaction

A conference 1.0 has attendees - a conference 2.0 only participants. It's a small difference, and yet a huge one. Although people have diverse personalities and thus engage and interact in different manners when being in groups, it will be an impossible undertaking to leave a conference 2.0 in utter anonymity. The key is to design a conference dramaturgy that works with and caters to different levels of personal engagement and lean back / lean forward behavior. Yet, the dramaturgy shall take every participant through different emotional modes as this fosters a holistic learning experience. After an inspirational or provocative keynote has taken place, a collaborative peer learning and sense-making session in a BarCamp manner might follow. As described in chapter 3.5, successful content driven online platforms have embedded a social layer where users can analyze, review, rate and recommend content. A similar approach can be embedded at offline conferences to share findings from parallel sessions and provide further program orientation for the conference users.

However, every conference 2.0 will also offer completely unfacilitated breaks, as the building of relationships and the magic of serendipity require organically emerging interactions. Ac-

cording to David Adler, forgetting to schedule space in one's conference agenda for "permission to talk" is the most common flaw amongst conference 1.0 organizers.[84]

5.7. Approaching challenges

Many conferences manage to gather a powerful group of high-profile people from different disciplines and organizations for a substantial amount of time in a rather distraction free environment. Yet, in a conference 1.0, the attendees spend most of their time listening to a dedicated keynote speaker on stage who talks about a pressing challenge within a particular field and urges the audience to tackle and solve it. And right after it, the next keynote is up on stage, referring to the next pressing challenge.

Hence, a conference 2.0 has to integrate enough time in the agenda to make some use of the rare opportunity to have such a powerful group face-to-face together. Instead of only raising awareness about challenges and showing best practice cases, conference organizers will design formats in which the participants tackle shared, unresolved problems to ideate and prototype first solutions. Taking into account the usual time constraints, the prototypes will presumably remain on a rough level. However, this outcome is superior to leaving a conference with only some good intentions in mind what to do upon the return at the work desk.

Here, traditional conferences can draw great inspiration from prototyping-focused unconferences like the *music hack day*, which was presented in an earlier chapter.

5.8. Facilitation style

As conferences 2.0 are participatory events, this calls for more and better facilitation. No matter how smart the crowd, there must be some kind of facilitation. Although there are few cases, where the conference's success is actually based on the rock star qualities of the key facilitator, this is a rare phenomenon. That is why conferences 2.0 ask for a cultural change in the facilitation style: less rock star, more wedding DJ. Unlike rock stars whose job typically is to take up the stage with their presence and unique aura, wedding DJs create the suitable environment but allow the guests to turn into the real stars on the dance floor. The same is applicable on conference floors. As the mood on the floor changes, the DJ-like conference facilitators fluently adapt the program like a playlist, using their empathy and improvisational capabilities.

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[84] Jenise Fryatt, 'BizBash CEO David Adler on Event Industry Trends to Watch in 2012 (Part2)', *engage365*, 2011 <http://www.engage365.org/2011/12/22/bizbash-ceo-david-adler-on-event-industry-trends-to-watch/> [accessed 12 April 2012].

5.9. Documentation

Every conference has to cope with the topic of documentation. In many cases, the official documentation crafted by the conference organizers gets released several months after the conference is already over. While this was still of interest in an age where no other sources could serve the purpose to recap a conference and its core content again after the event to prolong its impact, we have now reached a different era. As the attendees themselves have turned into prosumers, often summarizing their experience in a blog entry or in a different online channel, conferences 2.0 are smart and invite attendees to co-create the official documentation in a collaborative and authentic manner, offering several perspectives on the same content.

5.10. Work vs. play

Conferences 1.0 clearly separated work and play in their agenda. While the conference during the day was considered work, optional program modules on the side incorporated playful elements. Conferences 2.0 make use of the findings from the gamification research and embed playful elements into their core program during the day for a better, more holistic and more human learning experience. Besides, it is often the playful elements creating long lasting, memorable experiences. And memorable experiences foster group-bonding mechanisms, which are beneficial for a productive and collaborative working environment.

5.11. Sponsor integration

Sponsors in the conference 1.0 model usually appear at events in the form of 1) a logo, 2) a keynote speech - trying to sell the sponsor's product / service, or 3) in the form of a marketing booth. All three forms are everything but beneficial to the conference attendee; the sponsored keynote speech in fact is often perceived as particularly disturbing.

The conference 2.0 sponsorship model, in comparison, aims at creating instant value for both, the sponsor and the participants alike. Sponsors could e.g. host B2B conversations with interested attendees, tackling a challenge that is relevant to all three – the sponsor, the participant and the theme of the conference. Additionally, the sponsor could set up a space with high speed Internet and comfortable chairs and desks to work at - functioning as a co-working space for a team from the sponsor and conference participants alike. That way, participants are given the opportunity to experience the work culture of the sponsor in a direct manner which could potentially even turn into a future talent meeting space for both.

5.12. Venue

Business conferences 1.0 usually take place in large hotels or dedicated convention centers, as they are perfect for conference setups focused on talking heads: large screens, big stages and an almost infinite number of rows with ruler-straight chairs. People often fly all around the world and pay thousands of euros to attend a conference. They are longing for inspiration and some Eureka moments. Yet, in many cases they spend most of their trip in a large meeting hotel room without daylight, an environment that just looks like the one that they originally wanted to escape from.

As conferences 2.0 will be more about conversations and less about presentations, a venue needs to reflect the *prosumer* behavior in the digital era. Conferences 2.0 will thus increasingly prefer unconventional spaces that support collaboration and a creative atmosphere over traditional convention centers.

If the organizer choses a venue that matches the theme and context of a conference, the environment will help participants to trigger new thoughts by constantly being reminded of the user perspective of the particular industry: a travel industry conference taking place on a cruise ship, an education conference taking place in a library, a conference on live music taking place at an open air festival environment combined with a camping experience.

5.13. Global competition

As the world continues to globalize in many aspects (one of them being the establishment of English as a business language), business conferences with a similar topical focus are increasingly competing on a global level with each other. In the conference 1.0 thinking, conference organizers often tackle this competition by scaling their event in size and spending more money on the biggest international speaker names in the industry. This leads to a market where a conference in Tokio, Berlin, Paris or New York on the same topic and with the same target audience are almost interchangeable as the setup, the business hotel meeting rooms and the speaker line up often match each other to a high degree.

Conferences 2.0 incorporate the general trend in the digital era that users want to go beyond pure consumption. They are looking for interactions and conversations; they want to understand their environment. This desire can be perfectly translated into a new way to tackle the competition on a global scale: Business conferences 2.0 will use their local city / region as a USP. The organizers will establish interfaces for the conference participants to interact and experience the local way of doing business, triggering new insights and perspectives. This could e.g. be done through a collaborative learning journey where the conference participants go out in groups and visit local companies, institutions, foundations, cultural landmarks and

co-working environments. The places are curated in a manner that they tackle aspects or challenges that the conference topic deals with. Furthermore, they help to transmit the domestic DNA of doing business. Local scouts at each place will allow the participants to quickly deep dive into their worlds while dedicated facilitators ensure that the exchange will be of a nurturing nature for both parties, the hosts and the visiting conference participants. The group of global participants, equipped with many different perspectives, could for example be asked to cope with a pressing challenge of the local place and to generate ideas how to solve it. The experience of solving a concrete problem together in a collaborative manner can help to create a positive bonding experience among the conference participants, thus allowing them to work with each other in different scenarios also in a more productive manner.

5.14. Technology

One could expect from a Conference 2.0, which is supposed to adapt to the changes in the digital era: it will incorporate the usage of technology in every possible manner and exploit whatever is possible and en vogue nowadays.

However, this approach would not be considerably reflected. Conference 2.0 organizers cope with the questions: When, where and how can technology enhance the experience for our conference participants to learn from and inspire each other, to build relationships and communities, to interact with exciting key celebrities that the participants are eager to meet and understand? There is not a single answer to this question as the suitable integration of technology highly depends on different variables (conference topic, level of experience and spread of the various digital technologies among the participants, local cultural traits in communication and collaboration etc.).

However, conferences 2.0 will share some patterns. They will make extensive use of social media and social networks, allowing people to connect ahead of a conference, identify common interests & questions, and coordinate collaborative travel. After the conference, social technologies will allow the participants to stay in touch, share memories, and continue the conversations. Organizers of annual conferences 2.0 will use these communication channels to proactively foster further interactions among the conference community by providing communicational triggers such as provocative questions, theses and web links to relevant, inspirational content.

While some conferences 2.0 might intentionally absorb their physical gathering from the outside world to nurture an intimate collaboration culture, other gatherings will turn into *hybrid events:* The organizers will offer an online and offline experience to participate in the event, combining the potentials of intense, physical interactions with the global reach of the Internet.

Successful hybrid conferences 2.0 will go beyond simply setting up a live stream and a twitter wall at the physical event. Rather, they will design different conference experiences that leverage the specific potential of each form of communication and collaboration. Designated facilitators will help to bridge the online and offline environment and connect the conversations and activities.

But whether conferences 2.0 approach a hybrid format or not – the organizers will in either way be mindful about the role and opportunities of physical gatherings in the 21st century. That's why they will not employ technologies for the sake of being cutting edge. Rechnology will be consciously used in the most seamless possible manner to enhance and trigger personal interactions among the participants. BizBash CEO David Adler states: „Dependence on technology is really bad for events. Events are about storytelling, flow, pace, social engineering and numerology. The brain works more emotionally rather than logically and events have got to create that managed serendipity that make events magical"[85]. Building on that belief, conferences 2.0 will also question the (mis)use of PowerPoint in their 'talking heads on stage' scenarios. Organizers will support and enable their dedicated speakers to tell a compelling story and spread strong ideas instead of fighting for attention and competing with their own PowerPoint presentation.

5.15. Business model

There is a common saying: "The business of business is business." While business conferences are not necessarily only targeted at business people, in most cases, they want to generate their own business and gain a profit. As ticket prices for the attendance of a physical conference follow the rules of supply and demand and thus can not be endlessly risen, most of the business conferences 1.0 follow the simple strategy: make more money by scaling up the size of the conference. The assumption: more celebrity speakers and more sessions attract more attendees, and more attendees allow to leverage the economies of scale.

However, this simple strategy of scaling by growing eventually stops to work at a certain point. And this is when an increase of size with more diverse program offerings and more people to potentially network with doesn't raise the individual benefit of the participants anymore, but when the perceived value of the conference actually starts to decrease through scaling. Why would this happen?

Being part of a special community, where people know and trust each other, where business collaborations benefit from shared positive experiences and common memories – all this is of

[85] Fryatt.

huge value to most conference participants. A conference needs a minimum amount of people for such a community to emerge, but in return, such a positive community spirit is almost impossible to maintain if a conference has thousands of participants.

A conference 2.0 takes a different approach: It will create and monetize different levels of experience. Intimate, curated physical gatherings - small in size but high in price - can be complemented with lower priced, more accessible satellite events that are BarCamp like organized in a bottom-up approach. These sort of franchised remote events still share the brand and some of the methods and contents of the lighthouse gathering, but develop their own local flavor. Besides, a specially crafted remote experience of the main conference in the form of a simultaneous collaborative online event or a truly interactive mobile app creates further value and also can be monetized.

However, conferences 2.0 will always share their most inspirational outcomes, ideas and impulses in a free manner online – to strengthen the conference brand, extend the audience and contribute to the progression of the respective industry and society in general.

Conference 2.0 organizers understand that publishing content open source doesn't cannibalize ticket sales, as people in the digital era pay for the collaborative learning and networking experience.[86]

This also translates to the integration of sponsors. As already indicated in chapter 5.11, a conference 2.0 will be less focused on selling bronze/silver/golden logo spots, but more on creating premium experiences, where their sponsoring partners get to tackle some of their current problems, explore relevant topics, network with the participants and scout future talents.

A last upcoming transformation that can be identified is rooted in the current lack of transparency regarding a conference's business model. The evaluation of questionnaires, comments on various social media channels and personal conversations reveal: Numerous attendees often perceive business conferences as overprized. However, by far, not every conference generates a profit, which is unknown to the broader public. Conferences 2.0 will follow the users' demand for more transparency and hence increasingly disclose their cost structures on the Internet, allowing people to get a better understanding about the many different blocks of costs involved. According to Matt Moore, this increased transparency can also enable and help crowd funding endeavors: People who believe in the (financial) success of a conference could be asked / offered to become co-investors of this event. In return for providing a certain amount of money upfront, they will participate in the case of success by obtaining a respective share of the profit.[87] The assumption: By earning a stake in the conference, the co-

[86] Suter, Alexander and Kaplan, 47–59; Chicco.
[87] Moore, Chatfield and Etling.

investors are triggered to also serve as valuable promoters and ambassadors – leading to a potential win-win situation in the end.

5.16. Job understanding

Conferences 1.0 required professional meeting organizers, people who primarily excel at event management. When people pay large amounts of money to attend a conference, they want even the smallest details to be taken care of. This still holds true for Conferences 2.0. But the role of the organizers has changed, or, to be precise: it has expanded. David Adler states that contemporary conference organizers mainly serve as "programmers of human interaction"[88]. Conference 2.0 organizers should thus look upon themselves not as mere meeting organizers, but as professional community builders and experience designers. The conferences will resemble key physical gatherings of theses communities, yet every community is also strengthened and monetized through other experiences.

What is also part of the transformed job understanding: Conference 2.0 organizers don't assemble a program anymore that is being served to the audience, ready for them to lean back and consume. Their job is to design a framework, an experience in which the participants can accomplish their goals to learn, build relationships, tackle problems and get inspired in the best manner. This can imply that the participants are drawn out of their comfort zones. Nancy White, taking over the perspective of the conference attendee, articulates: "We have been trained to expect the important people at the podium and we're trained to expect that if we pay you'll do the work for me. [...] We have to understand that we sometimes still have to pay and do the work."[89]

Eventually, it is not only up to the organizers of a conference 2.0 to adapt to the changes in the digital era. Conference participants and organizers alike will both update their understanding of their respective role at a conference.

6. Outlook on music industry conferences

I started this paper with the hypothesis that most conferences have not adapted their framework and program design to match the 21st century flow of information & communication, triggered by the Internet. After an exploration of several changes in the digital era and a closer look at a set of business conferences tackling the music industry, this hypothesis has been validated. The conferences still employ a one-way communication scheme, limiting the at-

[88] Fryatt.
[89] Good.

tendees apart from lunch and coffee breaks in the agenda to sole consumers of information, which seems to be outdated in the 21st century.

In the last chapter, I have outlined several suggestions and predictions how traditional conferences can and, I suppose, ultimately will adapt to the digital era in various areas and aspects. Particularly conferences targeted at the music industry / creative industries will undergo major transformations within the next ten years.

There are three reasons that lead to this conclusion:

1) Awareness always comes first: This thesis has revealed that the organizers of music industry conferences are already well aware of the changes in the digital era, as those changes take up great space in their program agendas from a content perspective. Besides, they have largely integrated many of the emerging technologies such as social media and mobile apps into their conference experience. In comparison to conferences in other fields, for example in the scientific research scene, the organizing protagonists of music industry conferences seem to be rather adaptive. It always takes a while until new technologies translate into new behavioral patters among human beings, but being aware is the first step.

2) Rising popularity of unconferences: Although I have depicted why community-driven bottom-up organized unconferences are unlikely to replace the traditional conference model, they will still increasingly influence the shape of traditional conferences. There are already some vital unconferences being held and organized in the music industry landscape, which continue to gain attention among all industry stakeholders.

3) Digital Natives enter the field: The transformation to a conference 2.0 will first take place in areas where conference organizers and attendees have adapted the communicational and collaborative patterns of the digital era themselves. The music industry is a business with rather young protagonists and, according to Howard Givner, within conference organizations, younger people are also taking over more power and responsibilities. [90] Thus, the target audiences at conferences as well as their organizers increasingly belong to the generation of the *digital natives* who have grown up in the digital era. Consequently, they will be longing to create and participate in suitable formats that reflect their behavior to communicate and collaborate.

While I do expect major transformations to happen in the conference landscape, I assume they will take place gradually over the next years. In order to accelerate the process, conference organizers can actually draw inspiration from their audience. Observing the behavior of pro-

[90] Howard Givner, 'Business Trends in Event Design: An Event Leadership Institute White Paper' (Event Leadership Institute, 2012) <http://www.eventleadershipinstitute.com/white-papers.aspx>.

tagonists in the music industry, major record labels and independent labels have not only learned from each other during the past years, but they have also started to increasingly cooperate with each other. Similiarly, it would be beneficial for everyone to foster an exchange among organizers of traditional conferences and the emerging unconferencing scene.

And the user inspiration can go even further: business conferences in the creative industries attract and host – by nature – not only pure business oriented people, but also artists, equipped with many different perspectives and talents. Conference organizers could consider David Adler's advice: „Look Outside! The best event planners I've ever seen are people that are not from the industry."[91] As conference organizers increasingly become experience designers, they could consult musicians, film directors and game designers and explore, how those create compelling experiences: How does the dramaturgy work in emotionally touching movies, in catchy tunes, in engaging games? What's the right mixture of repetition and change, how to find the balance between comfort and surprise?

In summary, all those physical conferences will remain to have a bright future in the digital era which manage to make use of the great potential that third places possess: They are not only platforms that contribute many Euros towards the business tourism industry, but they can resemble highly productive environments that contribute to the advancement of individuals, industries and our whole society alike.

[91] Fryatt.

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