

## Business Events. The Day After Tomorrow: From Design Research to Generative AI: an Automated View on the Future of “Phygital” Events for Business

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the "phygital" reality where digital and physical realms merge in liminal spaces, blurring boundaries such as those between work and leisure, as well as the ones between constructivist Design Research and automated foresight. Therefore, this paper aims to update the "Phygital" Matrix, a formerly co-designed tool, to project the post-pandemic future of business events, proposing automated foresight-generated scenarios. The authors do so through a novel, automated data collection method, including Large Language Models (LLMs). Therefore, the ambition is to generate new hypotheses on the future of the subject at hand and experiment with new, hybrid modalities of operationalization that depart from Design Research while seeking opportunities for foresight currently existing in state-of-the-art Generative AI, which will be reflexively discussed elsewhere. As part of their findings, the authors present emerging trends in business events design and management in scenarios related to hybrid event formats, from physical to digital, e.g. personalized experiences, and immersive technologies. Several trends and scenarios emerge as pivotal in event design, which might apply to event design and management professionals.

**Practical Implications:** At the practical implementation level, the study pragmatically advises industry stakeholders to adopt these insights for eco-conscious and inclusive strategic planning. Ultimately, while LLMs offer valuable data, human interpretation is crucial, highlighting a need for greater AI-human collaboration in research. Research limitations include the explicit choice to work with Generative AI only, hence excluding any direct human input besides the “Trained Judgement” of the authors. In conclusion, this paper offers novel future findings to business events professionals and methodological findings to scholars and consultants in foresight and future research. The next steps in this line of research might pertain to the validation of AI-generated scenarios and the process.

**Keywords:** Business Events; Generative AI; Hybrid Events; Phygital; Post-pandemic Scenarios.

### 1. Introduction

The present paper builds upon both findings and methodological practices recently published in a peer-reviewed journal responding to the drastic changes in lifestyle, as well as embracing the dramatic impact of Generative AI on foresight and future research methodologies. As a preliminary position, it might be worth mentioning how, for business events, the



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authors built on earlier peer-reviewed sources and references as gathered in 2023 (Bevolo & Amati, 2023), that combined conceptual robustness with prospect validity over time, e.g. 2 to 5 years.

Why reflect, rework, and submit to peer review in 2024, a sectorial study that was generated between 2021 and 2022? Why shift from an elaborate Design Research process including 32 interviews, to Generative AI-created scenarios? Because in just a couple of years, the world and the *zeitgeist* changed, and deeply so. In this short gap, the economic outlook switched from the eager optimism of post-pandemic recovery to the shock of high inflation (Arce, 2024), continued populist politics (Young & Jackson, 2024), and complex conflicts (Smith-Meyer, 2024). Methodologically, ChatGPT 4.0 might disrupt education (Keiper, 2023; Tate *et al.*, 2024), administration, and research, as we knew them before its introduction.

For this reason, this paper will be based on a new Theoretical Justification with dual direction, both related to business events (the content) and to Generative AI implementation (the process). However, our research question will be focused on scenarios (the content), to identify and encapsulate those trends and directions that emerged from the long tail of post-pandemic dynamics. Therefore, the authors will provide a “light” theoretical justification, based on earlier peer-reviewed publications where the “Phygital” matrix was co-designed with 10 thought leaders and validated with 22 design and event management professionals (Bevolo & Amati, 2023). Here, the “Phygital” matrix will be generatively adopted for the development of scenarios and trends, by scanning based on Generative AI modalities of implementation. The methodological section will provide more insights related to this shift from Design Research principles, namely co-creation, and the fully automated foresight approach adopted in this paper for data generation. The outcome will combine an updated “Phygital” matrix, for the benefit of event design and management practitioners.

## 2. Theoretical Justification

In general, one might observe how, in the business and organizational domains, the experimental wave of digital connectivity solutions (e.g. remote working, smart working, online educational formats) has been contradicted by the concrete possibility of returning to the old order, with in-person meetings, events, and even classroom activities being selected and deliberated as a choice requiring a specific framework to weigh benefits and impacts (Standaert, Muylle, & Basu, 2022). These business and educational trends have been matched by what appear to be contradicting trends in city tourism and tourism in general. Tourists are seemingly caught between climate change concerns and a general desire to revive travel, especially among tourist segments seeking self-direction and stimulation through experience (Aschauer & Egger, 2023).

Starting from the above intent and leveraging what was elaborated in the recent past (Bevolo & Amati, 2023), the following Theoretical Justification provided the actual inspirational triggers and starting points of the research project underpinning this paper, namely:

- Origin of the concept of “Phygital”, to justify the tool selected to govern the research process, namely a matrix co-designed to identify possible futures of business events (Bevolo & Amati, 2023)
- Points justifying the choice of business events as the specific research field operationally investigated by this paper, from MICE to socio-cultural trends

From such departure points, which will be summarized in selected constituencies, this Theoretical Justification might speak to different audiences, from professionals in the event design and management fields to foresight consultants and researchers who might be more intrigued by its methodological implications.

### 2.1. Note on Semantic Overlap

The authors would like to highlight at a preliminary level the semantic similarity between “Generative AI”, which pertains to the output of advanced LLM systems, and “generative modality” of the “Phygital” matrix, which pertains to the switching from analysis to concepts within the Design Research process. This is a case where the same word, “generative”, by pure coincidence, covers two different and unrelated semantic areas.

### 2.2. “Phygital” as a Concept

Concerning the specific sector of business events, the authors performed their research aiming at further scoping the notion of “Phygital” after society returned to a post-health crisis state in contrast to the previous research conducted during the COVID-19 health crisis. A robust Theoretical Framework on the specific field of business events was recently established

through an extensive literature review by systematically scanning online qualified repositories like Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, plus academia.edu (Bevolo & Amati, 2023). There, the meaning of the word “Phygital” was assessed as grounded in a rich texture of bibliographic references. Its key synthesis is to stand for the continuum between physical design and digital solutions, with the liminal space of hybrid as a median point. In terms of its roots, they lie in the analysis of retail trends: “The origin of the term “Phygital” should be ascribed to the Australian firm Momentum in 2013” (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2022).

Challenges of integrating the physical and the digital domains have historically arisen since the feasibility of digital devices and applications for mass distribution and consumption, from specialized sectors like Brand Marketing (Bevolo & Brand, 2003) to the everyday of “the rest of us” (Andrews & Bevolo, 2004). Fast forward to the early 2020s, one of the primary contexts where this “Phygital” meta trend might be observed evolving is the Metaverse, defined as follows:

*“...a massively scaled and interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds that can be experienced synchronously and persistently by an effectively unlimited number of users with an individual sense of presence, and with continuity of data, such as identity, history, entitlements, objects, communications, and payments” (Ball, 2022).*

Ultimately, the authors herewith posit a notion of the “phygital” as a socio-cultural construct. Namely, the “phygital” might be conceptualized as an advanced socio-technical field in advanced and emerging economies and markets. Specifically, the “phygital” function might be described as acting as an innovation aggregator and accelerator combining “in presence” with “remote” functionalities and modalities, that have unfolded thanks to a solid and reliable digital backbone (Hamurcu, 2022).

### **2.3. Business Events in Transition: From MICE Niches to “Phygital” Trends**

The field of “business events” might be critically reviewed and theoretically established to include the current socio-cultural trends (e.g. “business tourism”) (Kumar & Hussain, 2014) and the proliferation of innovative formats in new locations like museums, beyond the traditional MICE limited domains of economic research which have been the focus since the 1960s (Mair, 2012). It was posited and assessed through bibliographic review (Bevolo & Amati, 2023), that in such a fuzzy context of “business events: It might not appear clear what ‘business events’ exactly are but describing ‘what business events can do’ is demanded”. Such an approach might open richer taxonomies for “business events” than simple industry self-perceptions. In that constructivist viewpoint, for example, a collateral but fundamental function of “business events” as enablers of social networks was mentioned (Luo & Zhong, 2016). Such social aggregation function might appear mission-critical to achieve success, especially for the post-pandemic organizational culture of enterprises. As further proof of dynamism in this niche sector, the notion of “business events” as “business time” might be challenged by new conceptualizations of the social functions of “leisure”, in a “blurring” continuum (Bevolo & Amati, 2023). To this end, “Bleisure” (Pinho & Marques, 2021) – which is professional traveling, tourism, and leisure in individually tailor-made continuums – should also be highlighted as yet another relevant development in this specific field of study, justifying its assessment of being in a deep transition.

## **3. Research Question**

This paper is based on a specific research question, one related to the actual subject at hand, i.e., content (“business events”). Challenges and opportunities derived from the transition from Design Research to Generative AI research would exceed the scope of this paper. Based on the above Theoretical Justification combining the context and content background of business events, the following Research Question was formulated:

***What are the key scenarios anticipating the future of the business event industry?***

The key to justifying this Research Question is dictated by the rapid evolution of the post-pandemic context, with major changes at the macro-level from the time of original research for the 2023 paper, which is in the period 2021-2022 during the pandemic, and the time of research for this paper, which is early 2024. This paper employs a rather general question, related to the factors impacting business events, complemented by a specific focus on the termination of post-pandemic measures.

## 4. Methodology: From Design Research to Generative AI Automation

From a methodological viewpoint, the emergence of a digital focus in sociology is not new, since academic edited monographs and foundational references (Marres, 2017) engaged with the inevitability of these technologies across IT and media in the last decade. As well as implementing Design Research findings, the authors aim at doing so through Generative AI automation with a hybrid modality of research, namely a transdisciplinary problem-solving capability juggling between concrete facts (empirically determined) and meditative thinking (at an abstract level) (Gibbs & McGregor, 2023). This specific awareness ultimately informed the research practice underpinning this paper.

Considering the specific process angle of this paper, the authors built upon earlier experiments where Design Research and Generative AI were already combined at an earlier stage of development. For this reason, Design Thinking and design processes are central (Floridi, 2022). Therefore, the authors took the opportunity to build upon an earlier foresight empirical exercise based on a constructivist approach to Design Research, which was published in a peer-reviewed journal (Bevolo & Amati, 2023). In such a participatory context, state-of-the-art AI was tested and leveraged for triangulation purposes. At that time, Generative AI appeared very promising in terms of both theoretical reflection as well as methodological integration yet was at an earlier stage of development. The authors, therefore, engaged in an experimental meta-trajectory, where the AI capabilities were both a subject for content generation and an object for scientific and professional examination and reflection.

### 4.1. Scenarios as Desired Outcome

The outcome of the 2024 project which stood as an empirical backbone of this paper, was intended as scenarios. The scenario analysis method that the platform, under research direction by one of the authors of this paper, has used for several years is Jim Dator's four scenario archetypes (Dator, 2009). Additionally, this same framework remains popular for foresight academics (Hines, et al. 2024) and consultants (Christophilopoulos et al., 2024), and it has been applied to both COVID-19 (Dunbar, et al., 2024) and AI (Teixeira & Pacione, 2024). So, the researchers relied on the same framework. The platform can develop much larger scenario reports than what the researchers have published in the findings. However, a longer scenario report would dilute the influence of the "Phygital" Matrix while exceeding the word count of an academic journal.

### 4.2. The "Phygital" Matrix: Introduction to The Tool

The empirical roots of the key tool adopted in this paper, the "Phygital" Matrix (Bevolo & Amati, 2023) lie in the urban future adaptation of generic sociocultural trends tools (Bevolo, 2017) and the further exploration of the tooling format (Bevolo & Rosenius, 2021). In methodological terms, this paper builds upon 22 qualitative interviews with Design Thinkers (11 respondents) and emerging talents (11 respondents), whereby the matrix was assessed by generatively discussing its parameters. These parameters, which were developed through 10 interviews with senior professionals in the event industry (5 respondents) and thought leaders (5 respondents), remained the same as designed in 2021/2022 and published in 2023, given the relatively short time between that research project and this present empirical experiment with Generative AI.

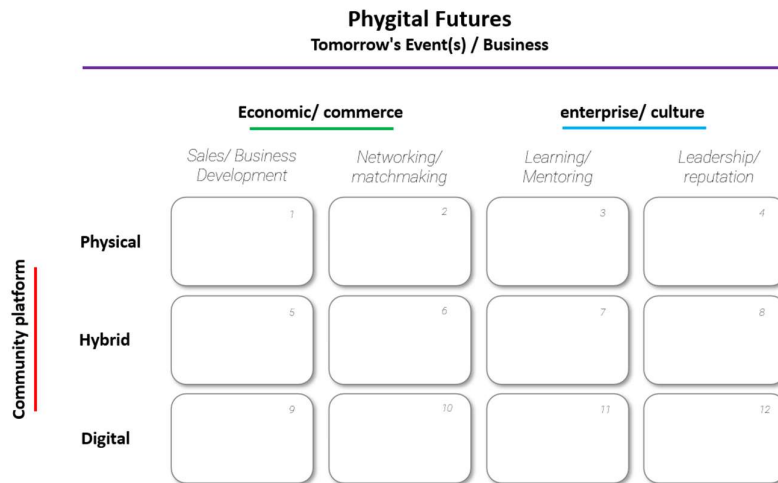


Figure 1. Phyigital Futures Matrix (Bevolo & Amati, 2023).

#### 4.2.1. Vertical Axis

The vertical axis of the “Phyigital Futures Matrix” structures the universe of contextual conditions of events, from “Physical” to “Digital”, through the intermediate “Hybrid” mix of physical and digital. In crafting a synthetic name for this vertical axis, the authors emphasized the notion of “Community Platform”, as a coherent, consistent set of enabling conditions, both technological and logistic.

#### 4.2.2. Horizontal Axis

On the horizontal axis of the “Phyigital Futures Matrix”, the authors captured socio-cultural preferences. This axis is split at its median, with

- (a) the “Economic / Commerce” utilitarian function of business events on the left, and
- (b) the softer “Enterprise / Culture” roles of business events on the right

- The “Economic / Commerce” semi-axis is described by keywords such as Business, Commercial, Economic, Networking, and Sales. It captures the profit-oriented potential of events in terms of immediate transactions such as: “Sales / Business Development”, while also including: “Networking / Matchmaking” as enablers of symbolic value exchange and future transactional enablers.
- The “Phyigital Futures Matrix” second horizontal semi-axis articulates the less transactional, more socially attuned, and culturally referred benefits delivered by business events to enterprises, organizations, and stakeholders: “Enterprise / Culture”. This semi-axis activates semantic areas triggered by keywords such as Brand, Conference, Culture, Leadership, Learning, and more. Here, dynamics of the cultural sector emerged along with non-transactional themes like mindfulness. The semi-axis is divided into two further dimensions first: is “Learning / Mentoring”, which captures the necessary internal company knowledge distribution, including lifelong learning challenges for staff and management such as constant reporting. Here, events like workshops, seminars, and other forms of internal or semi-internal gatherings might play a pivotal role. Additionally, the “Leadership / Reputation” dimension focuses more on external performance such as conferences, conventions, and other ways to establish one’s status in the public sphere. Here, professionals or brands exercise the role of thought leadership, inspiring industries, sectors, or even societies (Bevolo & Amati, 2023).

### 4.3. Generative AI Leveraging The “Phygital” Matrix: Sources and Practice

With the current paper, the authors aim to move on from an ancillary use of ML systems to a focal role for Generative AI to determine new trends within the same matrix framework designed in 2021/2022 and published in 2023. This Generative AI research outcome aims to identify and describe emerging trends as defined by the matrix, a generative tool based on validated empirical development. Likewise, the relationship between physical and digital spaces happens to be instrumental to an epistemological and theoretical reflection on the future of AI (Sisto, 2022), which exceeds the scope and focus of this paper.

At the heart of the automated foresight practice, a prompt is a common term given to the plain language instructions a user gives to an LLM to create the desired output (White et al., 2023). The platform used a set of proprietary prompts to develop its future-focused output. Having clarified the foundation of the adopted matrix, shifting to the Generative AI experimental engine adopted for the empirical research behind this paper, the platform already follows more than 110,000 online sources on a daily or weekly basis. To ensure this paper had as many relevant sources as necessary, the researchers googled event industry news sources.

The platform automates horizon scanning by searching the internet for sentences that forecast the future. The platform auto-extracts these sentences and presents them as Indicators, verbatim sentences about the future.

After adding the sources to the platform, the researchers waited two weeks for the platform to start adding new Indicators. Then, the researchers started using the platform’s semantic search to explore the articles with the term: the future of business events.

### 4.4. Operationalization

The authors, in their role as researchers, applied an AI tool, the platform, which uses both analytical and Generative AI as well as human collaboration to perform foresight research. Since LLMs are focused on general-purpose tasks, the platform is focused on applying LLM methods to the specific domain (Shen et al., 2024) of strategic foresight. The platform focuses on strategic foresight methods such as participatory foresight (Ramos Mansfield & Priday, 2012), environmental scanning (Kehl, Jackson & Fergnani, 2020), and scenario development (Fergnani & Jackson, 2019).

From methodology to execution, the authors searched at a preliminary level “event industry news outlets” on Bing, but there were very few event-specific news outlets on the first few pages. However, there were two links to lists of event industry blogs and news sources. So, the researchers used these two list articles (commonly known as listicles) to identify news outlets specific to the event industry.

One of the listicles is from Bizzabo from September 2023 with 21 industry sources (Gordon-Bennett & Gordon-Bennett, 2023). The other listicle is from FeedSpot in October 2023 with 18 industry sources, despite the title saying 20 (Top 20 Event Planning Magazines & Publications to Follow in 2024, 2024). The researchers clicked through the blogs and news outlets to find their RSS feeds. Of the 39 sources that both listicles offered, 36 of them were unique. Of the 36 unique sources, the researchers only found 30 sources with RSS feeds. The researchers copied the RSS URLs and pasted them into the platform’s Sources manager. Of the 30 RSS feeds, 20 of them were not currently on the platform. The researchers then allowed the platform to monitor these new sources automatically.

## 5. Findings

The authors present all machine-generated content in underlined text, with any author comments not underlined. This way, the reader can navigate the AI-generated content while distinguishing and appreciating reflexive comments by the authors, who critically examined the outcome of the empirical experiments as they were designed and performed.

In these scenarios, the AI-generated content enables the user to experience findings in a more narrative fashion, where storytelling intertwines descriptions and sources. This enables the navigation of possible futures with a first validation thereof through interactive access to referenced links. Implications and a further reading list are provided to complete the AI-automated output.

### 5.1. AI-Generated: Introduction to The Automated Scenarios

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the realm of business events, spearheading a fundamental shift in networking experiences. As a strategic futurist, I have delved into a collection of recent articles to assess the transformative potential

of AI within this sector. Each article contributes unique insights, thus informing the four scenario archetypes crucial to understanding the future landscape of business events.

## *5.2. AI-Generated: Scenario Archetypes*

### *5.2.1. AI-Generated: Continued Growth Scenario*

In this scenario, the business events sector continues to mature steadily, with AI-driven matchmaking and networking technologies becoming more sophisticated and widely adopted. Event technologies, notably those referencing advancements within Apple's ecosystem and live-streaming platforms like DeeStream, are pivotal in enhancing productivity and building intelligent connections within events (Gaming Ideology, 2024; Tech Bullion).

With AI becoming instrumental in predictive analytics and impacting various industries like logistics, its application in event planning is expected to enhance crowd management, cater to attendee preferences effectively, and predict event success accurately (Logistics Management). I foresee a substantial growth in global reach and audience engagement as hybrid event platforms evolve to incorporate real-time collaboration tools and immersive experiences, allowing for seamless integration of virtual participants into physical spaces.

### *5.2.2. AI-Generated: Limits and Discipline Scenario*

Boston's former Mayor's quote, "We will grow, but we will grow wiser," encapsulates the essence of this archetype. Higher event costs could prompt stricter budgetary discipline, as predicted by CEN and intensified by the surge in travel and F&B prices indicated by MeetingsNet (CEN; MeetingsNet). In such a future, AI-led matchmaking must deliver a significant return on investment, streamlining network-building while ensuring that increased efficiency does not compromise the quality of connections.

Additionally, sustainability could become a non-negotiable element as Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) norms influence the industry, demanding eco-friendly events. The sector thus would not only grow but evolve with a strengthened moral compass, integrating ethical considerations such as diversity and inclusion into all facets of event planning.

### *5.2.3. AI-Generated: Decline and Collapse Scenario*

The fragility of economic structures, such as the one India Inc. is aiming to bolster for sustainable manufacturing, could portend a scenario where business events suffer setbacks due to fluctuating global markets or recessionary pressures (Economic Times). In this world, business events must navigate through budget cuts, the pressing need for cost-effective solutions, and the potential loss of sponsor interest.

AI in this scenario aids narrative-creating AI, offering cost-effective networking solutions that are less reliant on sponsorship and high attendee numbers, rather focusing on building impactful, curated experiences for a smaller, more engaged audience.

### *5.2.4. AI-Generated: Transformation Scenario*

The most radical of the scenarios, transformation foresees breakthroughs akin to new technologies like Gen AI that drastically disrupt the business events landscape. As indicated by the Yahoo Finance projections, the event management software market could embrace revolutionary tools, propelled by the surging demand for innovative and intuitive user experiences (Yahoo Finance).

This transformative phase could witness virtual reality and blockchain technology redefining engagement, with live streaming platforms playing a central role in delivering content and extending event reach significantly. The rise of hybrid events might even catalyze a redesign of spaces to accommodate the fusion of digital and physical elements seamlessly.

### *5.2.5. AI-Generated: Implications from Scenarios to Future Practice*

As an event organizer, understanding the array of possible futures illuminated by these scenarios is critical. In the face of such transformative prospects, strategic adaptation is indispensable.

- For Continued Growth, investing in advanced AI-powered networking platforms to improve attendee satisfaction and ROI is advisable. It is important to track technological advancements closely, anticipating the evolution of consumer expectations and industry standards.
- Under Limits and Discipline, ensuring that AI matchmaking systems promote sustainability and inclusivity becomes crucial. Leveraging AI to create more with less could forge a competitive edge.
- In the event of Decline and Collapse, resilience is key. AI should be utilized to optimize lean operations, identify critical synergies, and maintain high-quality networking opportunities even amid financial constraints.
- Embracing Transformation means being at the forefront of change. The event organizer should be willing to pivot rapidly, experimenting with disruptive technologies such as virtual reality and blockchain to lead rather than follow the wave of innovation.

#### 5.2.6. AI-Generated: Further Reading

- Apple's AI-powered Xcode update and the future of software innovation. <https://gamingideology.com/2024/02/17/apples-ai-powered-xcode-update-and-the-future-of-software-innovation/>
- TechBullion: Polygon (MATIC) holders add DeeStream (DST) sensation to portfolios as Bitcoin (BTC) exceeds \$52K. <https://techbullion.com/polygon-matic-holders-add-deestream-dst-sensation-to-portfolios-as-bitcoin-btc-exceeds-52k/>
- 2024 Global Logistics Outlook. [https://www.logisticsmgmt.com/article/2024\\_global\\_logistics\\_outlook\\_crisis\\_mode\\_lingers/lm\\_february\\_2024](https://www.logisticsmgmt.com/article/2024_global_logistics_outlook_crisis_mode_lingers/lm_february_2024)
- Corporate Event News. <https://www.corporateeventnews.com/news/meetings-industry-report-reveals-high-prices-top-mind-planners-2024>
- MeetingsNet Travel Managers' 2024 Predictions. <https://www.meetingsnet.com/corporate-meetings-events/travel-managers-2024-predictions-3-takeaways>
- Yahoo Finance: Event Management Software Market Projection. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/event-management-software-market-projected-143400742.html>
- Economic Times: India Inc on the Move 2024. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-inc-on-the-move-2024-smart-and-sustainable-manufacturing-accelerating-towards-trillion-dollars-and-net-zero/articleshow/107745949.cms>

The authors, in their capacity as researchers, traced back how these scenarios might relate and would be mapped onto the original matrix tool, whereby earlier constructivist research was structured, with positive outcomes. A further methodological alignment of the two research approaches by convergence into the matrix is therefore posited as feasible, however it would exceed the focus and equity of this paper.

## 6. From Automated to Hybrid: Reflexive Note on The Research Practice

The scenarios identified in the above AI-generated output were already provided by the platform in the form of conclusive statements and articulated hypotheses. Therefore, this section focuses on the implications for the practical adoption of the LLM's output.

Within the features of this AI-generated exploration:

- Scenario Analysis
- Table synthesis (**Figure 2**)



Only the Table (Figure 2) provides direct input to the “Phygital” Matrix (Figure 1), converging on a breakdown of findings where the “Phygital” Matrix (Figure 1) might be updated. The other features diverge from the matrix source, providing valuable findings like diverging formats, whereby the researchers might find supplementary or complementary answers to the Research Question. It is possible to therefore sketch the hypothesis that LLMs enable a wider thematic exploration than the constructivist Design Research approach adopted for the reference 2023 paper.

What appears promising is the dynamic evolution between the 2021/2022 forecast and the 2024 signals of change: this might be an area for future investigation with a hybrid approach, combining Generative AI and constructivist Design Research into a new methodological synthesis.

The authors experienced first-hand the empirical and experimental processes and procedures they designed and executed to perform their research for this paper. Within this context, it has become rapidly, although somehow anecdotally, evident how LLMs cannot yet generate output that is valid and usable without human, critical review.

In the end, automated foresight and human reflection seemed to complement each other constructively, leading to novel sequences of inspiration, reflection, and experimentation, where the design of increasingly sophisticated prompts might be positioned as the discriminatory procedure where output might be enabled at a higher quality level.

Specifically, the best opportunities for generating automated foresight might lie in the actual “phygital” combination of Generative AI-prompted content with “Trained Judgement”, or the multilayered accumulation by researchers, as derived from their own historical experience.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

### 7.1. Research Question on The Future of Business Events based on Gen-AI findings

To enable impact analysis, a reflection on trend directions, and to distill these conclusions while addressing the research question of this paper, AI findings were formatted into a specific Table (Figure 2), matching the “Phygital” Matrix (Figure 1) structure, thereby enabling comparison and reflection. The research (utilizing Generative AI) integrated findings into the conceptual framework of the “Phygital” Matrix.

Title	Format	Socio-cultural preferences	Dimensions	Maturity	Impact
A. Integrating Virtual Reality for Enhanced Engagement	digital	Enterprise/ Culture	Learning / Mentoring	emerging	high
B. Data-Driven Personalization for Attendees	digital	Economic/ Commerce	Sales/ Business Development	emerging	high3
C. AI-based Matchmaking for Attendee Networking	digital	Economic/ Commerce	Networking / Matchmaking	emerging	high
D. Decentralized Events with Blockchain Technology	digital	Economic/ Commerce	Sales/ Business Development	emerging	moderate
E. Mobile Event Applications for Enhanced Personalization	digital	Economic/ Commerce	Networking / Matchmaking	emerging	moderate
F. Live Streaming for Extended Event Reach	digital	Enterprise/ Culture	Leadership / Reputation	emerging	high
G. Micro-Moments for Audience Interaction	HYBRID	Economic/ Commerce	Networking / Matchmaking	emerging	moderate
H. Hybrid Event Platforms for Global Reach	HYBRID	Economic/ Commerce	Sales/ Business Development	emerging	very high
I. Real-time Collaboration Tools for Workshops	HYBRID	Enterprise/ Culture	Learning / Mentoring	emerging	moderate
J. Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives	HYBRID	Enterprise/ Culture	Leadership / Reputation	maturing	high
L. Immersive Hybrid Exhibitions	HYBRID	Enterprise/ Culture	Learning / Mentoring	emerging	high
M. Gamification for Attendee Engagement	HYBRID	Enterprise/ Culture	Leadership / Reputation	emerging	moderate
N. Sustainability in Event Planning	physical	Enterprise / Culture	Leadership / Reputation	maturing	high
O. Experiential Marketing at Trade Shows	physical	Enterprise/ Culture	Leadership / Reputation	maturing	high

Figure 2. Table for Synthesis Generative AI Foresight Output.

Using the table, a mission-critical connection was made between the output of LLM-generated trends and the original “Phygital” Matrix under examination in this paper. The “Phygital” marked trends are particularly relevant to understanding the effect of technologies on near-term and future business event design, towards hybrid formats.

## 7.2. Comparison Gen-AI Findings (Figure 2) with Design Research Findings (Figure 1, as in: Bevolo & Amati, 2023)

Making a direct comparison of findings by cell and cross-referenced Indicators within the “Phygital” Matrix (Figure 1), it is possible to articulate the following remarks, completed by reflexive evaluations on expected maturity/impact as elaborated by the authors in 2023/2024, both based on academic reflection and professional observation, however anecdotal:

### 7.2.1. Matrix Cell 4 (Figure 1): Physical Formats / Enterprise & Culture / Leadership & Reputation (Figure 2 – Lines N, O)

In 2021/2022, physical formats to increase reputation and display leadership were described as future-proof at local and regional levels, due to the need and demand for in-person storytelling. However, because of the trend of remote event design following the pandemic, interest in this kind of event seemed less relevant than in hybrid or digital formats. For 2024, the LLM identified experiential marketing, trade shows, and event planning as highly impacting future areas of innovation, provided Sustainability is duly factored at the design level. This is perhaps the area where the “return to order” characterizing the post-pandemic phase is most noticeable.

Expected maturity/impact: maturing / high.

### 7.2.2. Matrix Cell 5 (Figure 1): Hybrid Formats / Economic & Commerce / Sales & B.D. (Figure 2 – Line: H)

“Shopable” functionalities within applications were identified in 2021/2022 as an opportunity for inclusion through commerce across borders, thanks to the technical possibility of converting digital dialogs into financial transactions accessible to all. In 2024, the availability of hybrid platforms is identified as an opportunity for global reach, hence confirming the relevance of such digitally enabled ubiquity. This is expected to have a very high impact on business events soon.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / very high.

### 7.2.3. Matrix Cell 6 (Figure 1): Hybrid Formats / Economic & Commerce / Networking & Matchmaking (Figure 2- Line: G)

Beyond serendipity as a needed mechanism of informal social interaction, the 2021/2022 study highlighted the relevance of communal values (e.g. subscribing to moral design strategies) (Weernart, 2022) in the adoption of technology. The LLM suggests, instead, a purely matchmaking mechanism to facilitate micro-moments of interaction. It seems a more culturally neutral and functionally focused outcome.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / moderate.

### 7.2.4. Matrix Cell 7 (Figure 1) Hybrid formats / Enterprise & Culture / Learning & Mentoring (Figure 2 – lines I, L)

In 2021/2022, this was seen as an extremely promising combination because of the impact of pandemic prevention policies (i.e. remote working). At the top of this organizational trend emphasized by emerging technologies like AR or VR, it seemed that a tipping point was in sight, where remote working might become the new normal. What is left in 2024 are emerging technologies to further improve the functionalities of tools for remote workshops or sessions, expected to have a moderate impact in the future, as well as immersive experience-focused hybrid formats, with an expected high impact. Perhaps, the aspired remote working revolution was more of a Fata Morgana, than a real revolution.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / moderate to high.

*7.2.5. Matrix Cell 8 (Figure 1) Hybrid Formats / Enterprise & Culture / Leadership & Reputation (Figure 2 – Lines J, M)*

Further, than the trend identified in Cell 7 (Figure 1), the Dimension of Leadership & Reputation displayed possible evolutions towards a curatorial turn in the design and execution of hybrid events for thought leadership and personal reputation within corporate and business events in 2021/2022. In 2024, the relevance of Diversity & Inclusion initiatives, which has been maturing for a few years, was confirmed as highly impacting future theming of business events. Furthermore, a less impacting adoption of gaming formats through hybrid channels was associated with this potential direction.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging to maturing / moderate to high.

*7.2.6. Matrix Cell 9 (Figure 1) Digital Formats / Economic & Commerce / Sales & B.D. (Figure 2 – Lines B, D)*

This trend was assessed as highly relevant in 2021/2022, with a particular focus on commodities and utilitarian categories with potentially great benefits for the environment in terms of mitigating climate change by reducing business travel. In 2024, data-driven personalization (emerging / high impact) and the adoption of blockchain techniques (emerging / moderate impact) represent the natural extension.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / moderate to high.

*7.2.7. Matrix Cell 10 (Figure 1) Digital Formats / Economic & Commerce / Networking & Matchmaking (Figure 2 – Lines C, E)*

This cell was met with relatively mild interest in 2021/2022, although it appeared beneficial for organizations to adopt remote communication for their business networking. In line, the 2024 constituencies of AI-based matchmaking and mobile applications for further personalization are identified as emerging, however the latter with moderate impact on the business event field, whereas AI-based matchmaking is expected to have a high impact. Further design and development of mobile solutions might be required to match the sparkling power of human contact.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / moderate to high.

*7.2.8. Matrix Cell 11 (Figure 1) Digital Formats / Enterprise & Culture / Learning & Mentoring (Figure 2 – Line A)*

In 2023, this specific cell was identified as highly impactful in the short term, because of the measures adopted to mentor talent and ensure teamwork during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, with key challenges related to usability (e.g. UX design). In 2024, engagement is confirmed as key, only given the integration of virtual reality. There seems to therefore be a progression toward further implementation of digital technologies at an even more advanced level.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / high.

*7.2.9. Matrix Cell 12 (Figure 1) Digital Formats / Enterprise & Culture / Leadership & Reputation (Figure 2 – line F)*

In 2021/2022, the expectations were that “push content” in the form of speeches, clips, and other forms of frontal “lecturing”, would migrate to digital formats, also for asynchronous broadcasting and availability on on-demand digital platforms. In 2024, the potential of live streaming was identified as potentially relevant for the extension of the reach of live events, therefore bringing back the focus on synchronous experiences of content at the time of personal performance.

Expected maturity/impact: emerging / high.

A continuity between co-designed trend insights by Design Research, in a highly participatory process, and information aggregated and analyzed using Generative AI, might be perceived at least at the operational level of reporting conclusions. What appears however promising is the dynamic evolution and the potential cracks between the 2021/2022 forecast and the 2024 indicators of future evolutions: this might be an area for future investigation with a hybrid approach, combining AI and constructivist Design Research into a new methodological synthesis.

### 7.3. Statement On the Expected Impact of Research

This paper offered two specific benefits: practical research for application in strategic planning and theoretical considerations for the value of strategic foresight automated output within the events industry. It consolidates strategic research necessary to build a strategic plan relevant for the next 2-5 years, also based on a validated matrix tool. As an application of strategic foresight, the Phygital Matrix, and LLMs; the Findings also provide a systematic approach for academics and industry professionals to examine and anticipate the future form and function of automation within the events industry, the foresight industry, and academic publishing.

The paper offers a variety of strategic research findings and methodological reflections based on a platform that automatically tags, categorizes, and highlights information within online sources, functioning much like an automated expert survey. The AI platform also automatically analyses and applies different strategic tools, functioning as an automated consultant. With this research, event organizers and other stakeholders can better understand the trends currently impacting the market while beginning to imagine the different plausible futures that could transpire before the end of the decade. These findings and insights may, therefore, lead to better-prepared and more agile strategic decisions within an industry of constant instabilities.

The report might also provide events industry stakeholders with data to evaluate whether the automated output of the platform could be appropriate – whether in collaborative planning workshops or by a solo planner – to advance their own thinking and strategic planning. Likewise, foresight researchers might recognize the same value of this report as the application of strategic foresight to an industry laden with upheaval. Academics might also consider how LLMs can be used to further the interactions of diverse domains such as foresight and events management.

In particular, the authors feel they reached the following milestones:

- At a general methodological level, the research process was validated in professional communities by a substantial subsequent research project on the future of lighting design, presented in London as a keynote at the IALD (International Association of Lighting Designers) 2024 congress (June 2024) and further published in a leading architectural lighting magazine (Bevolo & Draeger, 2024) and a further webinar by world’s largest manufacturer in conversation with their Head of Design (Signify Lighting Academy, planned on January, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025);
- At a generative content level, the “phygital” matrix was validated in two workshops held in academic years 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 in collaboration with Rinco van Rijn, former Global Manager of Events and Sponsorships at Signify, former known as Philips Lighting, at the MA Master of Strategic Events Management, Breda University of applied sciences, The Netherlands, where students with junior to senior professional background appreciated the versatility of the tool and the actionability of generated content to their client companies and educational purposes.

Collectively, this paper’s mix of practical applications for strategic planning and theoretical considerations for AI distinguishes it as a meaningful addition to the canon of events-related research, setting a benchmark for future explorations into industry planning and the integration of AI in academic inquiries.

## 8. Future Research

The goals of AI research continue to progress, and the current LLMs are only the latest stage in a decades-long history of applications. Soon the internet will be further inundated with automated content potentially to the point of obsolescence. Event industry insiders and other stakeholders can use the Findings of this report to objectively discern between human and LLM authorship. They can then evaluate how they wish to interact with and draw conclusions from such content.

In converging towards a synthesis for our “Conclusions” above, the authors identified and herewith propose at least two lines of future research development to optimally feed the next wave of Generative AI empirical research:

### ***8.1. Scenario Validation***

Scenarios are standard tools in foresight consulting and future research (Molitor, 2009). While the adoption of the “phygital” matrix might enable a critical review and a mission-critical update of content, at the level of methods, it appears advisable to develop techniques devoted to the validation of the scenario format itself. This is at par with more general concerns on evaluation capacity in foresight (Gardner & Bishop, 2019), to enable learning loops across consulting and academics (Dator, 2019). Because of this, Generative AI is just a new technological opportunity that brings challenges to scenario creation and validation. The authors would therefore state that the validation of scenarios and scenario techniques in general terms, is a relevant topic for future reflexive and research output. However, this is not within the scope and focus of this paper.

### ***8.2. Generative AI Hypercreativity***

The current gap between Generative AI hallucinations and valid automated foresight findings might be reframed as a hypercreative moment. Namely, in automated processes, Generative AI generates such hallucinations based on unconventional and unorthodox connections at a semantic level, therefore standing for the abductive spark of visionaries and original thinkers in human terms. This might require future researchers and scholars to change their perspective, whereby hallucinations shift from invalid byproducts to a highly valuable output thanks to their novelty and radical originality. Such a shift requires the ability and flexibility of researchers to change both epistemological vision and operational praxis, moving from acritical editing of Generative AI output to appreciative embracing of hallucinations based on their Trained Judgement (Bevolo, 2024). In this sense, one might conclude that pending the next generation of AI innovation and revolution, the future of (automated) future research might be described as less “artificial”, and more than ever, “phygital” indeed, because it will require the hybrid interaction of humans and machines, in frequently reiterated loops of divergence (e.g. by hallucinations) and convergence (e.g. rationalization) through matrix mapping. One might notice how the key fundamental mechanism of divergence/convergence is the very DNA of the design process as described in the Double Diamond approach by the UK Design Council which is a standard reference in the global creative industry (Design Council UK, 2024). This might be further researched as a vital touchpoint between automated foresight and Design Futures. In a separate peer-reviewed essay, currently accepted for publication (at the time of submission of this paper), the authors developed a dedicated proposal for a repeatable process to include and leverage hypercreative hallucinations in automated foresight practices, by design.

### ***8.3. Framework For Future Research and Further Validation***

This paper is the outcome of several research activities performed in 2023/2024, both empirical, e.g. Gen-AI experiments and experiences at the level of content generation and hybrid human-machine optimization; and reflexive, e.g. evaluation based on Trained Judgement of intermediate results. The authors have elaborated the fundamental elements for a hybrid research process, involving both automated and participatory elements, across a continuum that sees man and machine engage in a virtual dialog towards the best possible outcome.

Intending to structure the next steps in a Gen-AI / Design Research hybrid agenda, the authors reflexively elaborated a framework for repeatable implementation, with a focus on the entire leisure sector, therefore at a more general level than business events only. This framework includes three key constituencies: a) archetypical scenarios, based on Dator’s seminal work in this domain, whereby the authors specified by Gen-AI four basic and universal leisure futures macro-scenarios; b) a dedicated tool, mixing the participatory qualities of trend analysis in Design Research with the dedicated outcome of leisure-specific archetypical scenarios, and c) a system of futures cards, inspired by past Design Research best practices, from Philips to ARUP, however automated as based on Gen-AI generation. This framework is the subject of a separate peer-reviewed submission by the authors, currently in its finalization.

The combined system offered by archetypical scenarios with participatory mapping tool will be tested in Semester 2 2024/2025, in an academic activity in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of vocational students at the Leisure Management specialization at Breda University of Applied Sciences, where 120 students will engage with the generation and mapping of their reflexive trends in the field, as based on their placements and curriculum for professional leadership. This Research & Knowledge Development program, under the new professorship Leisure in Social Context by Dr. Joern Fricke, will enable both generations

of student self-perceived trends in leisure industries, as well student interaction with automated leisure cards as created by Gen-AI. The authors consider this triangulation as a key moment of validation by comparison of Gen-AI futures signals and trend reports versus human participatory processes of constructivist co-creation, as mandated by Design Research.

Lastly, in August 2025, the authors will present key conclusions and findings of the overall process at the 18<sup>th</sup> World Leisure Congress, as organized by the World Leisure Organization in Breda, The Netherlands, with a contribution entailing a special track within the “Leisure and Innovation” session; a workshop with academics and professionals; and a dedicated abstract for a frontal presentation. Then, the authors will consider their development process as complete. This paper will be a key stepping stone to optimization based on findings and feedback before implementing the newly defined hybrid method in business and scientific settings.

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