

# India's event industry diversity deficit: are minority students left out?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research aims to identify the key obstacles minority students encounter in the event management industry and industry practices that may hinder inclusivity and propose strategies for fostering greater diversity and equality in event management jobs.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with minority students belonging to various universities of India who are either doing internships or who were placed in the event industry. Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify common challenges related to event industry experiences, industry exposure and cultural inclusion.

**Findings** – Preliminary findings indicate that minority students face barriers such as barriers to mentorship and advancement, workplace culture and macroaggressions, access to opportunities and resources and lack of representation and leadership roles. Industry experiences vary, with some students reporting inclusive initiatives, while others highlight gaps in diversity efforts.

**Practical implications** – This study provides valuable insights for event industry professionals and policymakers to create a more inclusive work environment for minority students. Additionally, event industry stakeholders can use these findings to develop more equitable hiring practices and inclusive professional development opportunities. Addressing the diversity deficit in the event industry can contribute to a more representative and innovative event industry.

**Originality/value** – This research fills a critical gap in literature by specifically examining the experiences of minority students in event management, an area that has received limited academic attention. By incorporating firsthand student experiences, this research offers unique, data-driven insights that can inform future diversity initiatives in both event sector and academia.

**Keywords** Diversity, Inclusion, Minority students, Event industry, Industry barriers, Higher education

**Paper type** Research article

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## Introduction

The event industry, known for its vibrancy and ability to bring people together, plays a significant role in shaping cultural, social, and economic landscapes (Burman *et al.*, 2025). Known for its vibrancy, the industry encompasses a wide range of activities, including festivals, conferences, concerts, corporate events, and community gatherings. These events bring people together, creating shared experiences that transcend boundaries and foster a sense of unity (Varnier *et al.*, 2025). Culturally, the event industry plays a pivotal role in showcasing traditions, art, and heritage, allowing communities to express their identities and celebrate their uniqueness (Darcy and Dickson, 2025). Socially, events act as catalysts for building relationships, networking, and promoting inclusivity by providing spaces where individuals from diverse backgrounds can interact and collaborate (Antchak and Eckley, 2025). Economically, event industry generates significant revenue, creates jobs, and stimulates local businesses, making it a vital contributor to global and regional economies. However, beneath its dynamic surface lies a pressing issue: a lack of diversity, particularly in the representation and inclusion of minority students (Kumar *et al.*, 2025). Simamora *et al.* (2025) stated that minority refers to groups that are numerically smaller or socially marginalized compared to the dominant population, often distinguished by race, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, or socioeconomic status. This diversity deficit raises critical questions about equity, access, and opportunity within the industry, as well as its ability to remain relevant in an increasingly multicultural world (Najwa and Rahmiaji, 2025). This diversity deficit undermines the event industry's potential to reflect the multicultural societies it serves and limits its ability to innovate and grow. Research shows that diverse teams outperform



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homogeneous ones in creativity, problem-solving, and financial performance (Hunt *et al.*, 2018).

Diversity in the workplace has long been recognized as a driver of innovation, creativity, and economic growth (Herring, 2009). A diverse workforce brings varied perspectives, experiences, and ideas, which are essential for addressing complex challenges and fostering inclusive environments. However, the event industry, which thrives on creativity and human connection, appears to lag behind other sectors in achieving meaningful diversity (Fletcher and Hylton, 2018). Studies have shown that minority groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, are underrepresented in event management roles, leadership positions, and educational pipelines (Thomas *et al.*, 2018). This underrepresentation is particularly concerning given the growing diversity of the global population and the increasing demand for events that reflect and celebrate multiculturalism. Diversity is essential for fostering innovation, creativity, and social cohesion. It brings together individuals with unique perspectives, experiences, and skills, enabling organizations and societies to solve problems more effectively and adapt to changing environments (Calver *et al.*, 2023). Companies with diverse leadership teams are 33% more likely to achieve above-average profitability (Dolan *et al.*, 2020).

The exclusion of minority students from the event industry often begins at the educational level. Event management programs, which serve as gateways to the industry, frequently fail to attract and retain minority students due to systemic barriers such as limited access to resources, lack of mentorship, and unconscious bias (Smith and Johnson, 2020). These barriers are compounded by the event industry's reputation for being insular and reliant on networks that are often inaccessible to minority groups. As a result, many minority students are either unaware of career opportunities in the event industry or discouraged from pursuing them, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion (Leigh and Melwani, 2019).

Past literature says that there is limited exploration of systemic barriers and institutional practices that hinder the inclusion of minority students in the event industry. While existing studies highlight the lack of diversity in the industry (Harris and Jones, 2020), there is insufficient research on how educational institutions and industry partnerships contribute to this disparity. For instance, minority students often face unequal access to internships, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs, which are critical for career advancement in the event industry (Smith and Johnson, 2020). However, the specific mechanisms through which these barriers operate remain underexplored (McDonald *et al.*, 2018). There is gap in the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in shaping minority students' experiences in the event industry (Dennissen *et al.*, 2020). For example, minority women often face compounded challenges, but this intersectional perspective is rarely addressed in existing literature (Taylor *et al.*, 2022). Past literature has been studied on challenges by ethnic minorities in small business (Rahman *et al.*, 2018), sexual and gender minority (Danckers *et al.*, 2024), challenges faced by Arab minorities (Mahajne and Alnabilsy, 2025), religious minority in Bali (Abbas *et al.*, 2025), Racial minority entrepreneurs (Van Merriënboer *et al.*, 2025), but a specific study on challenges faced by minority students in event industry is still at nascent stage. Therefore, this research aims to identify the key obstacles minority students encounter in event management industry and industry practices that may hinder inclusivity and propose strategies for fostering greater diversity and equality in event management jobs.

### Literature review

This literature review examines the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the event industry, with a particular focus on how systemic barriers may exclude minority students from entering and advancing in the field (Perrin *et al.*, 2020). The event industry, despite its vibrant and dynamic nature, faces significant challenges in achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), particularly for minority groups (Burman *et al.*, 2025; Chauhan *et al.*, 2020).

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Research highlights widespread dissatisfaction with DEI initiatives, underscoring systemic barriers that hinder equitable representation and participation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). For instance, the Events Industry Council's (EIC) 2022 Equity Benchmarking Study revealed stark disparities: while 61% of surveyed event professionals identified as white, only 15% of senior management roles were held by Black individuals, and a mere 6% at the board level. This underrepresentation is compounded by structural racism, with Black professionals rating their DEI experiences 11% lower than white counterparts across all dimensions, pointing to subtle but pervasive forms of discrimination. Such findings align with broader critiques of the industry's failure to dismantle systemic inequities, as tokenistic measures like recruitment drives often fail to address power imbalances or cultural change (Abukhalaf and von Meding, 2021; Calver *et al.*, 2023).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are essential pillars in creating supportive educational environments where all students, particularly those from minority backgrounds, feel seen, valued, and empowered (Walters and Higgins-Desbiolles, 2025). Minority students often face unique challenges in connecting with mentors who understand the complexities of their identities and experiences (Hunt *et al.*, 2018). Factors such as disability, religion, sexual orientation, caste, and social class significantly shape their academic journey and personal development. However, mainstream mentoring systems frequently lack adequate representation or cultural sensitivity, leading to feelings of isolation and marginalization among these students (Haq *et al.*, 2024). When mentors fail to acknowledge or appreciate these differences, it becomes difficult for students to share their concerns or seek guidance, ultimately limiting their growth and confidence. Limited access to informal networking and cultural capital can restrict mentorship, guidance, and advancement opportunities. Additionally, biases in promotion and unequal access to professional development resources further hinder their career progression. Inclusive mentorship programs that prioritize DEI can help bridge this gap by actively recruiting diverse mentors, promoting empathy-based training, and encouraging open dialogue around identity (Calver *et al.*, 2023).

Yi *et al.* (2020) stated that the Diversity and Inclusion deficit is further exacerbated by gender disparities. Although women constitute over 75% of the event workforce, they report lower satisfaction with DEI efforts compared to men, particularly in leadership roles. Male respondents were 7% more satisfied with DEI experiences, reflecting entrenched patriarchal norms that privilege male influence in decision-making (Slobodin and Masalha, 2020). This gender gap intersects with racial inequities, as women of color face compounded barriers (Antchak and Eckley, 2025). For example, Cathy Breden of the EIC noted that improving minority representation remains a "mere statistical activity" without addressing workplace experiences, calling for "unconventional practices" to foster genuine inclusion. The event industry often relies on performative allyship, such as surface-level diversity statements, without implementing meaningful accountability measures, thereby continuing to reinforce these disparities (Marks *et al.*, 2020; Perez-Brena *et al.*, 2018). In India's event management industry, minority students often face barriers to securing internships and entry-level roles due to recruitment practices that fail to reach or fairly assess diverse candidates. Heavy reliance on networks, biased screening, and unequal access to opportunity listings limit their entry into the field. Financial constraints, especially with unpaid or low-paid internships, further exclude students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Event management industry**

The event management industry is a dynamic and fast-growing sector that plays a crucial role in organizing and executing various events, ranging from corporate conferences and trade shows to weddings, concerts, and sports events (Siemiatycki, 2019). This industry thrives on creativity, meticulous planning, and seamless execution to deliver memorable experiences for clients and attendees. Event managers are responsible for coordinating logistics, budgeting, marketing, vendor management, and risk assessment to ensure events run smoothly (Crawford

*et al.*, 2020). With the rise of experiential marketing, businesses increasingly rely on events to engage customers, making event management a vital component of modern marketing strategies (Conus and Fahrni, 2019). This industry has also embraced digital transformation, leveraging technology such as virtual and hybrid event platforms, event management software, and social media promotion to enhance reach and engagement (Tran *et al.*, 2021).

The global event management market continues to expand, driven by increasing demand for personalized and immersive experiences (Calver *et al.*, 2023; Minefee *et al.*, 2018). Key trends include sustainability initiatives, such as eco-friendly events with reduced carbon footprints, and the integration of artificial intelligence for attendee tracking and personalized recommendations (Haq *et al.*, 2024). Despite challenges like rising costs and post-pandemic shifts in attendee expectations, the event industry remains resilient, adapting to new trends and technologies (Seale *et al.*, 2023). Corporate events remain a major revenue driver, while social events like weddings and festivals contribute significantly to the market (González-Granadillo *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the rise of destination events and luxury experiences has opened new opportunities for event planners. Success in this industry requires strong organizational skills, adaptability, and a customer-centric approach. As the world becomes more interconnected, the event management industry will continue to evolve, offering innovative solutions to create unforgettable experiences for diverse audiences (Seale *et al.*, 2023; Hauber-Özer *et al.*, 2023).

### **Diversity and equality in event management industry**

The event industry, as a microcosm of broader societal structures, reflects persistent challenges in achieving meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Calver *et al.*, 2023). Despite growing recognition of DEI's importance, systemic barriers continue to marginalize minority groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, women, and persons with disabilities (Ezenel and Ece, 2023). Research highlights that while diversity is often framed as a moral or economic imperative, its implementation remains superficial in many sectors of the industry (McCandless *et al.*, 2022; Kipnis *et al.*, 2021). In event management industry, minority students encounter microaggressions, subtle yet harmful remarks or actions rooted in stereotypes and cultural insensitivity. Workplace norms that overlook diverse traditions, coupled with tokenism, can lead to undue pressure and feelings of being reduced to a group identity. Exclusion from informal networking and team-building activities further isolates them, limiting workplace integration and growth (Abbas *et al.*, 2025).

Corporate activism in events, such as debates around hosting conferences in politically contentious regions (e.g. SXSW in Texas amid anti-LGBTQ + legislation), reveals tensions between public DEI commitments and pragmatic silence (Tavares, 2024). While some companies, like Clubhouse, withdrew from SXSW to protest discriminatory policies, others opted to platform marginalized voices within the event, highlighting divergent strategies to navigate DEI challenges (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2022). However, such efforts often lack systemic impact, as destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and event planners struggle to translate external messaging into internal equity. A 2022 study on DMOs found that 18% of respondents were neutral or negative about their organization's alignment with community diversity, underscoring a disconnect between rhetoric and practice.

People who are d/Deaf, disabled, or neurodivergent often face significant access barriers when it comes to participating in events, both as audience members and as part of the workforce. These barriers may include physical inaccessibility, lack of sign language interpreters, poor acoustics, overstimulating environments, or the absence of quiet or sensory-friendly spaces (Gough and Dort, 2025). For neurodivergent individuals, the social and sensory demands of events can be overwhelming, while those who are d/Deaf may struggle with limited communication access, such as the lack of captions or interpreters. Similarly, disabled individuals may find it difficult to navigate venues that do not consider mobility needs or provide necessary accommodations. As a result, these communities are frequently excluded

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from opportunities for professional growth, cultural participation, and social engagement (Liu *et al.*, 2025). To create truly inclusive environments, event organizers must adopt a proactive and intersectional approach to accessibility. This includes consulting with individuals from these communities, incorporating universal design principles, and ensuring accommodation is available and well-communicated. Accessibility should not be an afterthought—it must be embedded in planning from the beginning. When events are designed to be inclusive, they allow everyone to participate fully, fostering a richer, more diverse exchange of ideas and experiences that benefit all (Kahn *et al.*, 2025).

Until recently, much of existing events' literature has concentrated on measuring and evaluating impacts on communities and places (Langen and Garcia, 2009; Mor Barak *et al.*, 2022; Preuss, 2007; Wood, 2005; Triana *et al.*, 2021). Within these mainly economic-driven contexts, research has, for the most part, prioritized narratives of dominant cultures and privileged groups. As Finkel *et al.* (2019) argue, "Although there has been a recent swell of media attention and public interest in this area, research focusing on non-hegemonic populations as they relate to events environments still needs further exploration. It is only recently that issues of under-representation, marginalization, and intolerance have begun to emerge in the critical events discourse." A "turn" in events studies research can be seen to be taking place as critical event studies gains momentum, drawing from cross-disciplinary literature and cross-fertilizing with broader social science approaches and methodologies. This has meant that more and more events are being viewed through gender lenses (e.g. Dasgupta and Stout, 2014a; Finkel and Finkel, 2015), critical race lenses (e.g. Fletcher and Hylton, 2018), disability lenses (e.g. McGillivray *et al.*, 2021; Misener *et al.*, 2018), and from different points of view to highlight less conventional power relationships (e.g. Duffy and Mair, 2018; Walters and Higgins-Desbiolles, 2025).

### Research methodology

Our preliminary analysis aimed to identify the key obstacles minority students encounter in event management industry and industry practices that may hinder inclusivity. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the respondents through offline and online sessions. The justification for selecting semi-structured interviews is the reason that it has the strength to empower a researcher to collect "rich" data. This approach enables researchers to explore and clarify the subjects under investigation in greater depth (Bebbie, 1990). When participant responses are vague or overly brief, this method offers the flexibility to seek further clarification—either by requesting additional details or prompting with examples (Carey, 2013a, b). Data was gathered from a total of 33 participants, each of whom was interviewed on an individual basis. This figure was obtained at the stage of data saturation, which refers to the stage in data collection where no new themes or insights emerge. As noted by Hennink and Kaiser (2016a, b), developing a well-rounded and in-depth understanding of an issue typically necessitates a minimum of 24 interviews. All interviews were conducted in English language. The data collection process spanned from November 2024 to February 2025. Before taking the interviews, all the ethical practices were considered. The in-depth interviews were conducted with the help of judgmental cum purposive sampling technique and the respondents are various students belonging to various universities of India who are either doing internships or who are placed in the event industry. Purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to identify the sample for the study. According to Black (2010a, b) purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method, and it includes the selection of the sample chosen on the basis of the judgment of the researcher. Qualitative research was undertaken to identify the key obstacles minority students encounter in the event management industry and industry practices that may hinder inclusivity and to propose strategies for fostering greater diversity and equality in event management jobs.

The primary objective of the study was to develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by minority students within the event management

sector. A qualitative research approach was deemed suitable, justified by the study's ontological stance, its objectives, and methodological alignment. Aligned with the interpretive paradigm, this research adopted a qualitative methodology, recognizing that the subjective experiences, feelings, and viewpoints of participants are inherently complex and fluid, and thus not adequately captured through quantitative or statistical measures. The questionnaire aimed to explore the primary barriers encountered by minority students in the event management industry, along with identifying industry practices that may contribute to a lack of inclusivity. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely utilized technique in qualitative research. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the dataset, which often includes sources like interview transcripts. The researcher conducted a thorough review of the transcripts to identify recurring ideas, topics, and patterns mentioned by participants. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its practical and adaptable nature. As noted by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), it is a versatile method that does not adhere to any one theoretical or epistemological position, making it applicable across a broad range of research frameworks. NVivo (version 15) was utilized for the data analysis of the transcripts. This decision was made to enable deeper engagement with the data, facilitating a more immersive and insightful analytical process.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained to protect respondents' identities and ensure a safe environment for sharing their experiences. The research adhered to ethical guidelines for working with vulnerable or underrepresented groups, ensuring sensitivity to participants lived experiences. Care was taken to use neutral and respectful language in all survey and interview materials to avoid any form of bias or discomfort. The data collected is securely stored and will only be used for academic and research purposes in line with the approved research protocol.

### Data analysis and findings

The data collected for the study was first checked for the socio demographic profiles of the respondents and results are depicted in the [Table 1](#). The initial stage of data analysis involved open coding, which was carried out after importing the transcripts into NVivo-15. This stage focused on recognizing, categorizing, labeling, and interpreting the content within the transcripts. Following this, axial coding was implemented, requiring researchers to form subcategories and group related open codes. This process aimed to develop preliminary insights into the relationships among different phenomena ([Tan et al., 2013](#)). The final stage, known as selective coding, involved a more abstract approach, where all subcategories were synthesized into a central, overarching category. According to [Strauss and Corbin \(1998\)](#), such categories hold significant analytical value as they can aid in explanation and prediction.

**Table 1.** Socio demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender				
Male		Female		Third gender
16		13		4
Minority category				
Disability	Religion	Sexual orientation	Casteism	Social class
05	11	05	04	08
<b>Source(s):</b> Compiled by researchers on the basis of information obtained through collected data				

After administering thematic analysis on the transcripts, 7 subcategories emerged (Lack of Mentors, Bias in Professional Development, Lack of Cultural Sensitivity, Insensitive Remarks, Unequal Access to internships and Entry-level positions, Financial Constraints Representations and Roles) and these have been later regrouped into 04 different themes namely, *Barriers to Mentorship and Advancement*, *Workplace Culture and Macroaggressions*, *Access to Opportunities and Resources*, and *Lack of Representation and Leadership Roles* (see [Figure 1](#)). The detailed results of this analysis are depicted in [Table 2](#). The synthesis of the thematic analysis is as follows.

## Discussion

### *Theme 1: barriers to mentorship and advancement*

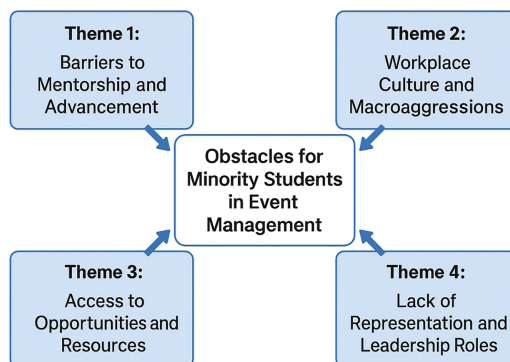
This theme encapsulates the challenges minority students face in accessing guidance, support, and opportunities for career progression within the event management industry. These barriers can stem from a lack of relatable mentors, exclusionary networking practices, biases in promotion processes, and unequal access to professional development resources ([Tileaga et al., 2022](#)).

Minority students often find it challenging to connect with mentors who understand their unique experiences and the specific obstacles they encounter due to their identity (Disability, Religion, Sexual orientation, Caste, and Social Class). The absence of relatable mentors can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of tailored guidance on navigating event industry-specific challenges ([Bourdieu, 1986](#)). Furthermore, informal networking, which often plays a crucial role in securing mentorship and advancement opportunities, can be inaccessible to minority students who may not be part of dominant social circles or share the same cultural capital. Unconscious or conscious biases within promotion processes can also hinder their upward mobility, leading to a sense that their talents and contributions are not equally recognized. Finally, disparities in access to professional development opportunities, such as workshops, training programs, and industry conferences, can further disadvantage minority students in their career trajectories ([Marks et al., 2020](#); [Perez-Brena et al., 2018](#)).

I really wished there was someone senior who also had a disability that I could talk to. They would understand the extra planning I sometimes need for site visits or the challenges of long event days. Without that, I felt like I was figuring things out on my own.

The internships that seemed to lead to permanent roles often required you to have connections within the industry, which I simply didn't have coming from my social background. It felt like a closed door.

I felt like the senior staff just didn't understand the extra time or different approaches I sometimes needed due to my disability for tasks. There wasn't anyone who could really guide me on how to navigate that within the fast-paced event environment.



**Figure 1.** Obstacles for minority students in event management. Source: Data analysis

**Table 2.** Synthesis of open coding, axial coding and selective coding

Open codes (generated from data)	Axial coding (sub categories)	Selective coding (themes/categories)
<p>“Coming from a different socio-economic background, I didn’t have the same connections or know the ‘right’ people to even approach for mentorship. It felt like an old boys’ club sometimes.” (R5)</p> <p>“I was hesitant to be open about my identity at work, and that made it harder to connect with senior colleagues on a personal level, which often seemed to be how mentorships naturally formed.” (R2)</p> <p>“I felt like the senior staff just didn’t understand the extra time or different approaches I sometimes needed due to my disability for tasks. There wasn’t anyone who could really guide me on how to navigate that within the fast-paced event environment.” (R10)</p> <p>“During Ramadan, it was difficult to participate in some of the professional events like workshops, or trainings that are crucial for advancement. I felt a bit left out of those connections.” (R4)</p> <p>“I feel due to my social background, I wasn’t given the equal amount of opportunities or consideration for a position, as compared my fellow interviewees. It highly demotivated me” (R7)</p> <p>“During a team lunch at an event, there were jokes made about religious dietary restrictions, and I felt really uncomfortable and like I had to explain myself.” (R15)</p> <p>“There were constant assumptions made about my background and where I came from, sometimes in a condescending way. It made it hard to feel like I truly belonged.” (R3)</p> <p>“I’ve had colleagues make comments about my ‘inspiration’ for overcoming my challenges, which just makes me feel like my abilities are constantly being questioned.” (R21)</p> <p>“Someone once made a casual homophobic remark, not realizing I was part of the LGBTQ + community. It made me feel unsafe and unwelcome.” (R23)</p> <p>“Many internships seemed to focus heavily on physical tasks without considering accommodations or alternative roles that I could excel in.” (R16)</p> <p>“I worried that if I was open about my identity during the application process, it might negatively impact my chances, so I felt pressured to hide a part of myself.” (R22)</p> <p>“I feel the hiring processes in events industry, is not be designed to attract and fairly evaluate diverse candidates. You need certain resources to be at the same level as your competition.” (R30)</p> <p>“Most of the internships I found were unpaid, which simply wasn’t an option for me financially, limiting the opportunities I could even consider.” (R11)</p>	<p>Lack of Mentors</p> <p>Bias in Professional Development</p> <p>Lack of Cultural Sensitivity</p> <p>Insensitive Remarks</p> <p>Unequal Access to internships and Entry-level positions</p> <p>Financial Constraints</p>	<p>Barriers to Mentorship and Advancement</p> <p>Workplace Culture and Macroaggressions</p> <p>Access to Opportunities and Resources</p>

(continued)

**Table 2.** Continued

Open codes (generated from data)	Axial coding (sub categories)	Selective coding (themes/categories)
<p>“I’ve never seen anyone in a senior event management role who has a visible disability. It makes me wonder if it’s even a realistic goal for me.” (R28)</p> <p>“It’s disheartening to not see openly LGBTQ + individuals in prominent positions. It sometimes feels like you have to choose between your identity and your career.” (R19)</p> <p>“The leadership in this industry seems to come from very specific social circles. It makes it feel like there’s an invisible ceiling for people from different backgrounds.” (R33)</p>	<p><i>Representations and Roles</i></p>	<p><i>Lack of Representation and Leadership Roles</i></p>
<p><b>Source(s):</b> Compiled by researchers on the basis of information obtained through collected data</p>		

### *Theme 2: Workplace Culture and Macroaggressions*

This theme highlights the presence of unwelcoming or subtly hostile workplace cultures characterized by macroaggression, a lack of cultural sensitivity, tokenism, and exclusion from social and team-building activities. These experiences can create a sense of marginalization and negatively impact on the well-being and professional growth of minority students (Yoder, 1991).

Macroaggressions, defined as subtle, often unintentional, yet harmful verbal, nonverbal, or environmental slights, snubs, or insults that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages targeting marginalized groups, can be pervasive in the event management industry. These can manifest as insensitive remarks, stereotypes, or assumptions based on a student’s identity (Sue, 2010). A lack of cultural sensitivity within the workplace can further exacerbate these issues, where the norms and practices may not accommodate or respect diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions (Liu *et al.*, 2025). Minority students may also experience tokenism, where they are treated as symbolic representatives of their group, leading to undue pressure and a feeling of being seen as a monolith rather than an individual. Exclusion from informal social activities and team-building exercises can further isolate these students and hinder their integration into the workplace culture (Kahn *et al.*, 2025).

Someone once told me I was “so brave” for working in such a demanding industry despite my disability. It felt like they were surprised I could even do the job.

A colleague assumed I wouldn’t be interested in a particular client event because it was geared towards a heterosexual audience. It felt like my professional interests were being limited by their assumptions about my identity.

I’ve had colleagues make comments about my “inspiration” for overcoming my challenges, which just makes me feel like my abilities are constantly being questioned.

### *Theme 3: Access to Opportunities and Resources*

This theme focuses on the disparities minority students face in accessing crucial opportunities such as internships and entry-level positions, as well as the resources necessary for professional development and success in the event management industry. These barriers can arise from non-inclusive recruitment practices, limited information about available opportunities, and financial constraints (Wilson, 2012).

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Minority students may encounter significant hurdles in securing initial opportunities like internships and entry-level positions due to recruitment practices that are not designed to reach or fairly evaluate diverse candidates. This could include a reliance on networking that disadvantages those without existing industry connections or unconscious biases in resume screening and interviewing processes. Furthermore, information about available opportunities may not be disseminated equitably, with some students lacking access to the same networks or platforms where these roles are advertised. Financial constraints, particularly concerning unpaid or low-paid internships, can disproportionately impact students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, effectively gatekeeping entry into the industry (McCandless *et al.*, 2022; Kipnis *et al.*, 2021).

Many of the internship descriptions focused heavily on physical stamina and long hours without mentioning any possibilities for accommodations or flexible work arrangements.

The expectation to do multiple unpaid internships just wasn't feasible for me. It felt like only those who could afford to work for free could get their foot in the door.

I found out about some really interesting internship opportunities through informal channels that I wasn't part of because they happened outside of work hours and didn't consider my religious obligations.

#### *Theme 4: Lack of Representation and Leadership Roles*

This theme underscores the visible absence of minority professionals in leadership positions within the event management industry. This lack of representation can impact minority students' sense of belonging, limit their access to relatable role models, and create a perception of limited career progression pathways (Dasgupta and Stout, 2014b). It also highlights the absence of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

The underrepresentation of individuals from minority groups in leadership roles can create a significant barrier for students entering the industry. The absence of visible role models who share their backgrounds can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of belief in their own potential for advancement. It can also foster a perception that career progression pathways are limited for minority individuals. Furthermore, the lack of diverse perspectives at the leadership level can result in industry practices and organizational cultures that are not inclusive or equitable, perpetuating the challenges faced by minority students. This absence also means that the unique insights and experiences of these groups are often missing from crucial decision-making processes.

I've been in the industry for a few years now, and I've yet to see anyone in a senior management position who openly identifies as having a disability. It makes me question if there's a glass ceiling.

The leadership in this industry often seems to come from very privileged backgrounds. It makes it feel like there's an unspoken barrier for those of us who come from different socio-economic realities.

I've never seen anyone in a senior event management role who has a visible disability. It makes me wonder if it's even a realistic goal for me.

#### **Suggestions and practical implications**

The lack of diversity in the event industry has broader implications for social equity and representation. Events are powerful platforms for storytelling, cultural expression, and community building. When the creators and organizers of these events lack diversity, the stories told and the communities represented risk being narrow and exclusionary. This not only limits the industry's ability to connect with diverse audiences but also reinforces stereotypes and marginalizes minority voices (Davis and Brown, 2019). Event management firms should

mandate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training that specifically addresses microaggressions. Companies should establish anonymous reporting systems for issues and other workplace concerns, with clear follow-up procedures. Festivals, conferences, and corporate events that fail to incorporate diverse perspectives may inadvertently alienate minority participants, undermining the industry's potential to foster inclusivity and social cohesion. Companies can collaborate with industry bodies to create virtual or in-person networking events tailored to minority students. These events could include speed-mentoring sessions with professionals or panels on breaking into the industry, ensuring students build connections early in their careers. In education, diversity enriches learning environments by exposing students to different cultures and ideas, preparing them for a globalized world. For instance, universities with diverse student bodies report higher levels of creativity and collaboration among students (Gurin *et al.*, 2002). Event management companies should set measurable diversity goals for leadership positions, such as achieving a specific percentage of minority representation within five years. Progress should be tracked and reported publicly to ensure accountability. In the workplace, diversity drives innovation by combining varied perspectives. Tech giants like Google and Microsoft prioritize diversity to develop inclusive products that cater to global audiences. Event management firms and industry associations should create paid internship programs specifically for minority students. These programs could partner with universities serving underrepresented groups to ensure outreach and provide stipends to offset financial barriers.

The consequences of the diversity deficit extend beyond social and cultural dimensions to economic and organizational performance. Research has consistently shown that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones in terms of innovation, problem-solving, and financial returns (Hunt *et al.*, 2018). By excluding minority students and professionals, the event industry may be missing out on valuable talent and perspectives that could drive growth and innovation. Organizations should integrate diversity into succession planning by identifying and grooming minority talent for future leadership roles. This could involve creating a talent pipeline where high-potential minority employees are given stretch assignments to build their leadership credentials. Furthermore, as consumers become increasingly conscious of diversity and inclusion, organizations that fail to address these issues risk losing credibility and market share. In an era where social responsibility is a key differentiator, the event industry's diversity deficit could have far-reaching implications for its competitiveness and sustainability.

Addressing the diversity deficit in the event industry requires a multifaceted approach that involves educational institutions, industry leaders, and policymakers. Event management companies should establish formal mentorship programs that prioritize pairing minority students and early-career professionals with senior leaders. These programs should include clear objectives, regular check-ins, and diversity training for mentors to address unconscious biases. Companies should publish clear, objective criteria for promotions and leadership roles to reduce bias in selection processes. Regular audits of promotion decisions can help identify and address disparities in advancement rates among minority employees. Educational programs must actively recruit and support minority students, providing them with the resources, mentorship, and opportunities needed to succeed in the industry. Industry leaders, on the other hand, must prioritize diversity and inclusion in their hiring practices, organizational cultures, and event planning processes. This includes creating pathways for minority professionals to advance into leadership roles and ensuring that events are designed with inclusivity in mind. Policymakers can also play a role by implementing initiatives that promote diversity in the event industry, such as funding for minority-led events and incentives for organizations that demonstrate a commitment to inclusion.

### **Conclusion and future research**

This research paper seeks to shed light on the event industry's diversity deficit and its impact on minority students. By examining the barriers that minority students face in entering and

thriving in the event industry, as well as the broader implications of this exclusion, the study aims to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future for the industry through a combination of literature review and interviews with minority students, the paper will provide actionable insights and recommendations for addressing the diversity deficit. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the event industry reflects the diversity of the communities it serves and harnesses the full potential of all its participants.

Additionally, there is a lack of qualitative research capturing the lived experiences of minority students navigating the event industry. Most studies rely on quantitative data, which fails to capture the nuanced challenges these students face, such as implicit bias, macroaggressions, and cultural insensitivity (Brown *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions in preparing students for the event industry has not been thoroughly investigated. These institutions may offer unique pathways for minority students, but their potential remains understudied. Finally, there is a gap in research examining Addressing these gaps through mixed-methods research and intersectional analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity deficit and inform actionable solutions for creating a more inclusive event industry.

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