


Attracting Convention and Exhibition Attendance to Complex MICE Venues: Emerging Data from Macao

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an importance-performance analysis of multi-level attributes (event, facility and destination) evaluated by delegates attending an exhibition event in a 'complex meetings, incentive, convention or exhibition (MICE) venue' in greater China (mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan). The study's findings expound the relevance of various attributes in light of the emergence of complex MICE venues and destination resorts and, in particular, emphasizes the relative importance of destination – vis-à-vis facility – and core event-related attributes towards determining exhibition attendance. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Received 22 July 2011; Revised 8 May 2012; Accepted 24 July 2012

KEY WORDS exhibition attendance; destination attributes; MICE; business tourism

The fundamental premise of any meetings, incentive, convention or exhibition (MICE) event is to bring together the purveyor of a message with its recipients (Whitfield and Webber, 2010). 'Conferences and conventions are about bringing people together to communicate by sharing information and ideas, to motivate and inspire, to launch new products and disseminate the latest research, to negotiate to reach a consensus on the different challenges facing our world' (Rogers, 2008, p. xvii). The convention and exhibition industry has grown in response to the challenge of facilitating these global meetings (Fan, 2011). In doing so, MICE tourism contributes significantly to a nation's economy as delegates spend more than the average leisure tourist (Wan, 2011); for instance, Thailand's MICE industry generated two to four times more revenue than its other tourism sectors. (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2006). A MICE destination would need to draw at least two leisure tourists for every delegate/attendee to generate the same level economic activity (Fenich, 1992). MICE events also lengthen visitors' average length of stay; they generate additional business opportunities within related economic sectors, while also increasing employment (Kim *et al.*, 2003; Mistilis and Dwyer, 1999; Oppermann, 1996b).

In recent years, complex MICE venues have been developed to provide appropriate facilities and services for delegates/attendees and to benefit further from MICE tourism. The aim is to integrate business tourism with leisure tourism related elements, whereby MICE facilities are integrated with accommodation providers, food and beverages retailers, shopping malls, gaming, sports events, entertainment, transportation and communication hubs (Hung *et al.*, 2011;

Wan, 2011). The Venetian Macao Resort Hotel (hereafter The Venetian) located in Macao is one such complex MICE venue. It opened in 2007 and is composed of 163 000 square foot of conference space, with 803 000 square foot of exhibition space, 550 000 square foot casino and 350 stores within 1 million square feet (Macao Business, 2007).

There is a large body of extant research that attempts to identify the relevant factors and attributes that influence attendance at MICE events and exhibitions in particular. Many of these studies conceptualize the problem in one of three major ways: a site or venue selection issue (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Fawzy, 2008; Robinson and Callan, 2005), attractors of potential or actual attendees (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Severt *et al.*, 2007; Whitfield and Webber, 2010; Yoo and Chon, 2010), or as a destination image issue (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Bradley *et al.*, 2002; Lee and Back, 2007; Oppermann, 1996b). Very often, these three frameworks are conflated, with one or a combination of two or all three being the focus in a particular study.

There is however a dearth of literature that identifies relevant attributes or factors specific to complex MICE venues. If such venues improved their understanding of visitors' attendance decisions and subsequently encouraged their exhibitors, retail outlets and leisure facilities to improve and target their exhibition attributes, then this could ensure improvements in the quality of exhibitor-visitor contact. This in turn can engender a loyal visitor base, which is viewed as essential in winning market share, repeat visitation and making not only the exhibition but also the complex venue (Lu and Cai, 2010; Severt *et al.*, 2007). Justification for this research therefore stems from the need to identify relevant attributes that influence exhibition attendees' propensity to attend an exhibition hosted at a complex MICE venue. Additionally, this research aims to identify whether the

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close juxtaposition of interrelated and supporting amenities offered by such complex MICE venues provide attendance attributes that differentiate this venue type for its competitors.

To accomplish the above aims, we analyse data from a survey of delegates attending the China Jade Culture Festival (CJCF) held at The Venetian Macao between 25 and 28 July 2010. Organized by B2C Expo Management Company Ltd., this exhibition is supported by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), Macao Government Tourist Office (MGTO) and another nine Jade associations from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao (China Jade Culture Festival, 2010). More than 7500 delegates attended the exhibition with free admission to all the visitors aged 18 and above, both trade delegates and members of the general public general.

EXHIBITION ATTENDANCE

Attendees' are becoming increasingly dependent upon both information on and their perceptions of fundamental exhibition attributes to make their attendance decisions (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008). In seeking to identify these crucial attributes, various studies have posited not only different types of attributes relevant to the problem of exhibition attendance (which emerge variably depending on the chosen research framework) but also attributes that differ markedly depending on the level of analysis or the research framework chosen. Some studies, e.g. consider site selection problems at the level of destination attributes (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Go and Zhang, 1997; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Lee and Back, 2007; Oppermann, 1996b), whereas others highlight determinant attributes at an intermediate level focusing on convention centres or facilities associated with conference venues such as hotels (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Fawzy, 2008; Robinson and Callan, 2002, 2005; Wu and Weber, 2005). A few studies traverse both macro (i.e. destination attributes) and intermediate levels (i.e. facilities attributes) (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2003). Still, others focus more specifically on the core or micro-level attributes related to the exhibition itself (Severt *et al.*, 2007; Whitfield and Webber, 2010) or a combination of exhibition-level and destination-level attributes (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Yoo and Chon, 2008).

An additional aspect that heretofore has not been examined by the body of literature covering exhibition attendance is the influence of the type of respondents (or raters) on conclusions arising from the various studies. Delegates and attendees naturally consider and emphasize different attributes from event planners and organizers, who act mostly as proxies for the delegates. A principal critique would be that studies focusing merely on one aspect (e.g. on exhibition attributes) would tend to identify factors at the same level of analysis. On the other hand, a study conceived on a broader scale and encompassing multi-levels of attributes and raters can be expected to reveal more at various levels of attributes. However, which attributes are considered more relevant by which types of raters is so far unclear.

Prompted by the above issues, we undertook a systematic and broad review of relevant literature on exhibition attendance. Table 1 lists studies that have identified factors or attributes hypothesized to be directly or indirectly influential in either determining attendance or attraction towards attending conventions/exhibitions. The studies are organized into categories based on level of analysis. These range from exhibition or event attributes (Category 1), facilities or conference venue attributes and their complementary facilities such as accommodation (Category 2), the destination (Category 3), or combinations thereof (Categories 4 and 5). Table 1 also lists the principal empirical findings of these studies, which include all relevant factors extracted and retained (where the purpose of the study is to identify a reduced set of attribute dimensions) or the top three attributes rated important by respondents. The list of attributes determined by the various studies to be relevant is then categorized in terms of how they were originally conceived or theorized by the authors.

As an example, Whitfield and Webber (2010) examined repeat visitation propensity of attendees of the MICROSCIENCE 2008 exhibition in the UK in which they assessed 13 attributes across four groupings. Using respondent ratings for the important dimension of importance-performance analysis (IPA), Whitfield and Webber (2010) identified that the three most important exhibition attributes were gaining product information, meeting specialists and gaining technical advice. The instructive, the study limits itself and its resultant findings to exhibition level of analysis.

Another example listed in Table 1 is the study conducted by Yoo and Chon (2008), which developed a measurement scale for convention participation decision making. Their study identified 42 attributes based on literature and in-depth qualitative interviews. Subsequent exploratory and confirmatory analysis revealed a five-factor structure, consisting of professional and social networking opportunities, educational opportunities, destination stimuli, safety and health situation and travelability. Yoo and Chon's (2008) attempt to develop a scale for convention participation decision making revealed two groups of relevant attributes that straddle micro-level (two exhibition-related factors) as well as macro-level of analyses (three destination-related factors).

The findings of other studies are listed in Table 1 and together reveal some interesting comparisons of relevant attributes. Some attributes, e.g. appear consistently to be important such as service or service-related qualities either at the facilities level of analysis (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Robinson and Callan, 2002, 2005; Wu and Weber, 2005) or at the destination level of analysis (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Oppermann, 1996b). Where it emerged as a relevant attribute influencing convention and exhibition attendance and site selection, cost has been found in four out of five studies to be associated with facilities level of analysis (Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Fawzy, 2008; Kim and Kim, 2003; Mair and Thompson, 2009).

Another observation from the corpus of studies listed in Table 1 is that the level of analysis adopted by different studies tends to influence the scope or range of attributes that emerge as relevant. For example, in studies that were

Table 1. Review of literature identifying factors influential in generating exhibition attendance

Level of analysis	Study	Respondents (raters)	Significant factors identified or rank importance of (top 3) attributes from study findings	Relevant attributes	
				Exhibition Facilities	Destination
(1) Exhibition	(Whitfield and Webber, 2010)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining product information • Meeting specialists • Gaining technical advice • Activities and opportunities • Networking • Educational benefits • Products and deals 	✓	✓
	(Severt <i>et al.</i> , 2007)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenience (location) • Convention services (cleanliness, well maintained and helpfulness of personnel) • Convention center features (directional signage, nearby availability of high quality lodging, sufficient restrooms) 	✓	✓
	(Breiter and Milman, 2006)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility of venue • Food and beverage • convention facilities and services 	✓	✓
(2) Facilities	(Wu and Weber, 2005)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence • Tangibles – others (includes food quality) • Service providers (quality of) 	✓	✓
	(Robinson and Callan, 2005)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence • Tangibles – others (includes food quality) • Service providers (quality of) 	✓	✓
	(Robinson and Callan, 2002)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence • Tangibles – others (includes food quality) • Service providers (quality of) 	✓	✓
(3) Destination	(Fawzy, 2008)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human • Technical • Finance/value 	✓	✓
	(Kang <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Buying centers) • Safety and security • Facilities • Environment • (Meeting planners) • Facilities • Accessibility • Service • Promotional appeal • Destination services 	✓	✓
	(Chacko and Fenich, 2000)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service • Facilities • Cost • Image • Location • Restaurant/retail/accessibility • Facilities • Logistics 	✓	✓
	(Oppermann, 1996)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service • Facilities • Cost • Image • Location • Restaurant/retail/accessibility • Facilities • Logistics 	✓	✓
	(Baloglu and Love, 2005)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service • Facilities • Cost • Image • Location • Restaurant/retail/accessibility • Facilities • Logistics 	✓	✓

(Continues)

Q2

Table 1. (Continued)

Level of analysis	Study	Respondents (raters)	Significant factors identified or rank importance of (top 3) attributes from study findings	Relevant attributes		
				Exhibition	Facilities	Destination
(4) Facilities + destination	(Kim and Kim, 2003) (Crouch and Louviere, 2004)	Meeting and/or event planners/organizers Meeting and/or event planners/organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City image • CVB services and support • Cost/service, facility/support • Cost of venue • Food quality • Plenary room • Meeting venue • Accommodation venue • Convenience • Technology • Price 			✓ ✓
				(Comas and Moscardo, 2005) Meeting and/or event planners/organizers		✓
(5) Exhibition + destination	(Yoo and Chon, 2008)	Delegates and/or attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atmosphere • Professional and social networking opportunities • Educational opportunities • Destination stimuli • Safety and health situation • Travelability • Networking • Personal/professional development • Time and convenience • Cost • Location • Health and security 			
				(Mair and Thompson, 2009) Delegates and/or attendees		✓

clearly restricted to one level of analysis, the emergent attributes were also limited, as can be expected. Such was the case with Severt *et al.* (2007) and Whitfield and Webber (2010), both of which are in Category 1, which focused on the core exhibition-related attributes. The same can be said of studies in Category 2, which focused specifically on the facilities level of analysis (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Fawzy, 2008; Robinson and Callan, 2002, 2005; Wu and Weber, 2005) and thereby identified relevant attributes at the same level. This expectation changes, however, when destinations are considered alone (as in Category 3 studies) or in combination with other levels of analysis (Categories 4 and 5).

In studies wherein the destination level of analysis was adopted (Category 3) or those that studied destination cities for conventions (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Oppermann, 1996b), the relevant emergent attributes tend to include not only destination-level attributes but facilities-level attributes as well. In Category 4 studies (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2003), which combine facilities and destination-level attributes in their focus, the relevant attributes that emerge tend to be concentrated solely on facilities-level attributes. It therefore appears that even if studies focus exclusively on a destination level of analysis or combined such focus with consideration of facilities level attributes, attributes pertaining to facilities tend to emerge prominently in influencing convention and exhibition participation or site selection.

RATER ISSUES

Of interest, however, are results emerging from studies (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Yoo and Chon, 2008) that identified attributes implicated in delegates' decision to attend or participate in conferences and conventions but predominantly straddling both destination-level and exhibition-level attributes (Category 5). These findings contrast markedly for the nonappearance of facilities-level attributes that featured vividly in Categories 3 and 4. A possible cause in the difference between results obtained by Category 5 studies compared with Categories 3 and 4 revolves around the issue of respondent sampling.

Studies in Category 5 sampled primarily delegates or attendees of conventions, meetings and exhibitions (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Yoo and Chon, 2008), whereas those in Category 3 (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Oppermann, 1996b) and in Category 4 (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2003) sampled principally meetings and/or event planners/organizers. The selected sample or rater thus seems to influence the significance of different attributes or factors.

The choice of respondents in any study is a function of how the relevant research question will be framed. Nevertheless, even if convention and exhibition attendance can be conceptualized as distinct from site selection, the two are intrinsically related. Tackling the quandary of convention and exhibition

attendance is, in essence, rooted in the decision-making and psychological considerations of the individual delegate or attendee. Site selection studies almost always focus principally on the meeting or event planners and organizers or even 'buying centers' (Kang *et al.*, 2005) with these acting as proxy consumers on behalf of delegates and association members. Any study can focus on one particular aspect but doing so precludes an integrated understanding of the whole.

DESTINATION LEVEL ATTRIBUTES

There appears to be a good degree of concurrence on the importance of a set of attributes centered on the facilities, venues and associated services surrounding convention centers (e.g. accommodation) among studies that focused mainly at a facilities level of analysis which sampled both delegates and/or attendees (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Robinson and Callan, 2005; Wu and Weber, 2005) or meeting planners and/or organizers (Fawzy, 2008; Robinson and Callan, 2002). The set of attributes found to have most significance in determining convention attendance also tend to correspond across studies that focused on core exhibition level attributes (Category 1), which sampled principally delegates and attendees (Severt *et al.*, 2007; Whitfield and Webber, 2010).

It is among studies that implicate destination level attributes, whether exclusively (Category 3) or in concert with other level attributes (Categories 4 and 5), which tend to have some degree of ambiguity. The general pattern of findings among studies in Category 3 (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Oppermann, 1996b), which principally examined destination attributes, indicate that both destination-level and facilities-level attributes matter considerably. On the other hand, Category 4 studies that sought to examine facilities and destination level attributes jointly (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2003) reveal that attributes centred on facilities tend to be of greater importance rather than destination centred attributes. Finally, among studies in Category 5 (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Yoo and Chon, 2008), which examined destination as well as exhibition attributes together, the general pattern of findings is that both levels of attributes are significant and that facilities attributes tend to matter too.

Overall, the importance of destination level attributes seems pervasive whenever it is included in studies that deal with convention and exhibition attendance and/or site selection (Categories 3, 4 and 5). In some clusters of studies, however, such as those in Categories 3 and 4, the importance of destination-related attributes appear to be outweighed by the importance of facilities-related attributes, most likely as an artefact of respondent characteristics (all of who were composed of meetings and events planners and/or organizers). In contrast, findings emerging from Category 5 studies reveal that destination-related and exhibition-related attributes are significant. However, since studies in this category primarily sampled delegates and attendees, a complete comparison with Category 3 and 4 studies is precluded. In short, when meetings planners and organizers are sampled, studies tend to reveal the

importance of facilities-level attributes together with destination-level attributes. When delegates and attendees are sampled, studies tend to reveal the importance of exhibition-level attributes together with destination-level attributes.

There are thus two important gaps in the literature suggested by the aforementioned review. One is the need to address the under-sampling of delegates and attendees in studies examining the relative importance of destination-level attributes alongside facilities-level attributes, which will serve to counterbalance findings emerging from studies that predominantly sample meetings and event planners. The second is the need to develop a greater comprehension of convention and exhibition attendance incorporating more than one level of attribute (combining event, facility and/or destination attributes) as delegates and attendees tend to no longer focus solely on any one single level of attribute. This study focuses on Category 4 attributes: facilities and destination (Yoo and Chon, 2008), with the addition of a single event attribute.

THE EMERGENCE OF INTEGRATED OR DESTINATION RESORTS AND COMPLEX MEETINGS, INCENTIVE, CONVENTION OR EXHIBITION VENUES

Delegates and/or attendees may view participation in an event, at the event's venue and the venue's destination as one decision-making instance, with some attributes being considered more prominently than others. Meeting planners and/or organizers may, however, see each component as a separate step in a multi-level or multi-stage decision process. As discussed above, different studies tend to highlight different significant attributes based on the respondents selected to evaluate the attributes or based on the chosen level of analysis. It is important though from the point of view of destinations, especially those aiming to depart from a highly differentiated tourism towards a more diversified model, led via conventions and exhibitions for example, that more than one level of attributes (exhibition-related, venue or facilities-related, and destination-related) are considered simultaneously.

The relative influence of facilities-level and destination-level attributes – as evaluated by delegates and attendees – is especially important when destinations adopt a particular strategy towards becoming an international conventions and exhibitions hub (Go and Zhang, 1997; Oppermann, 1996a; Qu *et al.*, 2000). This strategy involves opening up the conventions and exhibitions sector to new investors and innovative operators with ground breaking venues usually centred on a massive facility or integrated resorts (Henderson, 2006) combining convention and exhibition with recreational, entertainment and accommodation functions all located within one property, and usually built with a well-designed and attractive faux theme. The strategic impetus behind such a facilities-led development model is to attract not only association or meeting planners and organizers in selecting a multi-purpose and multi-attraction venue for holding events but also to directly draw potential delegates and attendees on top of the core motivation they have for attending an

event. In one sense, the evolution of complex MICE venues tend to diminish the overall significance of destinations (and destination-level attributes) making them secondary in the decision making process of convention delegates and meeting planners. This strategy has been credited in great part with the transformation and re-positioning of Las Vegas into a convention and exhibition hub, obscuring its original economic activity of casinos and gambling (Douglass and Raento, 2004; McCracken, 1997; Oppermann, 1996a, 1996b).

Such is the case with recent tourism development in East Asia, particularly in Singapore (Henderson, 2006) and Macao (Gu, 2004; Harrill *et al.*, 2011), destinations, which have welcomed new investors and operators with radical concepts of mega-sized venues and facilities that combine gaming, conventions and exhibitions, as well as a host of other recreational and entertainment activities in one complex. It must be noted that prior to adopting this profound change, Singapore already had a healthy conventions and exhibitions sector (Maclaurin and Leong, 2000) even if its overall tourism growth levelled off somewhat in the early 2000s. Macao's situation, however, contrasts with that of Singapore's in relation to this strategy. When The Venetian opened in 2007, it was the first of new external investors benefitting from the Macao Government's policy thrust of diversifying tourism and reducing the territory's reliance on traditional casinos and gaming activities (Zhang and Kwan, 2009). Designed and built as an integrated resort, The Venetian incorporates 3000 all-suite hotel accommodations, the biggest casino gaming floor in the world, indoor shopping, dining and rides, an expansive theatre and 15 000-seat arena, as well as 1.2 million sq. feet of usable space for convention, meetings and exhibitions (The Venetian Macao, .). The immense scale of this single property is such that its convention and exhibition space dwarfs the size of all other similar facilities in Macao. The huge variety of recreational, entertainment and accommodation offerings the property provides and can combine with its convention and exhibition product is unprecedented, posing The Venetian and Macao as a credible challenger in leading the business tourism sector in the region (Lo, 2007).

Of more practical significance to the host city of Macao is whether the concept underlying the establishment of The Venetian – and several other properties like it that have since opened – fulfils the Macao Government's long term aim of tourism diversification (Macao Special Administrative Region Government, 2010; Macao Special Administrative Region Government, 2011). If Macao is to overcome and reposition itself differently from its past and dominant image as a mere gaming destination (Bradley *et al.*, 2002), then it is imperative for destination policy-makers and marketers to examine whether the newly developed integrated resorts are able to attract association, convention and exhibition attendees to Macao not only for the core purpose of doing business but also for the new and innovative experiences offered by The Venetian and other facilities-level attractions like it, regardless of the image they have of Macao as a destination and the degree to which they are attracted to its attributes.

METHOD

To address the aforementioned issues, a study was conducted to explore the relative importance of destination-level attributes vis-à-vis facilities-level attributes, particularly those relating to exhibition and accommodation facilities, with survey respondents targeted being primarily delegates and attendees of exhibitions and conventions. Part of the aim for doing so is to fill the gap in literature that thus far has under-sampled delegates and attendees where the domain of interest has covered both destination-level and facilities-level attributes.

A survey was conducted in which a total of 700 questionnaires were randomly hand-delivered in person to delegates attending the China Jade Cultural Festival, an exhibition held from 25 to 28 July 2010 at The Venetian. Admission is free admission to all the visitors aged 18 and above. A response rate of 40.4% was obtained, resulting in a total sample size of 283 survey respondents. There are a number of strengths and weaknesses with this data collection methodology. Strengths include being able to ensure that the questionnaire is handed to the correct target audience directly, thus minimizing distribution time and minimizing wastage of resources. Being present on site over the four days also gave respondents a focal point to which to return completed questionnaires. The principal weakness of this methodology is that data were collected from a single exhibition, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings.

The survey instrument used consisted of three sections. Both sections 1 and 2 included 22 structured questions, which allowed answers that fit into categories that have been established in advance by the researcher (Denscombe, 2003). Section 3 sought to gather information on the gender, age, region/country and education level of the respondents. Respondents to the survey were asked to indicate the importance level of 20 attribute items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not important to 5 = very important). The 20 attribute items were categorized into five groups: (i) MICE facilities; (ii) accommodation; (iii) accessibility; (iv) recreational and professional opportunities; and (v) destination attributes. Three of these (destination, recreational and accessibility) pertained to destination-level attributes, whereas two groups of the multi-item scales (MICE facilities and accommodation) comprised facilities-level attributes. One attribute ('professional opportunities for business deals and selling') related primarily to the exhibition event. The list of attributes were drawn principally from previously published studies, such as the List of Convention Site Selection (Nelson and Rys, 2000), the criteria listed by Crouch and Ritchie (1998), and attributes analysed by Oral and Whitfield (2010). Respondents were also asked to indicate their perceived performance on the same 20 attribute items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = performance significantly under expectation to 5 = performance significantly over expectation). Respondents were not questioned on whether they stayed overnight within the venue hotel.

Analysis of the various attributes involved providing descriptive statistics for the various scaled items to compare the relative importance of the various attributes and attribute-groups. The results were compared with the findings reported in previous literature for comparison. Importance ratings

were then combined with perceived performance responses following conventions of the importance-performance (IPA) analytical framework to provide practical and evaluative insights regarding the strategic soundness of integrated resorts as a MICE development path, in particular for the case of Macao and The Venetian, from which the survey respondents comprising convention and exhibition delegates and attendees were sampled. IPA has been a favoured and conventional form of analysis in the convention and exhibition literature (Breiter and Milman, 2006; Go and Zhang, 1997; Kang *et al.*, 2005; Kim and Kim, 2003; Lee and Back, 2007; Oppermann, 1996b; Whitfield and Webber, 2010; Wu and Weber, 2005).

FINDINGS

Of the 283 delegates that responded to the survey, the majority (62.5%) were female, highly educated (53% possessed an undergraduate degree), and about half (49.8%) were between 18 and 30 years of age. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (81.6%) were from Mainland China, although respondents also came from Hong Kong (5.3%), Macao (3.9%) and Taiwan (7.4%).

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviation of the importance and performance ratings given by respondents for each of the 20 attributes. Of the five most important attributes rated by respondents, three were related to MICE facilities. These were as follows: (i) the atmosphere and environment created by the facility (mean = 4.30; SD = 0.81); (ii) the safety and security within the exhibition facility (mean = 4.29; SD = 0.88); and (iii) the standards of service within the exhibition facility (mean = 4.23; SD = 0.86). Considered equally important by respondents were the following: (iv) the safety and security within the accommodation (mean = 4.28; SD = 0.90); and (v) safety and security within the destination (mean = 4.17; SD = 0.86).

In terms of performance, of the five highest ratings given by respondents, four were destination-level attributes. These included the following: (i) the attractiveness of the destination's surroundings (mean = 3.25; SD = 0.84); (ii) the reputation of the destination for holding exhibitions (mean = 3.23; SD = 0.67); (iii) the safety and security within the destination (mean = 3.23; SD = 0.73); and (iv) the suitability and standard of local infrastructure (mean = 3.14; SD = 0.87). Also rated highly in terms of performance was (v) the safety and security within the exhibition facility (mean = 3.11; SD = 0.79).

Two other observations emanating from Table 2 are noteworthy. First, the overall mean for the importance of all 20 attributes considered together (overall mean = 3.59; SD = 0.48) is significantly higher than the overall mean for performance (overall mean = 3.03; SD = 0.39), $t(282) = 17.652$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, considering all 20 attributes together, it would appear that respondents in the survey considered the performance of the particular complex MICE venue in this study (the Venetian) and Macao as the host destination to be less than favourable overall in meeting the level of importance respondents conferred on the attributes. Second, only 3 of the 20 attributes evaluated have mean performance ratings

Table 2. Mean ratings of attribute importance (5-point Likert scale, 1 = not important to 5 = very important) and performance (1 = performance significantly under expectation to 5 = performance significantly over expectation), (N=283)

Attributes	Importance		Performance	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>MICE Facilities</i>				
1. The reputation of the exhibition facility.	3.37	(1.04)	3.00	(0.81)
2. The atmosphere and environment created by exhibition facility	4.30	(0.81)	3.06	(0.88)
3. The standards of service within exhibition facility.	4.23	(0.86)	2.91	(0.79)
4. The safety and security within the exhibition facility	4.29	(0.88)	3.11	(0.79)
<i>Accommodation</i>				
5. The availability of accommodation at the site.	3.59	(1.01)	2.97	(0.77)
6. The standards of service within accommodation facilities.	3.72	(0.96)	2.96	(0.71)
7. The cost of suitable accommodation at the site.	3.83	(0.89)	2.81	(0.74)
8. The safety and security within the accommodation.	4.28	(0.90)	3.10	(0.64)
<i>Accessibility</i>				
9. The distance/duration of travel involved.	3.40	(1.04)	2.88	(0.79)
10. The cost for travel to the destination.	3.54	(0.96)	2.99	(0.77)
11. Travel formalities that inhibit travel visas, customs	3.94	(0.86)	2.98	(0.84)
<i>Recreational and professional opportunities</i>				
12. Entertainment facilities-casinos, restaurants, bars	2.73	(1.11)	3.04	(0.84)
13. Shopping facilities-malls, low prices.	2.95	(1.06)	3.01	(0.81)
14. Sightseeing -historical sites, attractions.	3.28	(1.09)	2.98	(0.81)
<i>Destination attributes</i>				
15. The suitability and standard of local infrastructure	3.37	(0.86)	3.14	(0.87)
16. The safety and security within the destination.	4.17	(0.86)	3.23	(0.73)
17. The reputation of the destination for holding exhibitions.	3.04	(1.07)	3.23	(0.67)
18. The attractiveness of the destination's surroundings.	3.25	(0.93)	3.25	(0.84)
19. The friendliness of local residents and communities	3.22	(1.00)	3.09	(0.76)
20. Professional opportunities-business deal, selling.	3.05	(1.22)	2.89	(0.73)
Overall	3.59	(0.48)	3.03	(0.39)

higher than their importance ratings. Two of these are in the recreational group (entertainment facilities, mean = 3.04, and shopping facilities, mean = 3.01) and one in the destination group (reputation of the destination, mean = 3.23). While each of the three attributes can be suggested to exhibit favourable performance, this is a deceptive conclusion considering that the two attributes in the recreational group hardly depart from the overall performance mean of 3.03.

What the foregoing implies is that separate consideration of each attribute in terms of performance and importance is not instructive without considering all attributes in concert and for both performance and importance dimensions together. At the same time, an overall assessment reliant only on the overall means for performance or importance tends to obscure a much greater level of detail that can be obtained when each attribute is assessed vis-à-vis others. This necessitates a more integrative analysis that combines multidimensional (performance-importance) and simultaneous relative comparisons between attributes.

Importance-performance analysis

F1 Figure 1 combines both importance and performance ratings for each of the 20 attributes described in Table 1 and plots them simultaneously on separate axes, creating a conventional importance-performance matrix. To be able to create an effective analysis, the importance values have been recalibrated

so that their average value across all attributes is equal to zero. Therefore, an attribute with a value higher (lower) than zero has an importance that is greater (less) than the average on the importance scale. The same recalibration has been undertaken for the performance scale.

The four quadrants shown in Figure 1 distinguish between low and high importance and between low and high performance. Attributes located in Quadrant 1 (upper right) signify attributes with a higher than average value for both importance and performance and are classified as 'Keep up the good work'. Overall, results show that attendees view Macao's strengths to be the destinations safety and infrastructure. Additionally, Macao is seen to be doing well in terms of facilities atmosphere and safety. The final attribute in this quadrant is accommodation safety. Therefore, results show that no one group of attributes, be they related to the destination, facilities or accommodation, dominates this quadrant.

Quadrant 2 (upper left quadrant) represents attributes with a low importance but high performance scores and represents attributes for which there is 'possible overkill'. Destination attributes dominate this quadrant, in terms of friendliness, reputation and surroundings. All such attributes have higher performance scores than what attendees perceived important for a conference destination.

Quadrant 3 (bottom left) is composed of those attributes low in both importance and performance, and are therefore

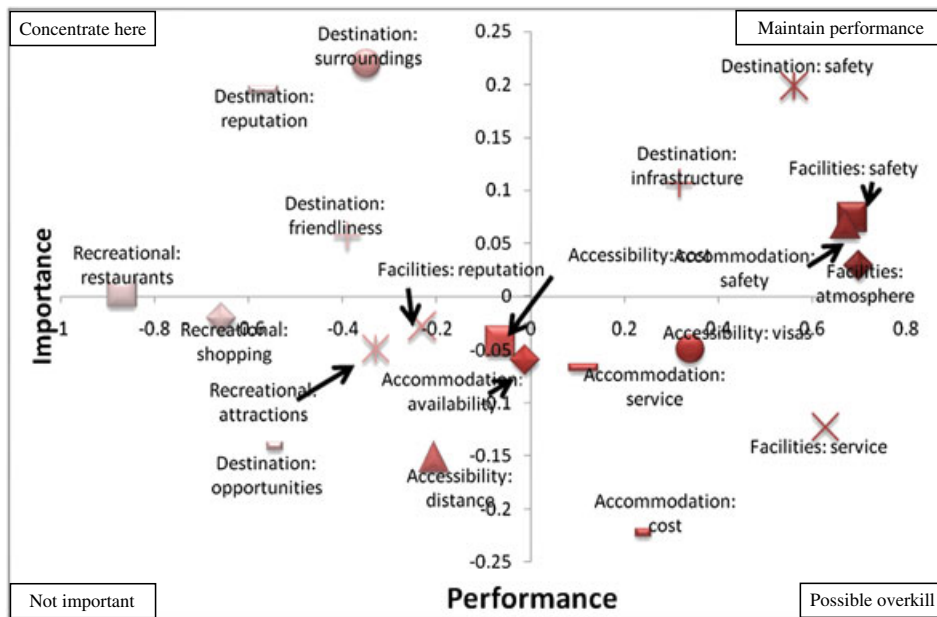


Figure 1. Importance-performance matrix.

'low priority.' Recreational attributes dominate, with restaurants, shopping and attractions all in this quadrant. This is followed by two attributes concerning accessibility: distance and cost. One of each of the following groupings also appears in this quadrant, destination, facilities and accommodation, these being opportunities, reputation and availability.

The final quadrant (bottom right) possesses four attributes, which should be the focus of attention of policy as they perform below average but are of higher than average importance. These attributes are accessibility-visa, accommodation-service, facilities-service and accommodation-cost.

DISCUSSION

The expansion and emergence of complex-type MICE venues in many parts of the world – and the immense investments they entail from both the public and private sectors – requires more extensive and in-depth assessment of their ability to draw event organizers as well as delegates. The complex interplay of attributes delegates consider relevant in attracting them to attend an exhibition requires further examination. As argued earlier, exhibition attendees no longer just consider core-exhibition or event attributes but also facility-related and destination-related attributes concurrently.

Our review of the relevant literature support the view that the importance of destination-level attributes seems pervasive whenever it is included in studies that deal with convention and exhibition attendance and/or site selection (cited under Categories 3, 4 and 5 in Table 1). Additionally, findings emerging from Category 5 studies reveal that destination-related alongside exhibition-related attributes are significant. Furthermore, when delegates and attendees are sampled, studies tend to reveal the importance of exhibition-level attributes together with destination-level attributes.

Such a development in the field of exhibition attendance requires reframing with the advent of complex and highly

integrated MICE venues and their oft-intended characterization as 'destinations within a destination' may. As indicated in the earlier part of this paper, complex MICE venues tend to be a category of their own: They are positioned not only as an attraction per se in the destination but an integrated compound that includes, among others, the core facilities necessary for holding exhibition and events. It can be suggested that they circumvent the importance of destination-level or exhibition-level attributes in attracting exhibition attendance. The outcome of this study indicates otherwise. Although the rise of complex MICE venues may indeed enhance the attractiveness of destinations as well as the atmosphere of facilities, it is the basic features of the destination (such as safety and infrastructure) that remain critical in determining exhibition attendance.

More specifically, the results of IP analysis depicted in Figure 1, which combines importance and performance ratings for each attribute, show that only two of five destination-level attributes were more favourably judged in terms of importance relative to the other three destination attributes (surroundings, reputation and friendliness). Nevertheless, it must be noted that facilities-level attributes as well as accommodation-related attributes also mattered considerably, especially when performance is evaluated. In this study, results showed facility safety and atmosphere as well as accommodation safety figured somewhat important and performed favourably. The results of the IP analysis reveals a comprehensive insight of the vital question of exhibition attendance within the context of new and emerging complex MICE venues, especially from the point of view of a study population dominated by exhibition delegates from the greater China region.

The generalizability of the foregoing findings must be tempered by the study's weakness in that data were collected from a single exhibition and a sample of attendees predominantly coming from Mainland China. Nevertheless, for event organizers and promoters, the study's findings suggest that the choice of destinations remains paramount in generating

attendance at exhibitions, in spite of the facility or venue in which it is located, although a few facility and accommodation attributes remain relevant in the consideration process. The nature of the event itself seems of less consequence. For policy-makers, the study's findings imply a need to understand further the rise of complex MICE venues and the role they play in attracting business tourism. If destination attributes are paramount, does the availability of complex MICE venues enhance the destination attributes overall? This is a question requiring further investigation.

Based on the inherent limitations of this study, it remains unclear whether complex MICE venues present an altogether different mix of attributes to sufficiently stimulate exhibition attendance compared with traditional MICE venues. If it were, data gathered from respondents in this albeit single case study would have shown predominantly more emphasis on facilities-related or exhibition-related attributes. To address this problem, more comparative studies between complex and non-complex MICE venues will need to be staged and covering a more varied context of events and attendees.

CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to shed more light on the most important attributes influencing exhibition attendance by delegates in the context of complex MICE venues. The study simultaneously measured determinant attributes destination and facilities (Category 4 as defined by Yoo and Chon, 2008) as well as a single event or exhibition level attribute. This extension from a single attribute view, to the incorporation of more than one level of attribute of convention and exhibition attendance, enables a greater comprehension of such attendance. Such an expanded view enables a broader framework than hitherto addressed in academic studies. It highlighted the increasing prevalence of complex MICE venues in drawing not only organizers and promoters of business events or exhibitions but delegates as well.

The empirical findings of this study drawn from delegates attending an exhibition in a complex-MICE venue show that the most important attributes remain destination centred, particularly in regard to destination surroundings, safety, reputation and infrastructure. Of secondary importance are attributes related to facilities' safety, reputation and atmosphere but also accessibility in terms of cost and accommodation safety. Overall, this finding suggests that destination characteristics remain as the principal consideration when attending exhibitions or business events, regardless of the emergence of complex MICE venues.

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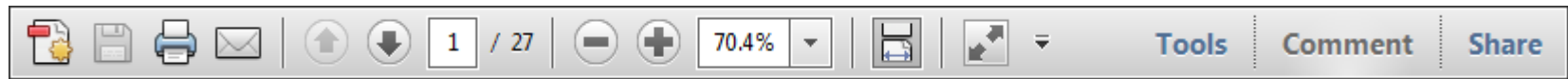
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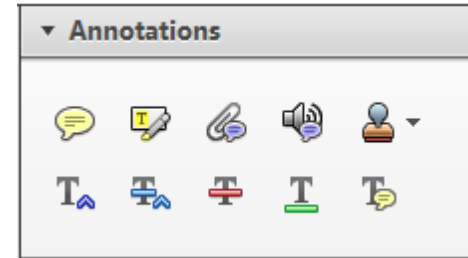
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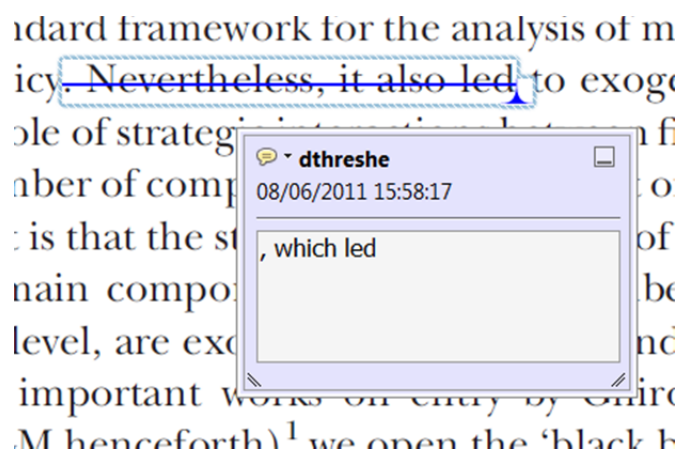
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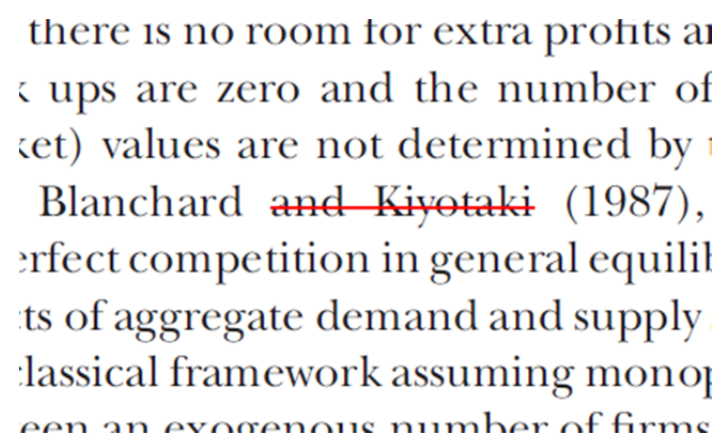
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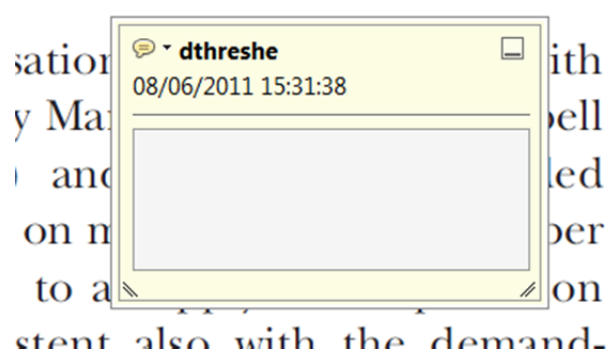


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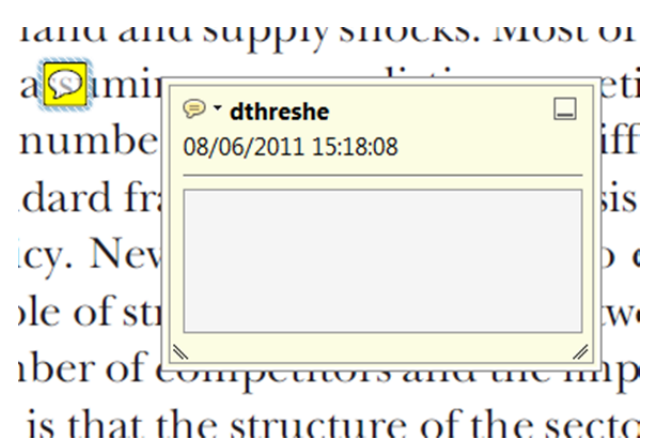
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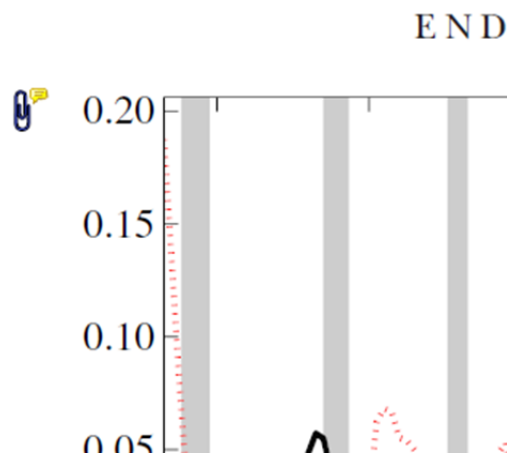
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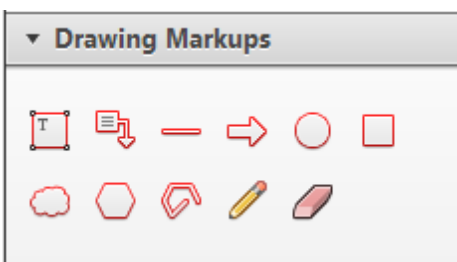


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of the business cycle, starting with the
 on perfect competition, constant return
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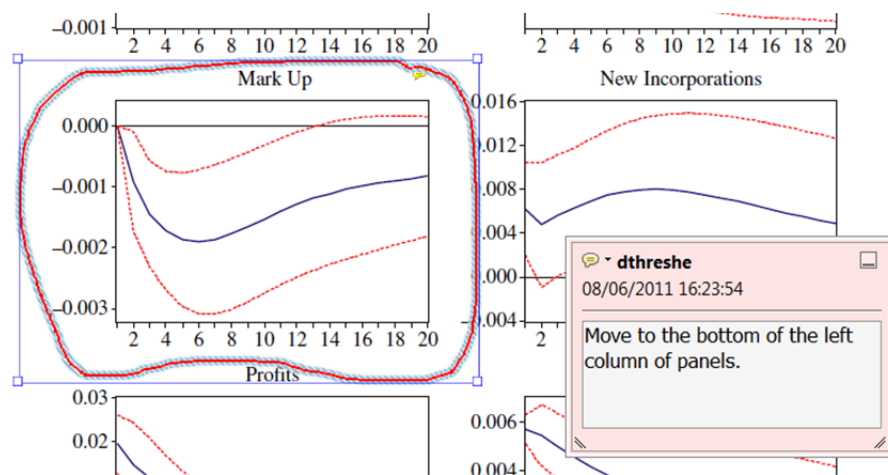


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