

**PERCEIVED CAUSES AND CONSEQUENT  
BEHAVIORS OF VISITORS' TOTAL EVENT  
EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC COMMUNITY EVENT**

By

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# **PUNCA-PUNCA TANGGAPAN DAN TINGKAH LAKU LANGSUNG MELALUI PENGALAMAN MENYELURUH PENGUNJUNG DALAM ACARA AWAM**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini memberi penekanan kepada kepentingan aspek fizikal dan juga keseronokan, keterlibatan, dan pengalaman yang sukar dilupakan dalam konteks acara awam di Malaysia. Objektif utama kajian adalah untuk meneliti penggunaan pengalaman pengunjung yang terdiri daripada punca-punca tanggapan dan tingkah laku langsung pengunjung. Kesan pengantaraan pengalaman menyeluruh pengunjung kepada punca-punca tanggapan dan tingkah laku langsung pengunjung adalah juga di selidiki di dalam kajian. Kajian ini juga menyelidik kesan segmen-segmen pengunjung atas penggunaan pengalaman menyeluruh. Landasan teori untuk model konseptual pengalaman acara adalah berpandukan teori atribusi yang memfokus kepada punca-punca hasil tanggapan dalaman dan luaran pengunjung, di samping kesan secara langsung dan tidak langsung ke atas tingkah laku pengunjung selepas acara. Kajian ini menggunakan data kuantitatif yang dikutip daripada 508 responden dan dianalisis menggunakan model persamaan struktur. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa punca-punca tanggapan dan tingkah laku langsung pengunjung telah diantarai oleh pengalaman menyeluruh pengunjung. Kedua-dua atribusi dalaman ciri acara dan atribusi luaran interaksi sosial menyumbang secara langsung kepada pengalaman menyeluruh pengunjung, dan secara tidak langsung kepada tingkah laku pengunjung, iaitu kepuasan menyeluruh dan niat pengunjung terhadap acara untuk masa akan datang. Walaubagaimanapun, segmen-segmen pengunjung didapati tidak mempunyai kesan ke atas pengalaman menyeluruh acara. Kajian ini telah menunjukkan bahawa pengantaraan secara kolektif keseronokan, keterlibatan dan pengalaman yang sukar dilupakan yang berfokuskan pengunjung adalah penting bagi acara awam dan juga bagi acara lain yang serupa dengannya.

# **PERCEIVED CAUSES AND CONSEQUENT BEHAVIORS OF VISITORS’ TOTAL EVENT EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC COMMUNITY EVENT**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study emphasizes on the importance of physical aspects of the event, as well as enjoyment, engagement, and memorable experiences in the context of public community event. The main objective of the study is to examine visitors’ consumption experiences which comprised of perceived causes and consequent behaviors. The mediating effect of total event experience on perceived causes and consequent behaviors also being explored in this study. The study also investigates effect of segments of visitors on the event consumption experiences. The theoretical orientation for the conceptual model of event experience is guided by attribution theory that focuses on visitors’ internal and external perceived causes of outcome, and their direct and indirect effects on consequent behaviors. This study uses quantitative data collection from 508 respondents and analyzed using structural equation modeling. Findings revealed that perceived causes and consequent behaviors were mediated by visitors’ total event experience. Both the internal attribution event features and external attribution social interactions have directly influenced visitors’ total event experience, and indirectly influenced consequent behaviors, which are overall satisfaction and future intentions toward the event. However, segments of visitors were found to have no effect on the event consumption experiences. The study implies staging a collective enjoyable, engaging and memorable customer-focused event experience is important for public community event organizers as well as for any similar event.

## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

The concept of experience now plays a central role in influencing consumers' choices of purchases in today's modern society. It was suggested that the world has now moved away from the conservative agricultural, industrial, and service-based economy to a new 'experiential economy' or the fourth economy era (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The ability to offer mere goods and services by businesses is no longer enough as effective and competitive strategy in today's increasingly competitive business world. Thus, businesses are strongly recommended to shift their focus from delivering high quality offerings (viewed as the "delivery-focused" service economy) to staging experience, which is also expressed as creating "a memorable consumption experience" (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007, p.119).

Similar to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) 'experiential economy', the concept of experience has been referred to as 'experience industry' (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1999), 'dream society' (Jensen, 1999), and 'experiential marketing' (Schmidt, 1999) in the literature. Although the terms are different, the emphasis is still the same whereby all of them stress on the importance of the experience consumption. In 1982, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) forwarded the idea that consumer's experience consumption is focused on fantasies, feelings and fun. Agreeing with this idea, Pine and Gilmore (2000) stressed on the importance for businesses to provide special experiences and unforgettable memories to their consumers as the world is now having shifted to the 'experiential economy'. Experiences that are memorable and engaging for consumers in a personal way are the key distinction of service experiences to other physical goods and commodities

(Berridge, 2007). Since this is the case, consumers today can be seen to be more demanding on the experiences, entertainment, and exhibitionism they can gain from service providers rather than from product performance and benefit (Holbrook, 2000).

Fundamentally, purchasing an experience is not the same as purchasing goods and services. There are significant distinctions between experiences and the other types of purchases (i.e. goods, services, and commodities). The key differentiation between experiences and goods, services, and commodities is that experiences are memorable and engage consumers in a personal way (Berridge, 2007). Hence, experiences are intended to be memorable occasions for consumers (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Gilmore & Pine, 2002; Berridge, 2007). Other than that, Pine and Gilmore (1998) claimed that experiences are generally full of emotions. Berridge (2007) mentioned about the richness of experience with sensations created within consumers. O'Sullivan and Spangler claimed that experiences address the "psychic needs of a society" (1999, p.4). In these cases, what is actually offered to the consumers is beyond mere goods and services. This is because the aim of purchasing is the "remembrance" and not the product itself (Wang, 2008). Based on above discussion, Pine and Gilmore (2000, p.18) have defined experience as "memorable events that engage customers in inherently personal ways". Since the above definition is written from a business perspective, a definition of experience from a consumer perspective could be defined as "enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events" (Oh et al., 2007, p.120).

Moreover, an experience is described as a consumer's "response to certain stimuli induced by events" (Lee et al., 2008, p.219). Customers would be engaged on an "emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual level" within a staged environment

set up (i.e. products or services) by the experience providers or staggers (Berridge, 2007, p.122). In addition, the consumers' interactions, participation or direct observations within the staged environment would eventually produce experiences. Else suggested by Woodruff (1997), and Butz and Goodstein (1996), experience can be viewed as a "subjective conception derived from the consuming experience" (as cited in Wang, 2008, p.45).

## **1.2 RESEARCH SETTING – SPECIAL EVENT**

To date, the concept of experience has been increasingly used in many areas such as marketing, retailing, branding, management and the service industry. There have now been efforts to refocus business strategy based on this contemporary concept. Nonetheless, Berridge (2007) stated that usage of the experiential paradigm in event-based publications is still somewhat limited and under-developed. Although experience is largely acknowledged as a component within events, it is yet to be used as the foundation of the whole event being delivered. The event experience would be constructive for event researchers to understand and examine what factors actually forms a celebration at special event. Berridge's (2007) comments seem to suggest that until today, the event sector still has not been able to explicitly capitalize on the new development of the experiential paradigm to the fullest, even though special events are good examples of venues of experiential hedonistic consumptions.

The limited and under-developed research publications and business implementations indicate the need for research to be carried out to further examine and capitalize this contemporary experiential approach into the event setting to capitalize on the new paradigm, and providing suitable understanding and measure on visitors' event experiences. Furthermore, experiential approach is said to be most

suitable when describing a certain group of services, like the ones related to travel, the arts, music, culture, theatre, hotels, and restaurants (Edvardsson, 2005; Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristenson & Magnusson, 2008). This indicates the suitability of the concept when one studies another hedonic product, namely a special event, as it is a high involvement product that is laden with ranges of sensation, imagination, and emotion within the event attendees (visitors).

A special event is defined as “an opportunity for a leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience” (Getz, 2005, p.16). It is often described as temporary, peripatetic, and organized with fixed and limited timescales (Jones, 2012). Goldblatt (1997, p.6), a prominent event guru simplified special event’s definition as “that different from a normal day of living”. Note that defining a special event is very challenging since it depends on one’s perspective and “superficially reflected in the names or themes” of an event (Getz, 1991, p.40). According to Getz (1989), what makes an event a “special” event would depend on its context to the organizer also to its visitors, and not on the term/title used to name the events.

Special events can be found at all levels of society. The majority of events started in the beginning as rituals or performances related to traditions, beliefs, and religions within the society. People gather to mark important occasions or celebrations in life, the changing of seasons, phases of the moon, or even to appease the spirits of sea, land or forest. Certain myths and rituals inclusive of dances and songs were also created to help define the events. Over time, these ceremonies were acknowledged and shared, and continuously regarded as eminent social occasions in the life of the community (Allen, O’Toole, McDonnell & Harris, 2005). Thus, generally, special events are often used as a meeting point for societies to enjoy and



celebrate. As Getz (2012) explained, many planned events are to fulfill human's basic need for economic and social exchanges. For example, there have been many historical events served as essential instruments for cultivating social order and civilization. To date, events are also valuable for urban and economic development, social marketing efforts, place marketing and branding.

While planned event activities have been observed to increase in numbers, size, cost, and impacts in recent decades similar to other related tourism activity (Jones, 2012), according to Getz (2012), the advancement of knowledge on event studies is generally 25-30 years slower than other studies on tourism, hospitality, and leisure since event studies only started as an academic discipline in the mid-to-late 1990s. Although it is now considered an academic field, event studies started from a professional field of event management (Kim, Boo & Kim, 2013). The core of event studies is suggested by Getz (2007) as the study of planned events looking at event experience, and meanings attached to events and its experiences. Civic events, expositions, hallmark events, hospitality, meetings and conferences, retail events, social life-cycle events, sport events, tourism, and public community events (i.e. fairs and festivals) are the ten subfields of event management provided and identified by Goldblatt (1997). Further explanation on special event and event management is provided in Section 2.2 – Background on Special Events of the literature review chapter.

In Malaysia, special events are considered excellent avenues for Malaysians to celebrate, educate, build friendship, and foster a sense of community or kinship, while simultaneously providing the locals with multiple recreational opportunities. These events enhance pride in locals of their culture, customs, and traditions as well as provide opportunity to boost tourism activities. To date, Malaysia's multi-racial

and multi-cultural nation serves as excellent pull factors for tourists to visit the country. The varieties of Malaysia's unique local special events such as 'Gawai Harvesting' Festival, Sarawak and 'Keamatan Harvesting' Festival, Sabah are examples of Malaysia's 'value-added products' for tourism. According to Malaysia Profile (2008), cultural events and festivals (as examples of special event) were cited as one of the most popular activities engaged by tourists (16.8% in 2007 and this increases to 17% in 2008). As special events helped to generate Malaysia's high tourism revenue, estimated to be worth RM53 billion (Hooi, Ling & Shamsul, 2011), the event sector is now considered a necessary component of the Malaysian tourism industry.

As observed by Ayob (2003), there is an apparent growth in events in Malaysia since the early 1990s. This was when the country started to include bigger events like the 1998 Kuala Lumpur XVI Commonwealth Games (the first big event ever staged in Malaysia) and the Malaysian F1 Grand Prix (introduced since 1999) into its tourism calendar and product list. These events have attracted a large number of visitors, major media coverage and viewers from all around the world and largely contributed to the development of event tourism in Malaysia. From business perspective, the staging or sponsoring an event can help commercial businesses to further their competitiveness, increase visibility, and create positive association (Jones, 2012). Ayob (2003) cited economic prosperity, a more leisure-oriented lifestyle, and ever-improving global communications that exist in the country as reasons for the increasing growth of the event sector in Malaysia. These factors are similar to Getz's (1991) reasons when he explained why events are growing in numbers globally.

In Malaysia today, participating in special events has become a popular activity and culture among the local communities as more and more leisure, social and cultural events are organized and staged for the general community and tourists alike. The popularity of special events in Malaysia seems to follow the trends observed in Asia. According to Weber and Ali-Knight (2012), the Asian region is now displaying a tremendous growth of staging and sponsoring special events especially in key areas of entertainment, conferences and exhibitions, cultural festivals, and sporting events.

The majority of public community events in Malaysia are typically of small-scale and are mainly designed and staged for local consumption and appeal. According to Goldblatt (1997), fairs and festivals are public community events identified as one of the important subfields of event management. Fairs allow certain opportunities for commercial gains while festivals are not-for-profit events celebrated without commercial gains (Goldblatt, 2011) that are mainly tied to religious and spiritual purposes such as Chinese New Year, Sarawak Gawai Festival, and Deepavali Open House. Getz (1991) too explained that fairs have to do with productivity and business. Examples of fairs in Malaysia include agricultural expos, food and cooking fests, fruits fiestas, Pameran Pertanian, Hortikultur dan Agro Pelancongan Malaysia (MAHA International), Karnival Jom Heboh, Karnival Gegaria Harian Metro, and Karnival Budaya 1Malaysia 2012.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Production of consumer experience is often seen and measured via conventional method that lies mainly on the event's physical aspects such as programs, settings, and amenities. However, the traditional approach of staging

consumer experience focusing only on the physical aspects of products and services are insufficient today due to intense business rivalry and increased consumer demands and expectation (Berridge, 2007; Mascarenhas, Kesavan & Bernacchi, 2006). This is because such production neglects to consider other important aspects i.e. the sensory and emotional elements during the experience. In short, the dependency upon physical aspect's measure alone will not be able to capture total customer experience.

Especially for experiential products like public community events, the customers' experience would depend heavily on the events' ability to produce ranges of sensations, imagination, emotions and involvement within the customers. In fact, a failure in creating an engaging, special, and memorable experience(s) may result in the inability for the customers to differentiate an event from another event (product differentiation), which in future will cause the event to lose its individuality or uniqueness.

As noted from the literature, the advantage of viewing production of experiential products from customers' experiences should benefit both researchers as well as service providers/event professionals as they are able to build an understanding on the 'what' and 'how' of total customer experience; which ideally, should be covering every component involved in the staging and delivery of the experience, not just the functional products and services alone. Similarly, Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) suggested that Berridge (2007, p.169) also strongly suggested that event user experience should be viewed as "the total immersive outcome that combines all the various elements that are experienced, as individuals and as a collective".

Thus, what is new in this study is the conceptualization of total customer experience at events as an overall experiential outcome or psychological benefits resulted from a combination of various causal factors, which later on would influence key visitors' post-consumption behaviors. With all that in mind, this study defines total event experience (TEE) for users/consumers/attendees/visitors as collective "enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters" for those who experience the events (adapted from Oh et al., 2007, p.120). In the attempt of providing such TEE, the study proposes that researchers to note how most celebrations often combine various elements to initiate a "festive" or playful event consumption environment. Similarly, Getz (1997) states that the total enjoyment perceived by event visitors is affected not only by the program, setting, facilities, and event management system designed by the service providers, but also by the behaviors and complex interactions of visitors with staff members, volunteers, performers, and other visitors.

In other words, factors such as social or human interaction may be among the influencing factors of the visitors' evaluation on TEE. However, the effect of human interaction is rarely considered as significant to be examined, understood, and managed within a public community event. Efforts to understand and examine the influence of social interactions within an event experience delivery system were found to be essentially inadequate even in the event and tourism field. As Baum et al. (2009) reported, event studies that examine impacts of the human side of events and social impacts associated with events were largely insufficient. The study argues that there is a need for researchers to examine not just the effects of performance of event features, but also the effects of social interactions the visitors had with various reference groups (i.e. event staff, performers, vendors, volunteers, and fellow attendees) at a public community event to provide an understanding of visitors' TEE.

An issue that arises in understanding and measuring visitors' experiences of an event is in finding the right instrument or mechanism for the purpose. An effective mechanism that is able to model event production and achievement via visitors' event experiences might be significant to visitors; for, it can help to enhance the visitors' event experiences at future events. Unfortunately, Wood and Masterman (2008) reported that at least 79% of event marketing agencies do not have specific tracking or measurement systems to evaluate their programs efficiently. Conventionally, methods and/or evidences that are commonly used by the event (i.e. attendance of visitors, achieved sales) when assessing the production of the event were somewhat subjective and might even be exaggerated purposely to achieve certain objectives; for example, to attract publicity, sponsorships and to influence certain decisions of the government or politicians. Moreover, the method used to get the data might also be questionable and not reliable. This is supported by Ayob (2003) who mentioned the common tendency of event organizers in Malaysia is to overstate the number of attendees at their events. Such problem has led to the suggestion by Abdullah, Mohd-Nadzar, and Abdul-Rahman (2012) on the need for effective event management and key success indicators for achievement standards in events in Malaysia. This major dilemma needs to be dealt with first in order to assist the growth of event sector in Malaysia. For this purpose, it is suggested to view and measure visitors' TEE that focuses on sensory and emotional elements within visitors, and that is able to capture various elements experienced by visitors together with the existing conventional method of measure. Briefly, the result of the study might not just benefit academic researchers, event organizers, and event visitors, but may also help the event and tourism industry in Malaysia.

Henceforth, it is important to select the appropriate theory to guide the theoretical orientation for the model of event experience. The attribution theory is well known within psychology and social psychology fields. It is also applied into studies of marketing and consumer behavior. However, application of the attribution theory within event studies is practically nonexistent even though the assumption of this theory would work well in conceptualizing experiences in social phenomena such in public community events. In addition, this study contributes to new knowledge by proposing extension of the attribution theory to include the TEE variable as mediator between causal factors or perceived causes (i.e. event features and social interactions) and consequent behaviors (i.e. overall satisfaction, future intentions) in attempts to understand and evaluate total customer experience in context of public community event in Malaysia.

The attribution theory assumes all visitors of a public community event would try to interpret perceived causes of their TEE from personal observation and analysis on-site of event. Particularly, the conceptual framework proposed the visitors to assign causality to their TEE on the basis of event features provided by the event (assumes to be internal attribution of the event from perspective of the event organizer) or social interactions with various people that they meet on-site of the event (assumes to be external attribution or situational factors to the event from perspective of the event organizer), or to some combination of both. Furthermore, Cort, Griffith, and White (2007, p.10) suggested that the attribution theory focus on the visitors' perceived causes of outcome and their direct and indirect effects on consequent or post-consumption behaviors. Since this is the case, visitors' event experiences are assumed to be better explained if the model proposes the perceived causes (i.e. event features and social interactions) to have direct effect on visitors'

TEE (as a mediator) and indirect effect on visitors' consequent or post-consumption behaviors (i.e. overall satisfaction and future intentions). In addition, the model would be able to better explain and even predict visitors' consequent behaviors if effect of a moderating variable namely segments of visitors (i.e. first-time and repeat visitors) on the experiences are investigated too. An implication of difference between first-time and repeat visitors groups, as two important consumer segments, on the relationship (i.e. TEE→Consequent behaviors) at events can provide valuable information for more cost-effective target marketing and sustain its steady growth rate.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based upon the discussion in previous sections, the following research questions are established:

- 1) Will visitors' TEE be influenced by proposed perceived causes, i.e. event features and social interactions?
- 2) Will visitors' TEE lead to consequent behaviors i.e. overall satisfaction and future intentions?
- 3) Will visitors' TEE play a role of mediator between perceived causes (event features and social interactions) and consequent behaviors (overall satisfaction and future intentions)?
- 4) Will segments of visitors (whether a visitor is a first-time or repeat visitor) influence the relationships between TEE and consequent behaviors (overall satisfaction and future intentions)?



## **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Relating to the above research questions, these research objectives are developed specifically for this research.

The general research objective of the study is to investigate visitors' total event experience (TEE) role as a mediator, particularly in terms of event features and social interactions' role as perceived causes of TEE as well as TEE's consequences on consequent behaviors, i.e. overall satisfaction and future intentions in the context of a public community event, and the moderating effect of segments of visitors (first-time and repeat visitors) on the TEE-consequent behaviors relationships.

In specific, the research objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine the role of event features and social interactions as the perceived causes of visitors' TEE.
- 2) To examine the role of TEE as the attributor or influencer to consequent behaviors, i.e. overall satisfaction and future intentions?
- 3) To investigate the mediating role of visitors' TEE on relationships between perceived causes (event features and social interactions) and consequent behaviors (overall satisfaction and future intentions).
- 4) To investigate the moderating effect of segments of visitors (first-time and repeat visitors) on relationships between TEE and consequent behaviors (overall satisfaction and future intentions).

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This section presents the significance of the study and its expected outcomes. The study and its outcomes would be significant as regards to the advancement of knowledge and to industry and society.

### **1.6.1 Advancement of Knowledge**

Advancement of knowledge of the study can be in several forms. First, the study is significant because the study proposes the conceptualization of TEE as an overall experiential outcome or psychological benefits resulted from a combination of perceived causes (i.e. internal factors such as event features and external factors such as social interactions), which later on would influence key visitors' consequent or post-consumption behaviors. There are still relatively inadequate in-depth study and knowledge collection in regards to the concept of experience within event studies. Berridge (2007) argued that to date, many event researchers and event organizers of the past have treated experience indifferently. As Berridge stated, not much meaningful discussion on experience can be found within event studies. Such neglect has resulted in the event being measured via physical components primarily the performance of event features/attributes but not in terms of how the event succeeded to psychologically, emotionally, and at times spiritually engaged the visitors within the event experience. Hence, instead of traditional approach focusing on process of management, provision, and programming of facilities, the study recommends modern events to envision, deliver, and stage all event components into TEE, an overall outcome experience that can physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually engage the visitors.

Moreover, the study is important given that there exists a serious gap in the literature in terms of evaluating experience variable. Even though various researchers (i.e. Pine & Gilmore, 1998; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1999; Jensen, 1999; Schmidt, 1999) have long argued on the importance of the experience consumption, there is a lack of empirical measurement tool published to measure consumer experience much less tourist experience (Oh et al., 2007). Moreover, application and measurement of the concept of experience within event studies are not comprehensive. Methods used (i.e. estimation of attendees, achieved sales) to assess success of events are conventional, questionable, and somewhat exaggerated for purpose of publicity.

Hence, the study attempts to add to the body of knowledge of event studies by conceptualizing TEE in order to try to measure event's capacity to produce ranges of sensations, imagination, emotions and involvement within visitors' experiences at a public community event. Distinctively from other event studies, TEE will not be treated as a part or component within events that can be inserted or incorporated by the organizers. TEE is viewed as total collective "enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters" for those who experience events (adapted from Oh et al., 2007, p.120). For the practical purpose of measuring visitors' TEE, the study tries to improve measurement of 4Es framework of experience realms proposed by Oh et al. (2007) adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1998). This study considers it to be crucial for a new dimension most probably an event-specific dimension to be added to the other four existing dimensions. It is believed that the new set dimensions of TEE variable may help to enhance the researchers' understanding of the essence of celebration experiences at events (i.e. the public community event).

In addition, the study is proposing that the attribution theory can be extended and adaptable for conceptualizing the understanding of event experience within the

social phenomena at special events (like public community event). This is in line with the gap found within the literature on the ‘near zero’ application of this attribution theory in event studies in comparison with its wide application within the psychology and social psychology fields. Folkes (1988) and Weiner (2000) for example noted that the concept of attribution in the attribution theory has been less recognized within consumer studies (i.e. consumer as a causal agent). This may be taken as indication that attributions to consumers’ personal dispositions are considered less important compared to event’s products and services. In this study however, it is proposed that the attribution theory is useful especially in addressing the issue of biasness and errors concerning visitors’ judgments and behaviors in a special event setting.

From the attribution theory, it can be learned that it is important to consider that consumers’ personal dispositions are attributed to many factors, some of which can be unrelated to one another, or, in other cases, are very much interrelated; the factors can also be subjective (own perception) or objective in nature; and that the what, when, where, who, why, and how information that they collect within the time frame that they perceive they have, as well as the situations that they are in at an event which will basically determine the consequences or outcome of their experience evaluations. The visitors’ ability to process all relevant information at an event is normally limited, biased and often done without much effort and time to think it thoroughly, especially at the most celebrated and short-run events with fast exit rates. As a result, event visitors may often make subjective perception of perceived causes based on personal analysis of behavioral facts and figures. Heider (1958) suggested that the subjective perceptions of causal inferences are not necessarily based on a true reality. Besides, the subjective perception visitors made at

the event might be from personal and direct observations and as well indirectly hearing about something from other people at the event. Nonetheless, the subjective inferences would still influence the visitors' outcome judgment, action, and behavior (Brehm & Kassin, 1996; Cort et al., 2007). As such, the study deems the attribution theory may be useful and adaptable as a basis in studying special event experience phenomena.

Consequently, the study proposes an extension to the use of attribution theory via the proposal of TEE variable as a mediator between perceived causes (i.e. event features and social interactions) and consequent behaviors (i.e. overall satisfaction, future intentions). With such proposal, TEE may allow both the perceived causes and consequent variables as suggested in the attribution theory to take place. As explained by Kelley and Michela (1980), the basic structure of attribution theory includes perceived causes explanations, and consequences of causal attributions (e.g. on emotions and behaviors). In addition, the attribution theory is suggested to consist of a psychological consequence (TEE) as a mediator in its conception as demonstrated in Cort et al. (2007) in their attribution model of internationalization success.

Lastly, the study is different because it strongly suggests social interactions need to be considered as an important perceived cause or antecedent of TEE and be treated as a separate variable from performance of event features. The study argues that event studies must also evaluate effect of social interactions on visitors' event experience. Although the event studies have continuously progressed, that saw subject areas to diversify since 2000, still, the literature review suggests that the focus of the studies remains to be very limited in terms of number of topics, in particular, the business and economic dimensions in event studies (Getz, 2012; Mair

& Whitford, 2013; Kim, Boo & Kim, 2013). This is in addition to the fact that the human side of events and social impacts associated with events are also largely under researched (Baum et al., 2009). The study aims to fill the research gap by measuring visitors' social interactions with various people encountered at a public community event, and examine its direct and indirect effects on TEE, overall satisfaction, and future intentions. This is because according to Getz (1997), a complete model of event experience may consist of a fusion of activities, settings, facilities, amenities, and human encounters at a special event that makes up the total event experience at the end of a visit. The human or social factor may play an influential role on visitors' judgment on-site of a social gathering of public community events. Hence, it is important to note that visitors' social interactions with various people with different dispositions, attitudes, and manners may significantly enhance or disturb visitors' TEE. Thus, the study proposes to evaluate social interaction with various reference groups that may range from organizer's own staff, vendors or salespeople, performers, celebrities to fellow visitors as a perceived cause of the visitors' TEE distinct from an evaluation of event products and services.

### **1.6.2 Significance to Industry and Society**

For practical contributions, the study would be of substantial assistance to service providers/event organizers in improving their event experiences. Indeed, a thorough understanding of the visitors' event experiences may afford opportunities for the organizers to design and deliver experiences that can emotionally, physically, intellectually, and may be spiritually 'connect' with visitors (Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009). Event organizers may understand the totality of what really comes about at a celebration that forms visitors' event experience and consequently their

satisfaction and future intentions. As Berridge (2007) suggested, the experiential concept would enable organizers to have a holistic view of customer experience. Cole and Illum (2006) state that event organizers should understand visitors' experience in order to ensure the visitors' satisfaction, and thus the future of the event. Thus, Lee et al. (2007) urged event organizers to organize, manage, market, and stage their event in form of experiences that are special and unforgettable in order to yield value to the event attendees. Furthermore, there is a need for the organizers to be able to anticipate new trends or changes in visitors' hedonic need. Overall, the study may assist event organizers in designing, strategizing, marketing, managing, and staging their events for a more unforgettable and engaging event experience in future.

Other than providing positive benefits to event organizers, a successful memorable and special event experience may also result in stronger relationships with supports from visitors, media, sponsors, government, and from related social and business communities. This is because improved event experiences can essentially lead to improved experiences, satisfaction, knowledge, and understanding of the visitors and the host of the events' goals, objectives, customs, and traditions. Then, the events would truly become excellent avenues for societies to celebrate, educate, build friendship, and foster a sense kinship among the locals and with the outsiders.

Last, a successful memorable and special event experience would surely be an attractive competitive advantage that can differentiate a destination from others. As according to Allen et al. (2005), special events can help destinations to attract more tourists to the destination, for the events provide certain uniqueness to touristic experiences at the destination. Successful events could certainly create attractive

profile and image for the destination (Allen et al., 2005) and thus allow the destination to position itself strongly among its competitors in the tourism market, build brand awareness and loyalty towards the destination on the part of visitors. Hence, it is hopeful that the result of this research would help provide suggestions on some practical implications and strategies to event organizations, tourism related government agencies, and local authorities on what is important to stage a great event experience.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF VARIABLES/KEY TERMS**

- Special events
  - “An opportunity for leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience” (Getz, 2005, p.16).
  - “An event that is different from a normal day of living” (Goldblatt, 1997, p. 6).
- Total event experience (TEE)
  - Collective “enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters” for those who experience the events (adapted from Oh et al., 2007, p.120).
- Event features (EF)
  - Performance quality or quality of opportunities or resources supplied by event organizers or available at an event (Baker & Crompton, 2000).
- Social interactions (SI)
  - “Particular forms of externalities, in which the actions of a reference group affect an individual’s preferences” (Scheinkman, 2008, p.1).



- Overall satisfaction (OS)
  - A collective psychological state that takes place immediately after a consumption experience at an event (adapted from Oliver, 1997).
- Future intentions (FI)
  - Visitors' behavioral intention to say positive things about the event to other people, and intention to revisit the event in the future (Ayob et al., 2010).
- Segments of visitors
  - Frequency of visits in order to differentiate first-time and repeat visitor groups (Kruger, Saayman & Ellis, 2010).

## **1.8 THESIS OUTLINE**

Chapter One provides the background of concept of experience and special events in general and specifically in Malaysia, and. Then, it outlines the research problem, objectives, questions, and significance of the study.

Chapter Two examines relevant literatures that relate to the variables identified in the framework of this study. It begins with significant discussions, arguments, and findings on the study's underlining theory i.e. the attribution theory, concept of experience, social interactions, event features, overall satisfaction, future intentions, segments of visitors, event studies, and event management,. Chapter Two also establishes the study's conceptual framework, hypotheses, basis for the framework of TEE, and research gaps.

Chapter Three outlines the quantitative methodology of the study. The chapter covers the research design, research study setting (i.e. a case of public community event), research instrument and procedures, pilot study, the main survey, and data analysis and statistical methods.

Chapter Four reports the results of the data analysis. The chapter presents results from descriptive analysis in terms of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The chapter also presents detailed descriptions and results of measurement and structural model analysis of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and hypotheses testing.

Chapter Five discusses the main findings of the study in terms of the four research questions established in Chapter One. It concludes the thesis with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and recommendations for future research, and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter first reviews relevant literature on the underlying theory, the attribution theory. Then, the chapter attempts to identify and justify arguments, findings, and research gaps on relevant variables in this study; namely, concept of experience, social interactions, event features, overall satisfaction, future intentions, and segments of visitors. The chapter also presents background knowledge on special event study. All these findings from literature reviews are key information in developing the study's conceptual framework, and hypotheses, which are discussed towards the end of Chapter 2. A summary of research gaps and summary of Chapter 2 ends the chapter.

### **2.2 THE UNDERLYING THEORY – ATTRIBUTION THEORY**

The attribution theory is well known within psychology and social psychology fields. It is also applied into fields of marketing and consumer behavior. However, event studies have not yet applied the attribution theory even though the assumption of this theory would work well in interpreting visitors' experiences in event phenomena.

Fritz Heider (1958) first introduced the logic of attribution in his book entitled 'The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations'. According to Heider, all of us tend to act like amateur psychologists to make sense of our world. Psychologically, we always try to understand causes of actions/events/outcome of human behavior. We often search for answers to 'why we do what we do?' Thus, we observe and analyze our own and other people's behavior, and come up with explanations for the

behavior. The explanations are termed attributions; the theory that describes the process is called the attribution theory (Brehm & Kassin, 1996).

So, what kind of explanations do individuals make, and how do they set about making them? There are many different kinds of causal inferences or perceived causes that a person can make to explain outcome of human behavior (Brehm & Kassin, 1996). Heider suggested that it would be most useful to put together these explanations into two generic properties: (a) Internal or personal, and (b) External or situational/environmental. Individuals would rationalize and discern degrees of responsibility for the outcome under consideration. Hence, an individual can make two types of attributions or explanations to explain causes of an event. First, internal attribution suggesting something about the person, or in this case about the event and organization, personally causes the event. The second type of attribution is termed external attribution, which means causes of the event are perceived to have originated from the environment or situation a person is in. Accordingly, it means that an event outcome is a function of both internal and external/environmental components. Concisely, the many causal attributions are aggregated into two dimensions to allow greater understanding and generalization (Cort et al., 2007).

Moreover, the attribution theory focuses on an individual's subjective perceptions of the causality of success/failure and their direct and indirect influences on consequent behaviors (Cort et al., 2007). Hence, according to the theory, the causality or reasons perceived by individuals are our true interest. The perceptions of the causes of the event do not necessarily need to be the true perceived causes. The attribution theory assumes that individuals make up their judgments and conclusions based on objective reading of behavioral facts and figures (Brehm & Kassin, 1996). However, our ability to process all relevant information via observation is limited,