



POST-COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXAMINING THE MODERATING ROLE OF EVENT IMAGE ON VISITORS' INTENTION TO REVISIT MAJOR EVENTS

May Chiun Lo^a , Abang Azlan Mohamad^{b,*} , Jun Zhou Thong^c , Fung Yee Law^d

^a Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Kota Samarahan, Malaysia), Faculty of Economics and Business; Loughborough University London (London, UK), Institute for International Management and Entrepreneurship; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0767-7834>; e-mail: mclo@unimas.my

^b Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Kota Samarahan, Malaysia), Faculty of Economics and Business; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6266-8450>; email: maazlan@unimas.my

^c HELP University (Shah Alam, Malaysia), Faculty of Business, Economics and Accounting; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2107-8766>; e-mail: junzhou.t@help.edu.my

^d Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Kota Samarahan, Malaysia), Faculty of Economics and Business; e-mail: fylaw@unimas.my

* Corresponding author.

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ABSTRACT

Grasping the perspectives of consumers is a fundamental focus for those managing events and festivals. This study investigated the impacts of aspects of awareness and event experience, namely perceived value, service quality and event image on satisfaction, along with revisit intentions to major events. The study used a quantitative analysis based on 1265 valid responses collected from a survey conducted during several major events that were held in Sarawak, Malaysia. Via partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), the findings revealed service quality as a crucial motivator towards the attendees' satisfaction levels, and this led to their revisit intentions. The event image was found to enhance the association, while the impacts of awareness and perceived value on satisfaction were not significant. The study provides event organizers with valuable insights regarding attendees' perceived aspects of an event, enabling the effective planning and implementation of future major events post-COVID-19.

KEYWORDS

Malaysia, post-COVID-19, major events, revisit intention, PLS-SEM

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an important driver of tourism, the role of planned events within the sector is well established and has become increasingly important to enhance a destination's competitiveness (Getz, 2008). A total of five main categories of event are proposed (see

Table 1). In recent years, the event industry has had significant growth in Malaysia, for its strategic location and richness in elements such as diverse ethnic communities, cultural heritage attractions, events and festivals (Mohamad et al., 2024). Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019, the event industry experienced an unprecedented surge in the numbers that are staged



in Malaysia, a country with diverse ethnic groups and their celebration of variety of event and festival types (Bouchon et al., 2015).

Table 1. Categories of events

No.	Category	Description
1.	Cultural celebrations	Religious events Commemorations Celebrations Festivals
2.	Political and state	VIP visits Political events Royal events
3.	Arts and entertainment	Ceremonies Concerts
4.	Business and trade	Fairs Assemblies Trade shows
5.	Educational and scientific	Clinics Conferences Seminars
6.	Sports competitions	Amateur Professional
7.	Recreational	Games
8.	Private events	Gatherings Weddings Parties

Source: Getz (2005).

However, the tourism industry has been severely impacted since the emergence of the pandemic. Borders were ordered to be closed, followed by the enforcement of mandatory quarantines, travel bans and the suspension of tourism activities (Gössling et al.,

2020). Subsequently, Malaysia saw a decrease of 83.40% in international tourist arrivals, with only around 4.3 million tourists compared to the 2019 figure of 26.1 million. This significant drop resulted in a decrease in tourism receipts from RM 86.1 billion in 2019 to RM 12.7 billion in 2020 (Tourism Malaysia, 2021).

Sarawak, in Malaysia (illustrated in Figure 1), suffered as tremendous a loss as Peninsular Malaysia. The event industry in Sarawak, which is one of its significant tourism products and elements, was heavily affected by the pandemic with public or special events being suspended or cancelled to prevent any COVID-19 infection. The Sarawak tourism industry commenced various efforts to emerge from the pandemic after entering the National Recovery Plan (NRP) phases. As an initiative to rejuvenate domestic tourism and part of its post-COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030, numerous small and medium events were immediately held in the state. These are comprised of several events and festivals that are held on an annual basis, ranging from sports events, music and arts festivals to carnivals: the Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF), Kuching Food Festival (KFF), Neon Borneo Festival, Sarawak Regatta and the Sunbear Festival (described in Table 2).

Although nations around the globe entered the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant shift in tourists and visitors' preferences was witnessed due to it, specifically from mass tourism to small groups or individual tours (Polukhina et al., 2021). This has revealed a particular interest in, and future trends towards local communities and culture along with events and activities (Chin, 2022). Moreover, the significance of events in the development of tourism has been highlighted in a wide range of previous studies (Eluwole et al., 2022; Fyttopoulou et al., 2021). Researchers have postulated that events can serve as important motivators of tourism and are an integral part of most destinations' development and

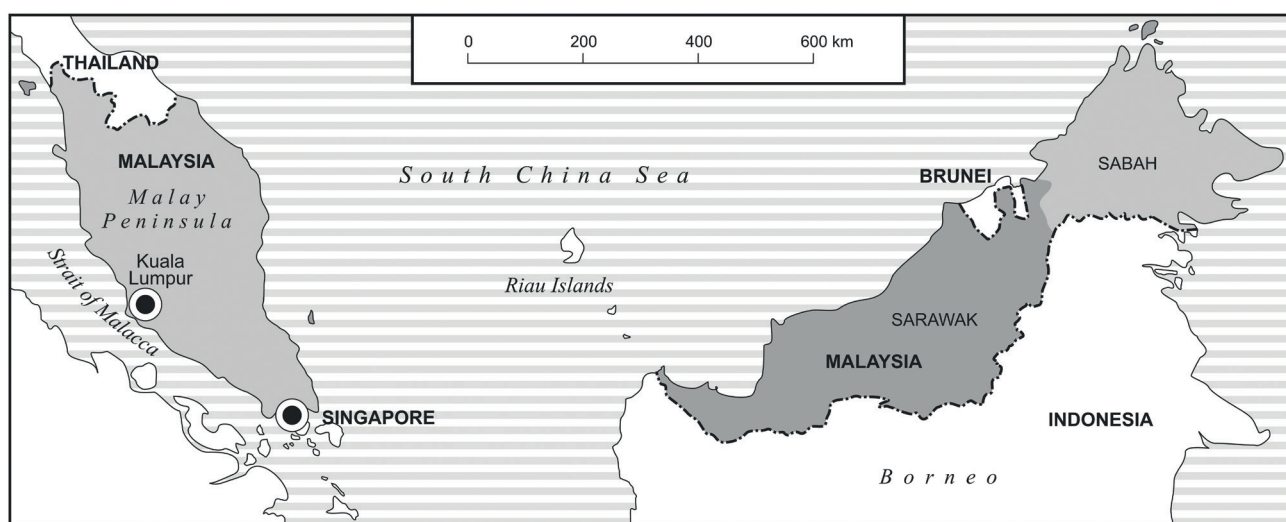


Figure 1. Location of Sarawak
Source: authors

Table 2. List of major events in Sarawak

No.	Time	Name	Category	Description
1.	July–August	Rainforest World Music Festival	Music festival	This event offers a variety of activities such as daytime music workshops, cultural and craft exhibitions, food vendors and evening performances on the main stage
2.	July–September	Kuching Food Festival	Food festival	The event takes place as part of the city's initiative to promote local tourism, activities include theatrical shows, live music performances, art exhibitions and writing competitions
3.	October	Neon Borneo Festival	Music festival	The festival celebrates Sarawak's rich heritage infused with contemporary elements, featuring traditional performances paired with Sarawakian cuisine and beverages
4.	October–November	Sarawak Regatta	Sports festival	The event features thrilling boat races with competitors from government bodies, private organizations, and neighboring nations such as Indonesia and Brunei
5.	December	Sunbear Festival	Music and arts festival	This event offers a fresh and innovative experience, combining diverse music genres with elements of art, fashion and various cuisines

Source: authors.

marketing strategies. Moreover, according to the study by Oklobdžija (2015), events can draw tourists who have a ripple effect on local economies by consuming products and services provided by local tourist companies such as lodging, food and transportation. Conversely, organizing an event in a specific location frequently encourages tourists to look for local suppliers, and this leads to several positive effects on the economic growth of the community hosting the event (Palrão et al., 2021). Ultimately, it is imperative for the understanding of the variables that influence an individual to travel; in fact, the literature on tourism now in existence has identified a number of push and pull factors (Chi & Pham, 2024; Thong et al., 2022).

Despite numerous empirical studies on various types of events and their impact on tourism development (Li et al., 2021; Mainolfi & Marino, 2020), there is inadequate evidence on aspects of how event experience (perceived value and satisfaction) can individually or simultaneously influence revisit intentions (Armbrrecht, 2021; Sato et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2016). The present study has included event image to examine its moderating effect. Thus, comprehending pre-event awareness and the various dimensions of event experience, along with their influence on visitors' satisfaction as well as intention to revisit in a single framework, would be beneficial for event planners and tourism experts in developing successful high-quality events, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another study from Avraham (2021) highlighted that the success of an event is not only dependent on its ability to re-attract visitors, but also its capability to restore their confidence post-COVID-19, and to encourage them to revisit. Therefore, this study can eventually help

event organizers and tourism practitioners to create successful events and generate long-term profitability. Overall, in line with Sarawak's PCDS 2030's strategic thrusts for the rejuvenation of the tourism industry post-pandemic, this study seeks to identify the impacts of visitors' awareness, along with several event experience components (perceived value and service quality), particularly on visitor satisfaction and subsequent intentions to revisit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

2.1. EVENT EXPERIENCES

Events and festivals represent a distinctive combination of tangible and intangible elements, creating challenges in assessing service quality and this aligns with expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Parasuraman et al., 1985), widely utilized for evaluating consumer service experiences (Theodorakis et al., 2015). While some studies (Oh & Kim, 2017) emphasize the proactive role of event organizers in responding to participant expectations, others (Choo et al., 2016; Shonk et al., 2017) underscore the causal link between service quality and satisfaction, reinforcing its centrality to business success. Recent methodologies have explored this relationship through surveys (Chang et al., 2022; Selmi et al., 2021), whereas observation approaches to a participatory event (Armbrrecht, 2020) provide deeper insights into participant narratives. This comparative perspective highlights service quality as

an integral factor influencing satisfaction, particularly in event settings (Kusumawati & Rahayu, 2020). In sum, by focusing on the participants' experience, event organizers can identify and prioritize areas of improvement and determine the effectiveness of their event planning and management strategies. This can lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising, which can contribute to the long-term success of the event and its future growth.

2.2. AWARENESS AND SATISFACTION

The literature on perceptual blindness indicates that people tend to be insensitive towards unusual occurrences in their vicinity if they are otherwise engaged (Kreitz et al., 2015; Simons & Schlosser, 2017). In general, awareness of an event can help to manage expectations and create a sense of anticipation prior to a visit, which can enhance the overall experience after the event (Polegato & Bjerke, 2019). Masmoudi (2021) has pointed out that being aware of an upcoming event that they can attend may increase their enthusiasm and excitement, which can lead to a sense of satisfaction when the event takes place. Fundamentally, visitor satisfaction is defined as the extent of affirmative awareness and emotion that has been shaped within an individual, particularly after participating in a selected activity (Beard & Ragheb, 1980; Zhang et al., 2018). Post-COVID-19, participating in events may give a sense of normalcy and a break from the monotony of pandemic-related restrictions, and this can contribute to their overall satisfaction (Chin, 2022; Zhu & Deng, 2020). Moreover, another study supported the relationship from awareness to satisfaction (Hermann et al., 2021), indicating the strong influence of information availability in promoting enthusiasm and perceptions, thereby leading to actual participation (Wise et al., 2021). Furthermore, individuals who were aware of an event were more persuaded than those who were not provided with necessary information (Chan et al., 2022). Hence, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H₁: Visitors' awareness of an event is positively related to their level of satisfaction.

2.3. PERCEIVED VALUE AND SATISFACTION

Earlier studies (Hume & Sullivan Mort, 2010; Jeong & Kim, 2020) emphasized that perceived value is a crucial factor in the success of any event because it directly impacts the customer's satisfaction and willingness to return or recommend the event to others. Perceived value refers to the customer's subjective assessment of the overall benefits they received, relative to the cost or effort they invested in attending (Kim et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2021), while satisfaction refers to how

happy or pleased a person feels about their experience (Sung et al., 2021). Likewise, Lee and Back (2010) examined the connection between perceived value and satisfaction among tourists attending a Korean cultural festival, and they also observed a significant positive relationship between the two variables. Specifically, they found that participants who perceived high value from the festival were more likely to have positive experiential and emotional experiences, which in turn led to higher levels of satisfaction. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H₂: Visitors' perceived value is positively related to their level of satisfaction.

2.4. SERVICE QUALITY AND SATISFACTION

Research (Grönroos, 1984; Hapsari et al., 2017) has consistently shown that when customers perceive service quality as high, they are more likely to be satisfied with their experience. This is because service quality directly affects customers' perception of how well the service has met their needs, expectations and preferences. Following this, Andersson et al. (2017) present a theoretical construct illustrating the interrelations between perceived quality, satisfaction, value and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, Xiao et al. (2020) investigated the effect of service quality on participants' happiness at a business event, discovering that attendance satisfaction is significantly and positively impacted by service quality. Another study by Khoo (2022) has offered sector-specific implications, revealing the positive effect of service quality on satisfaction, particularly in the context of sport events. Overall, these studies, along with others (Song et al., 2022; Zhong & Moon, 2020), have explained that if the service quality is good, the customer is more likely to feel that their needs have been met, which leads to higher levels of satisfaction. Therefore, based on the above discussion, the hypothesis is constructed as follows:

H₃: Visitors' perceived service quality is positively related to their level of satisfaction.

2.5. SATISFACTION AND REVISIT INTENTION

This study also investigates the relationship between visitor satisfaction and intention to revisit an event. Generally, the degree of satisfaction can be assessed from response to service experiences (Chen & Chen, 2010). It is presumed that visitors achieved satisfaction when a difference is seen between their anticipations prior to participation and experiences received from the experience (Cong, 2016). On the contrary, they will be unsatisfied when the experience resulted in unpleasant feelings (Cong, 2016). In the present context, Vassiliadis et al. (2021) explained that when someone

is satisfied with an event, they are more likely to have positive feelings and memories associated with it. This can lead to a desire to relive those positive experiences in the future, and this can translate into an intention to attend the event again, as satisfaction tends to create a sense of loyalty and attachment to the event, which in turn can lead to repeat participation. Following this, another study found that satisfaction has a positive effect on the intention to revisit a sports event (Li et al., 2021). Overall, satisfaction with an event is a crucial factor in determining an individual's intention to revisit. Thus, another hypothesis has been proposed as follows:

H₄: Visitors' satisfaction is positively related to their revisit intention.

2.6. THE MODERATING EFFECT OF EVENT IMAGE

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the overall image component is defined as the holistic impression of an individual, specifically on an event. Following this, previous scholars have argued that the overall image acts as a better attractor of visitors, as compared to other specified components of image (Akama & Kieti, 2003). Accordingly, several past studies have highlighted the significance of overall event image on visitors' behavioral intentions (de Lima Pereira et al., 2021; Stylidis et al., 2017). Based on these studies, it is deduced that the choice of participating in an event or festival is a cognitive process that combines self-improvement, action and the transformation of travel motivation into behavior. Thus, it is deduced that when satisfied visitors to major events receive a more positive event image, they may form greater revisit intentions to such an event. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₅: Event image positively moderates the relationship between visitors' satisfaction and their revisit intentions.

2.7. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the extensive review of literature above, the research model containing all the hypotheses formulated for the present study is depicted in Figure 2.

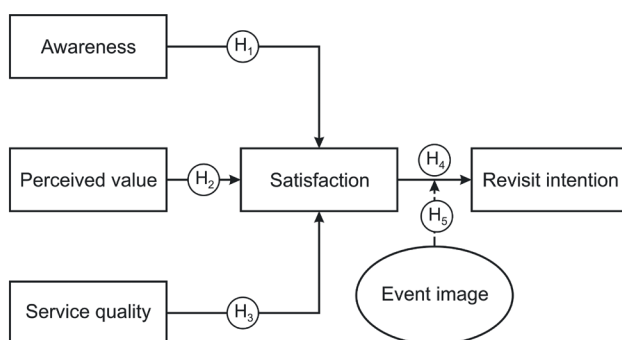


Figure 2. Conceptual framework
Source: authors

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. SAMPLING PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted from February 2022 to July 2022, particularly during major events that were held in Sarawak i.e. RWMF, KFF, Neon Borneo Festival, Sarawak Regatta, and the Sunbear Festival. The participants were diversified through various age groups and ethnicities to acquire responses from numerous perspectives, comprising local visitors who reside in Sarawak and visitors who originated outside (i.e. Sabah, Peninsular Malaysia and other countries). The present study employed an intercept survey method where the data collection only involved volunteers who have attended the events and met the minimum criteria of being at least 21 years old. This served to ensure that they could provide informed consent, and the data collected is reliable and valid.

Subsequently, as the border closures were only lifted a few months prior to commencement of collection (specifically on 31st December 2021) the questionnaire was designed in a hybrid form. Following this, to ensure the safety of both researchers and respondents, the surveys were also made accessible via Google Forms. To prevent possible COVID-19 transmission, the collection of data was performed and accomplished based on these steps. Following the survey, the respondents were provided with choices between physical (printed questionnaire) and virtual forms (Google Form); whichever suited them best. All participants were required to answer every measurement item to avoid the possibility of missing values.

In order to determine the required sample size, G*Power 3.1 – stand-alone power analysis software was utilized (Faul et al., 2007). This analysis indicated that a level of at least 0.80 was necessary to validate the relationship between the constructs (Cohen, 1988). Consequently, with the criteria of six predictors at a level of significance of 5%, a power of 0.95 and effect size of 0.15, the G*Power analysis identified that a minimum sample size of 146 was needed.

3.2. MEASURES AND SCALE DEVELOPMENT

In this study, the questionnaire primarily consists of two sections, namely A and B. In general, the demographic characteristics of the respondents were collected in section A, followed by section B which encompassed questions on the research model as proposed. In general, as an exploratory approach was used in the current study, 25 measurement items in total were adapted from past studies (Murphy et al., 2020; Saefi et al., 2020; The British Red Cross Society, 2020; The United States National Library of

Medicine, 2020). To tailor to the Malaysian context, the items were translated into Malay, namely Bahasa Melayu using Google Translate, a reliable translation machine widely utilized for text mining analytics (Lee & Park, 2018). The respondents were required to answer the measurement items using a five-point Likert scale, where the scale used to measure the level of agreement or disagreement was asymmetric, with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 5 *strongly agree*. Prior to the actual distribution, a pre-test was performed to ensure that the items accurately represented the present setting with adherence to the standards deemed necessary. A draft survey was presented to the target population, enabling cognitive interviews (Willis, 2016) where the respondents were required to answer accordingly. Thus, this allowed appropriate clarifications, expansions and adjustments to the draft survey to be consistent with the objectives of the study.

3.3. STATISTICAL ANALYSES

In this study, a quantitative approach was adopted, employing survey questionnaires to collect data. Subsequently, the gathered data underwent processing, which included eliminating straight-line responses through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 28.0. A two-phase partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis was implemented in this research. The initial phase focused on evaluating the reliability and validity of the constructs, whereas the subsequent phase examined the associations among the hypothesized constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Accordingly, the PLS-SEM analyses were evaluated using WarpPLS 8.0 (Kock, 2022), and the findings are presented below.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. PRELIMINARY DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 1283 individuals voluntarily participated in this survey. After filtering out 18 responses due to straight-lining, specifically those showing a consistent pattern of selecting 3's, 1265 responses were retained for subsequent analysis. The discarded responses exhibited uniform patterns, and their removal helped maintain data integrity by addressing questionable response trends (Kaminska et al., 2010). Additionally, as shown in Table 3, the full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all examined constructs were below 5, reinforcing the absence of common method bias (Kock, 2021).

Table 3. Full collinearity of constructs

Constructs	Full collinearity VIF
Awareness	1.03
Perceived value	1.22
Service quality	2.59
Event image	2.26
Satisfaction	2.40
Revisit intention	1.88

Note: VIF – variance inflation factor.

Source: authors.

4.2. RESPONDENT PROFILES

The demographic profile of respondents participating in this survey is demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of participants ($n = 1265$)

Characteristics		No. of participants	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	642	50.80
	Female	623	49.20
Age	21–30 years old	410	32.40
	31–40 years old	393	31.10
	41–50 years old	271	21.40
	51–60 years old	136	10.80
	61 years old & above	55	4.30
Residency	Local	1214	96.00
	Foreign	51	4.00
Education	High school & below	298	23.60
	Diploma	346	27.40
	Degree or professional qualification	442	34.90
	Postgraduate	116	9.20
	Others	63	5.00
Occupation	Government sector	276	21.80
	Private sector	403	31.90
	Self-employed	212	16.80
	Student	223	17.60
	Unemployed	101	8.00
	Retiree	48	3.80
	Others	2	0.20

Income	Less than RM 2,000	402	31.80
	RM 2,001–RM 4,000	376	29.70
	RM 4,001–RM 6,000	317	25.10
	RM 6,001–RM 8,000	97	7.70
	RM8,001 and above	73	5.80
Experience (visit)	Yes	1067	84.30
	No	198	15.70

Source: authors.

The participants of the present survey were both male and female giving almost equal representation. Following the end of border closures in Malaysia on 31st December 2021, most sectors and industries, specifically tourism began to reopen and welcome visitors. Accordingly, as this survey commenced not long after the lifting of the national Movement Control Order (MCO), it mostly involved the participation of domestic than international visitors.

4.3. ASSESSMENT OF THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

For this investigation, the partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) methodology (Hair et al., 2019) was utilized to construct a more versatile measurement framework. This approach enabled the identification of the optimal model to fit the dataset. Due to the non-normal distribution of the 1265 gathered data points, the PLS-SEM technique was employed for analyzing the data.

To examine the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measures, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. Indicators with factor loadings below 0.50 were removed to maintain internal consistency (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The valid loadings that remained are presented in Table 5. For the measures to be deemed reliable and valid, composite reliability (CR) scores were required to surpass 0.70 (Memon & Rahman, 2014), and average variance

extracted (AVE) scores needed to exceed 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results demonstrated that both CR and AVE values met these benchmarks. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the dimensions under study, which encompassed perceived value, service quality, event image, satisfaction, and revisit intention, yielding satisfactory results, while the coefficient for awareness was considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 5. Summary of construct reliability and validity

Constructs	No. of items	Items	Loadings	CR	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
Awareness	4	Aware_01	0.55	0.79	0.65	0.50
		Aware_02	0.73			
		Aware_03	0.76			
		Aware_04	0.73			
Perceived value	4	Per_Val_01	0.63	0.82	0.71	0.54
		Per_Val_02	0.76			
		Per_Val_03	0.76			
		Per_Val_04	0.77			
Service quality	5	Serv_Qua_01	0.82	0.90	0.86	0.64
		Serv_Qua_02	0.82			
		Serv_Qua_03	0.77			
		Serv_Qua_04	0.80			
		Serv_Qua_05	0.79			
Event image	5	Pla_Img_01	0.79	0.89	0.84	0.61
		Pla_Img_02	0.78			
		Pla_Img_03	0.78			
		Pla_Img_04	0.78			
		Pla_Img_05	0.78			
Satisfaction	4	SatisF_01	0.83	0.90	0.85	0.69
		SatisF_02	0.80			
		SatisF_03	0.85			
		SatisF_04	0.84			
Revisit intention	3	Re_INT_01	0.84	0.92	0.86	0.78
		Re_INT_02	0.91			
		Re_INT_03	0.90			

Source: authors.

Table 6. Discriminant validity of constructs

Constructs	Awareness	Perceived value	Service quality	Event image	Satisfaction	Revisit intention
Awareness	0.70	–	–	–	–	–
Perceived value	0.11	0.73	–	–	–	–
Service quality	–0.07	–0.29	0.80	–	–	–
Event image	0.14	0.26	–0.33	0.78	–	–
Satisfaction	–0.06	–0.36	0.67	0.64	0.83	–
Revisit intention	–0.03	–0.36	0.61	0.53	0.61	0.88

Source: authors.

Subsequently, the values of AVE for each measure were square rooted and examined against inter-correlations among the research model constructs. As demonstrated in Table 6, all values have exceeded each construct's correlation (Chin, 2010). Furthermore, the measurement model was determined to be satisfactory, supported by evidence of reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity. Furthermore, the R -squared values for satisfaction and revisit intention were 0.48 and 0.38 respectively, thus achieving the threshold of 0.19 suggested by the 'rule of thumb' (Cohen, 1988).

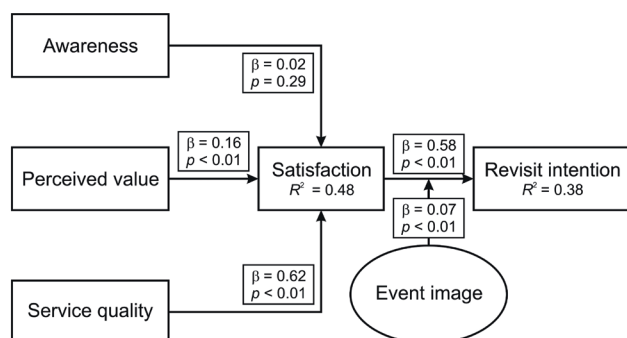


Figure 3. Structural model with path coefficients and p -values
Source: authors

Following that, Figure 3 and Table 7 demonstrate the outcomes obtained from hypotheses testing. Generally, as a 'rule of thumb', the value for probability, the p -value, must be less than 0.01 or 0.05 significance, particularly for one-tailed hypothesis testing. Subsequently, out of the four tested direct relationships, the statistical findings of this study have revealed that two hypotheses were supported. A significant relationship between service quality and the level of satisfaction among visitors was

uncovered while the visitors' level of satisfaction was discovered to have a strong relationship with their intention to revisit ($p < 0.01$). Accordingly, the event image was revealed to have a significant moderating impact on the relationship between visitor satisfaction and revisit intention ($p < 0.01$).

Interestingly, the remaining two hypotheses, namely H_1 and H_2 , which projected the significant positive relationships between visitor awareness and perceived value as well as satisfaction, were not supported by the findings which indicated that they were insignificant ($p = 0.29$) and negatively related ($\beta = -0.16$).

5. DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia and aimed to investigate the perceptions of the visitors who have attended to any of the major events held after COVID-19 pandemic in Sarawak, such as RWMF, KFF, Neon Borneo Festival, Sarawak Regatta and the Sunbear Festival (Hui & Louis, 2022). Consequently, visitors' perceptions of awareness, perceived value, service quality, event image and satisfaction during their trips as well as their intention to revisit these major events were evaluated. The results, established on a voluntary response sample containing both domestic and international visitors, showed that most of them, totaling over 80% (Nulty, 2008), were repeat customers of these major events. The measurement items for each construct are presented in subsequent tables, particularly Tables 8 to 13 using SPSS 28.0 software.

Table 7. Summary of path coefficients and hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Path	Coefficients	Standard error	t -value	p -value	Decision
H_1	Awareness \rightarrow satisfaction	0.02	0.03	0.55	0.29	Not supported
H_2	Perceived value \rightarrow satisfaction	-0.16	0.03	-5.72	<0.01**	Not supported
H_3	Service quality \rightarrow satisfaction	0.62	0.03	23.24	<0.01**	Supported
H_4	Satisfaction \rightarrow revisit intention	0.57	0.03	21.38	<0.01**	Supported
H_5	Event image *satisfaction \rightarrow revisit intention	0.07	0.03	2.57	<0.01**	Supported

Note: * moderating effect; ** p -value < 0.01.

Source: authors.

Table 8. Awareness of the event

Items	Awareness, n (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you know any of your friends attending this event?	923 (72.96)	342 (27.04)
Did you see the event information in other platforms?	798 (63.08)	467 (36.92)
Do you know about the similar event from other places?	982 (77.63)	283 (22.37)
Have you ever attended the similar event?	1050 (83.00)	215 (17.00)

Source: authors.

Table 9. Perceived value

Items	Perceived value, <i>n</i> (%)	
	Yes	No
Do you think this event will carry economic value?	1206 (95.34)	59 (4.66)
Do you think this event will carry social value?	1114 (88.06)	151 (11.94)
Do you think this event will carry emotional value?	1098 (86.80)	167 (13.20)
Do you think an overall value of this event is beneficial?	1144 (90.43)	121 (9.57)

Source: authors.

Table 10. Service quality

Items	Service quality, <i>n</i> (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
The quality of the activities available to visitors at the destination, such as festivals, events and entertainment, is excellent	17 (1.34)	67 (5.30)	296 (23.40)	568 (44.90)	317 (25.06)
The services or amenities at the destination are at high quality	7 (0.55)	65 (5.14)	327 (25.85)	559 (44.19)	307 (24.27)
The destination maintains a high level of cleanliness and hygiene	7 (0.55)	70 (5.53)	339 (26.80)	554 (43.79)	295 (23.32)
The destination is known for providing high-quality services, such as friendly and positive attitudes	6 (0.47)	49 (3.87)	258 (20.40)	638 (50.43)	314 (24.82)
The overall service provided was good	6 (0.47)	32 (2.53)	232 (18.34)	684 (54.07)	311 (24.58)

Source: authors.

Table 11. Event image

Items	Event image, <i>n</i> (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
The price of food at the event is reasonable	26 (2.06)	83 (6.56)	267 (21.11)	607 (47.98)	282 (22.29)
Expenditure during the event is low	12 (0.95)	109 (8.62)	283 (22.37)	503 (39.76)	358 (28.30)
The event is safe and secure	8 (0.63)	76 (6.01)	273 (21.58)	591 (46.72)	317 (25.06)
The people are friendly and helpful	2 (0.16)	44 (3.48)	257 (20.32)	596 (47.11)	366 (28.93)
The event is attractive and interesting	6 (0.47)	47 (3.72)	250 (19.76)	623 (49.25)	339 (26.80)

Source: based on Mohamad et al. (2024).

Table 12. Satisfaction

Items	Satisfaction, <i>n</i> (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
The event has met my expectations and I am content with it	6 (0.47)	35 (2.77)	121 (9.57)	752 (59.45)	351 (27.75)
The event has met my expectations	8 (0.63)	37 (2.92)	234 (18.50)	580 (45.85)	406 (32.09)
The event was worth my visitation	10 (0.79)	39 (3.08)	226 (17.87)	610 (48.22)	380 (30.04)
My time was well spent at this event	7 (0.55)	46 (3.64)	238 (18.81)	622 (49.17)	352 (27.83)

Source: authors.

Table 13. Revisit intention

Items	Revisit intention, <i>n</i> (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
I will attend similar events in the future	11 (0.87)	31 (2.45)	225 (17.79)	573 (45.30)	425 (33.60)
I would highly recommend this event	10 (0.79)	44 (3.48)	242 (19.13)	598 (47.27)	371 (29.33)
I will share the positive word-of-mouth to others	12 (0.95)	42 (3.32)	207 (16.36)	607 (47.98)	397 (31.38)

Source: authors.

As revealed by the statistical results, the majority of the visitors were well aware of the events. Following this, Table 8 shows that visitors are informed about their friends' participation (72.96%), conscious of the event information provided on numerous platforms (63.08%) and appraised of the history of similar events held at other places (77.63%). Interestingly, the results from the PLS-SEM discovered that awareness was not significantly related to satisfaction, thus not supporting hypothesis 1 (H_1). The result contradicts past studies where the sense of anticipation and excitement can enhance visitors' overall level of satisfaction (Polegato & Bjerke, 2019). However, this is explainable as most of the visitors to these major events, who are in this case repeat visitor, may already have a strong familiarity. These individuals might be less concerned about awareness as they do not rely heavily on external information or promotional efforts to shape their expectations. Furthermore, almost all these events are held on an annual basis, thus reducing the search cost for returning visitors, especially the need to source event information again. This finding underscores the importance of audience familiarity and prior engagement with an event, as the drivers of satisfaction might vary significantly between first-time and repeat visitors.

Following the outcomes in Table 9, almost every visitor perceived that the overall value generated by an event as beneficial (90.43%), where it helps to create economic (95.34%), social (88.06%) and emotional values (86.80%). Unexpectedly, the PLS-SEM analyses provided results by showing no evidence of a positive linkage between perceived value and satisfaction. As a result, hypothesis 2 (H_2) was not supported. This result contradicts prior research, which indicates that visitor satisfaction is typically driven by meeting their expectations on values received from an experience (Pandža Bajs, 2015). However, it is possible that these respondents placed more importance on other dimensions, such as functional factors like price, and communal factors (Sánchez et al., 2006). Therefore, despite these events producing economic value, they may primarily benefit the local community rather than the visitors themselves, leading visitors to under-value the economic contributions of the events when evaluating their personal satisfaction.

Moreover, the discoveries in Table 10 demonstrated that most visitors find that the overall service provided by the mega-events in Sarawak was good (78.65%), as activities were offered at decent quality (70.0%), followed by high quality services or amenities (68.46%), and a clean and hygienic environment (67.11%), while other qualities such as staff attitudes and friendliness were presented pleasantly (75.25%). In regard to PLS-SEM, the statistical finding discovered the significance of service quality on satisfaction among visitors,

thus supporting hypothesis 3 (H_3). In line with past studies, the quality of a service or product is regarded as fundamental for the satisfaction of a visitor (Lian & Wang, 2004; Muresan et al., 2019). To be sustainable in such a competitive industry, the quality of experience must be taken into consideration alongside individuals' personal satisfaction (Dioko & So, 2017; Thong et al., 2024).

Based on the present findings in Table 12, a large pool of respondents indicated that the events attended met their expectations (87.20%), were worth their visit (78.26%) and their time was well spent (77%). Subsequently, Table 13 shows that the majority of the visitors who participated in mega-events are willing to attend again in the future (78.90%), recommend the event (76.60%) and practice positive word-of-mouth in regard to them (79.36%). Following this, the statistical results from the PLS-SEM have indicated that visitors' level of satisfaction has a significant impact on their intention to revisit, hence supporting hypothesis 4 (H_4). This result is consistent with previous findings which highlighted the significant role of visitors' satisfaction in generating favorable future behavioral intentions (Chelliah et al., 2019). Therefore, it is wise for event planners and organizers to ensure the satisfaction of visitors to create a sustainable flow of customers, specifically revisiting consumers (Kim & Shim, 2019; Thiumsak & Ruangkanjanases, 2016) and this may eventually lead to long-term profitability.

As shown in Table 11, most visitors thought that the prices offered for the events were reasonable (70.27%), the environment was safe (71.78%), the staff friendly (76.04%) and interesting programs were presented during the events (76.05%). Following PLS-SEM, the event image perceived by the visitors was found to have a significant moderating impact on the association between satisfaction and revisit intention, hence the last hypothesis, namely hypothesis 5 (H_5), was supported. Undoubtedly, this discovery is congruent with studies in the past which postulated the important role of image in influencing visitors' behavioral intentions (de Lima Pereira et al., 2021; Styliadis et al., 2017). Henceforth, it is advisable for key players such as event hosts and coordinators to maintain or even enhance the overall reputation of upcoming events as well as festivals to promote the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Despite numerous studies focusing on the intention to revisit Sarawak, the extensive variety of sectors within the region remains largely unexplored. Consequently, this research adds valuable insights into the existing

literature on significant events in the state, specifically from the perspective of visitors and tourists. The present study has shed light on the multiple event landscape of Sarawak, unfolding the profound impact of event experience on customer retainment. Several major events in Sarawak were investigated, namely RWMF, KFF, Neon Borneo Festival, Sarawak Regatta and the Sunbear Festival. Based on the statistical findings obtained, the present study has provided empirical evidence to fulfil the research objectives, primarily in discovering the crucial role of the event experience aspect (service quality), in enhancing the degree of satisfaction among visitors as well as their intentions to revisit these events in the future. Besides, it draws attention to the importance of event image in enriching favorable behavioral intentions (revisit intention) through elements in relation to event experience.

7. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Moreover, the current results enhance the understanding of event experience aspects and their influence on satisfaction and subsequent intentions to revisit, particularly from a theoretical perspective. It is imperative for the associations between significant event experience components, satisfaction, event image and revisit intentions to be understood, specifically in the Sarawakian event tourism industry's effort to maximize profit. In this study, the service quality of an event was discovered as a significant contributor to attendee satisfaction. Hence, it is suggested that the relevant local industry players, which comprise event planners and organizers, should put high emphasis on improving their on-going activities, specifically during the major events. Although awareness was found not to significantly influence satisfaction in this context, targeted marketing campaigns can still be beneficial for first-time attendees. Thus, event organizers could tailor promotional efforts to highlight unique aspects of the events and leverage digital platforms to provide real-time, personalized information to different visitor segments. Also, the study demonstrates that the cross-validation methods, sourced from previous research (Murphy et al., 2020; Saefi et al., 2020; The British Red Cross Society, 2020; The United States National Library of Medicine, 2020), yielded consistent and credible scores. This confirms the reliability of these methods, making them suitable for future studies across various cultures and environments.

From a practical point of view, it is advisable for the key players to provide sufficient training for their event staff and perform regular check-ups on available facilities to ensure decency of quality in the services provided. For instance, developing a self-check-in

platform such as a quick response tagging system as a substitution for the current manual check-in process which can eliminate the overcrowded waiting lines and ensure a systematic flow for the ticketing system. Moreover, there is a need for event organizers to address functional factors like convenience and the quality of facilities to meet visitors' expectations. These factors include regular maintenance and sanitization of the amenities which can lead to high standards for cleanliness in the venue surroundings, safeguarding event attendees' health and hygiene. Moreover, by providing sufficient training programs and seminars for the relevant event staffs, it can lead to their increased efficiencies which eventually enhance the event experience and level of satisfaction among visitors. In today's fast-evolving world, events and festivals may face various unpredictable challenges like the recent COVID-19 outbreak. To maintain continuity in events, it is crucial for industry participants to develop robust management strategies that allow for close monitoring and optimal use of the key aspects under study.

Subsequently, the event image was found to have significant moderating value in enhancing the relationship between visitors' satisfaction and revisit intentions. As a consequence, satisfied visitors are very likely and willing to revisit similar major events in the future, especially when the image of these events is highly regarded. Thus, the enhancement of the overall image of these major events should be prioritized to generate favorable intentions, primarily among satisfied visitors in order to encourage revisiting and ensure profitability in the long run. Based on the present findings, it is crucial for event organizers and planners to put more effort into outlining effective marketing strategies. These include sponsored promotions through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, to ensure that the boosted content (e.g. event posters) can reach a broader customer base, thus encouraging revisiting of the promoted events. Simultaneously, it can create awareness among potential visitors, thus they are more informed and encouraged to visit the promoted events. Moreover, conventional channels can also be utilized as part of the event's marketing efforts. For instance, running advertisement campaigns through newspapers, radio and television enabling coverage for elderly customers and individuals who prefer such media due to individual security. In this context, such understanding can assist key players in the tourism sector, including business owners, local planners and policy makers, in drawing up effective development strategies for future major events. Consequently, it can foster the successful growth of major events, particularly during the vital phase of recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite its contribution, this study has some limitations. The limited scope of study is regarded as one of the main constraints, as there are indeed other drivers of visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions including image, community support and attachment. Thus, it is recommended for future research to consider these variables. Additionally, the study was conducted using a cross-sectional approach, where data was collected at a specific point in time, instead of a longitudinal approach where data is collected over multiple timeframes (Thong et al., 2023). Moreover, this study is constrained due to the limited number of international visitors, mainly because the border closures were only lifted two months prior to the major events. Hence, upcoming research should aim to encompass a more diverse viewpoint and understanding from various participants including residents, industry stakeholders and those who have never attended any significant event. Furthermore, as the present study has only focused on major events, more types could be included in future studies, such as mega, regional and local, and community events. These approaches would enhance the generalizability of the findings and lead to more unbiased results. Presently, the tourism industry of Sarawak is indeed in the middle of rejuvenation following the COVID-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, effective planning and strategic development should be the top priority among industry players. Following this, this study has provided meaningful insight with regard to visitors' perceptions of the drivers of their satisfaction, which could eventually lead to their intention to revisit major events in Sarawak.

As an important asset of the tourism-related sector, it is vital to understand both domestic and international visitors' perceptions to ensure long-term profitability. The present study is beneficial to industry practitioners by enabling them to understand visitors' perceptions towards enhancing their level of satisfaction and revisit intentions. Last but not least, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge, specifically based on visitors' perceptions of their satisfaction and intention to revisit, while being valuable to scholars by providing directions for future research on contributors to visitors' satisfaction and revisit intentions. Overall, these variables are thought to have a significant impact on improving visitors' satisfaction and their intention to revisit, thus contributing to the development of the tourism industry in the future. As more areas move towards the post-COVID stage, this research can provide useful recommendations for those places that are working to revitalize tourism industries, and as a reference for future event planners as well organizers related to satisfying visitors' needs during upcoming events.

Disclosure statement

The authors hereby declare the absence of potential competing interest.

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