Determinants of Conference Service Quality as Perceived by International Attendees

Shiva Hashemi, Azizan Marzuki, S. Kiumarsi

Abstract—In recent years, conference destinations have been highly competitive; therefore, it is necessary to know about the behaviours of conference participants such as the process of their decision-making and the assessment of perceived conference quality. A conceptual research framework based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour model is presented in this research to get better understanding factors that influence it. This research study highlights key factors presented in previous studies in which behaviour intentions of participants are affected by the quality of conference. Therefore, this study is believed to provide an idea that conference participants should be encouraged to contribute to the quality and behaviour intention of the conference.

Keywords—Conference attendees, service quality, perceives value, trust, behaviour intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

TODAY, the industry of conventions or conferences plays a key role in the sector of global tourism and hospitality. Especially, conventions become an attractive and competitive market in most cities [4]. Indeed, one or more events, conferences, exhibitions, and conferences in a wide range of areas are annually held in the world by a number of organizations and associations. Therefore, potential host destinations have become a great concern in previous research [3]. However, key factors contributing to the success of conferences have caught less attention of researchers [8]. According to [44], conference industry describes a gathering of attendees for the swap and discussion of ideas as well as details face-to-face. In some cases, attendants favour to make a deal, develop friendships or better business relationships in order to inspire individuals and organisations to carry out considerably better. In accordance to [38], there was a quick advancement of conference task in the Asia-Pacific region throughout the past twenty years. This improvement contributes to significant investment capital in promoting conference services in hotels, universities, residential conference centres, particular venues, and mainly in the building of specific convention and exhibition centres. It was demonstrated that Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Hong Kong were the key local centres of international convention activity recently [39]. Nevertheless, currently, very

few studies were carried out in Malaysia in in an attempt to find out conference international attendees' opinions and ideas. Thus, this study aims to help conference organizers better understand the importance role of key elements of conference facilities and services.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The sector of meetings and conventions become more attractive segments in the marketing of tourism [6], [7] in the past two decades, the activities of conventions had a significant decline in the Asia-Pacific region. AS [4] mentioned that better provision of services and facilities makes conference industry more successful. A framework was also introduced by [24] for the assessment of the expectation of the community including conference destinations and conference centers, which are considered as the important attributes. However, today, conference centers pay less attention to conference services although they play a significant role in the success of conference tourism.

Factors of convention quality including professional education, networking, site selection, and convention staff service were adopted by [11], in order to investigate attendee-based brand equity. These researchers found that all factors of quality make a great distribution to the satisfactions of convention brand. Structural relationships among education, activity and opportunity, satisfaction, and behavior intentions were also examined by [16]. These researchers indicated that a conference-specific factor such as education opportunities are more important than over site-specific factors such as travel and leisure activities in meeting the satisfactions of conference participants and achieving their behaviour intentions.

In recent years, various ways of convention evaluation have been investigated [9]. In this regard, conferences are evaluated through the first-time versus repeat conference participants. According to these researchers, the quality of conventions is divided into two main dimensions, namely convention-specific and site-specific dimensions. Convention-specific dimension refers to education, social networking, whereas site-specific one involves accessibility, extra-convention opportunities, site environment. This study showed that convention-specific dimensions are necessary for both the first-time and repeat conference participants; however, the site environment is evaluated by the first-time participants compared to the repeat ones. Consistent with this view, previous researchers [9]; [11]; [16] have stated that convention-specific quality is paid more attention than destination-specific quality when there is an evaluation of convention experiences. From this perspective, this study takes into considerations convention-specific quality

Shiva Hashemi is PhD Candidate with the School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia (Corresponding author; e-mail: shhashemi4@gmail.com).

Azizan Marzuki is Associate professor with the School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

S. Kiumarsi is PhD Candidate with the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

dimensions related to specific factors such as site environment, knowledge sharing and professional education.

A. Conference Service Quality

Today, service quality is defined in different ways in the literature [12], [5]. The most popular approach of conceptualizing and measuring service quality was developed by [14], service quality is also defined as an overall judgment or attitude towards the superiority of services related to competing offerings [15] or characterized as consumer's overall impression of relative inferiority/superiority of organization and its services [2]. According to [20], perceived service quality is viewed as participants' behaviour towards the services. This concept was defined by [25] as a user-based approach, referring to the evaluation of customers about the best service. It also results from the process of assessment. In this regard, customers are able to compare their desires with their perceptions towards the service [22]. From this perspective, [9]; [10] characterised perceived conference quality as participants' assessments about the best conference. Service quality has different attributes, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy [26]. Conference participants take into consideration site environmental aspects, for example security, safety, environment, and residents before deciding to participate in a conference [10]. Lately, attendees have become particularly mindful of natural disasters, outbreaks of communicable diseases, and local violence [10]. The climate is crucial to that decision as well [9]. For international conferences, the environment is much more essential than for local conferences [35]. Dimensions of conference service quality were built and determined, which are appropriate for attendees to achieve their goals in a conference.

The literature and theory concerning service quality in conference administration was well-put by [41] who else noticed that there is a difference involving requirements and expectations. An insufficiency of service quality was identified as the best element which might slow down the growth and improvement of the conference industry in both countries. Meeting planners' perceptions of the quality they obtain should be handled by conference operators offering the service in accordance to [40].

Knowledge sharing is one particular of the dimensions of conference service quality. In accordance with [36], knowledge sharing is utilized amongst academic staff in a Public Higher Education Institution in Malaysia; however it is not widely or undoubtedly practiced. Knowledge sharing of individual and organization level is considered an essential process. On the other hand, very little empirical research takes into factors knowledge sharing of educational level at higher education [37]. Professional education is one of the dimensions of conference service quality. Plenty of educational theorists have indicated that it is exclusively through active discussion between and within scholars and educators that considerable, located learning can survive and a community of learners can be developed [45], [46]. According to [47], as an instrument for professional education, the multimedia obstacle educators to create and examine learning activities to figure out those that ideally fulfil the requirements of eventful professionals interested in long term learning possibilities. Advancement of a community of inquiry is especially essential for high quality professional education.

B. Perceived Trust

Study has been very limited with regards to the perceived trust in conference industry. Perceived trust could be described as a perception of safety and willingness to depend on somebody or anything [42]. Reference [43] categorized perceived trust in to two ways: first, identifying trust as a belief, self-confidence, attitude, or hope regarding another party's believability; and second, determining trust as a behavioral intention or behavior of reliance and including weaknesses and doubt. The literature on marketing has highlighted the term 'trust' due to its positive influences on a long and profitable relationship [23]. According to [19], if individuals are trustful, they have their own beliefs as well as perceptions of certain attributes. In marketing, trust is referred to as the brands, products or services, salespeople, and the establishment. In this sense, the products or services are locally or globally exchanged. From this perspective, belief is considered as a construct that has a wide range of dimensions. This unique characteristic of belief distinguishes honesty from benevolence perceived in the behaviour of the other party. Likewise, [17] stated that honesty means belief which attempts to keep a promise and sincerity. Reference [27] also indicated a close association between trust and commitment, communication and satisfaction. This finding supports relationship marketing theory. Based on view of [28], trust refers to beliefs of individuals. Other parties will undertake the actions for the future if they get trust from individuals they are working with. Trust is a set of beliefs of customers; it has certain characteristics and possible behaviour.

C. Behaviour Intention

The concept of behaviour intentions is well manifested by attitudinal loyalty that shows "a degree of dispositional commitment [29]". Reference [21] pointed out that customers perceived service quality toward actual experience to propose behavioural intentions after the services encounter. When service quality assessments are high, the customers' behavioural intentions are positive. By contrast, when service quality assessments are low, the customers' behavioural intentions are negative, and the relationship between customer and company is more likely to be weakened. The positive behavioural intentions include saying positive things about the company to others [21], recommending the company or service to others [21]; [20]; [13], paying a price premium to the company, and remaining loyal to the company [21]; [18]. Reference [34] states behaviour intention is the foremost approach to predict behaviour. Behaviour intention is the possibility or chance of an individual using a particular conduct, and might also reveal the determination of the individual to carry out behaviour. In this research, it is presumed which international attendees through the use of

better motivation to participate in a conference whilst in Malaysia have a stronger intention to participate. Loyalty would be demonstrated by expressing a preference for a company over others, by continuing to purchase from it, or by increasing business with it in the future.

III. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB is applicable to behaviours that are not entirely under personal control [30]. This theory has a relatively thoughtful process that considers the personal costs and benefits of engaging in different types of behaviour [31]. TPB has a set of relations among attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intention. According to this theory, attitude refers to a predisposition, which is formed by learning and experience, as well as to respond to an object, including a product consistently. This predisposition can be favourable or unfavourable. In tourism, attitudes are predispositions or feelings towards a vacation destination or service based on multiple perceived products' attributes [32]. Behavioural intention is defined to be the anticipated or planned future behaviour of an individual [33], representing an individual's expectancies about a particular behaviour in a given setting and can be operationalised as the likelihood to act [1].

IV. Conceptual Research Framework

Fig. 1 points out a conceptual research framework that investigates the direct relationships of the independent variables, site environment, knowledge sharing and professional education that figure out conference service quality on the dependent variable of behaviour intention. The relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable with the mediating role of perceived trust is displayed in Fig. 1. The framework driven researchers to create four main hypotheses and nine sub hypotheses, which will analyzed using Smart PLS analysis:
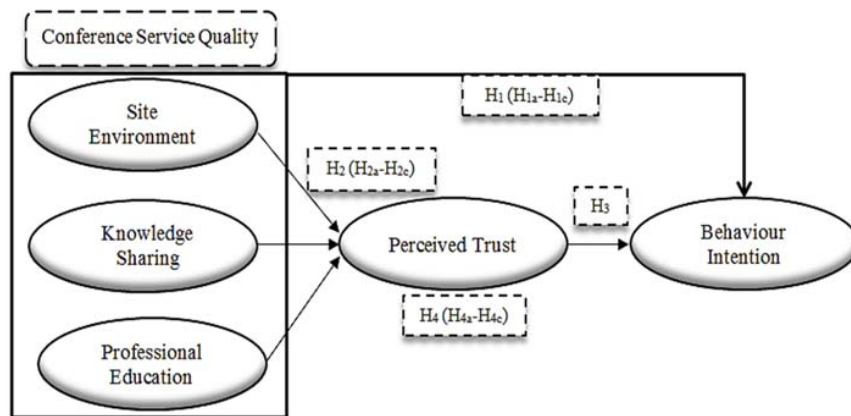

Fig. 1 The Conceptual Research Framework with Hypothesized Relationships

In this study, a conceptual research framework highlights the direct and indirect relationship of the independent variables, mediating variables and dependent variables. The conceptual framework is introduced by the researcher to create the seven hypotheses for direct relationship and three hypotheses for indirect relationship, which will examine using Smart- PLS analysis.

For this research study, hypotheses are introduced as:

- **H1 (H1a-H1c):** Conference quality (site environment, knowledge sharing and professional education) has a positive impact on Behaviour intention
- **H2 (H2a-H2c):** Conference quality (site environment, knowledge sharing and professional education) has a positive impact on perceived trust.
- **H3:** Perceived trust has a positive impact on Behaviour intention
- **H4 (H54-H4c):** Perceived trust mediates the relationship conference quality towards Behaviour intention.

V. Conclusions

In these modern times, there has been an excessive rival among the conference zones in the conference market. Consequently, it is essential to seriously comprehend crucial services, characteristics, and service providers of conferences. This research will create crucial contributions to both management theories and practical purposes of the conference not just in Malaysia but also in Asian associated countries. It is noticeable that the theory of planned behavior proof that intention might be the perfect determinant of an individual behavior. Therefore, an individual (participant in the conference) with a solid intention is probably to participate in their behavior than the one with a low behavior intention. In this particular research, the theory of planned behavior also links the relationship between conference quality and behavior intention with perceived trust as a mediating variable. The relationship between the features of conference quality and perceived trust is also investigated in detail. It is thus considered that the results of this research will initiate upcoming research in individuals' intention in conference in Malaysia.

REFERENCES

[1] Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl, & J. Beskmann (Eds.), Action control: From cognition to behavior (pp. 11–39). New York: Springer.
[2] Bitner, M. J., & Hubbert, A. R. (1994). Encounter satisfaction versus overall satisfaction versus quality: The customers' voice. In R. T Rust & R. L Olivr (Eds.), Service quality: New directions in theory and practice (pp. 72 94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
[3] Crouch, G. I., & Louviere, J. J. (2004). The determinants of convention site selection: A logistic choice model from experimental data. Journal of Travel Research, 43(2), 118-130.
[4] Crouch, G., & Weber, K. (2002). Marketing of convention tourism. In K. Weber, & K. Chon (Eds.), Convention tourism: International research and industry perspectives (pp. 57–78). New York: The Haworth Hospitality Press.
[5] Grönroos, C. (1984). A service quality model and its marketing implications. European Journal of Marketing, 18 (4), 36-44.
[6] Hashemi, M., Raftari, S., & Javed, M. (2014). The Role of The English Language in Facilitating Tourists in Malaysia: Tourists' perceptions. International Journal of Academic Research, 6(4).
[7] Hashemi, S. M., Afroza Akter, A., Raftari, S., Kiumarsi, S. (2016) Examining the Behavioural Consequences among Convention's Attendees in Malaysia, International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR), 27(2), 196-210.
[8] Jae Lee, M., & Back, K. J. (2005). A review of economic value drivers in convention and meeting management research. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 17(5), 409-420.
[9] Kim, S., Lee, J. S., Kim, M., (2012). How different are first-time attendees from repeat attendees in convention evaluation? International Journal of Hospitality Management 31 (2), 544–553.
[10] Lee, J. S., & Min, C. K. (2013). Examining the role of multidimensional value in convention attendee behavior. Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 37(3), 402-425.
[11] Lee, J.S., Back, K.J., (2008). Attendee-based brand equity. Tourism Management 29 (2), 331–344.
[12] Lehtinen, J.R. (1999). Asiakasohjautuva palveluyritys (Customer-driven Service Firm). Weilin+Goos, Espoo, Finland.
[13] Liu, B., Furrer, O., & Sudharshan, D. (2001). The relationships between culture and behavioural intentions toward services. Journal of Service Research, 4 (2), 118-129.
[14] Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. Journal of Marketing, 49, 41-50.
[15] Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). Communication and control processes in the delivery of service quality. Journal of Marketing, 52, 35-48.
[16] Severt, D., Wang, Y., Chen, P. J., & Breiter, D. (2007). Examining the motivation, perceived performance, and behavioral intentions of convention attendees: Evidence from a regional conference. Tourism Management, 28(2), 399-408.
[17] Robert, L. P., Denis, A. R., & Hung, Y. T. C. (2009). Individual swift trust and knowledge-based trust in face-to-face and virtual team members.Journal of Management Information Systems, 26(2), 241-279.
[18] Rust, R. T., & Zahorik, A. J. (1993). Customer satisfaction, customers retention, and market share. Journal of Retailing, 69 (2), 193-215.
[19] Williams, M. (2001). In whom we trust: Group membership as an affective context for trust development. Academy of management review, 26(3), 377-396
[20] Zeithaml, V. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality and value: A means-end model and synthesis of evidence. Journal of Marketing, 52, 2-22.
[21] Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. Journal of Marketing, 60, 31-46.
[22] Grönross, C. (2011). From marketing mix to relationship marketing towards a paradigm shift in marketing. Management Decisions, 35(3), 322-340.
[23] Flavián, C., Guinalíu, M., & Gurrea, R. (2006). The role played by perceived usability, satisfaction and consumer trust on website loyalty. Information & Management, 43(1), 1-14.
[24] Fenech, M. (2001). The role of folic acid and vitamin B12 in genomic stability of human cells. Mutation Research/Fundamental and Molecular Mechanisms of Mutagenesis, 475(1), 57-67.
[25] Garvin, D. A. (1983). Quality on the line. Harvard business review, 61(5), 64-75.
[26] Zeithaml, V. A. & M. J. Bitner. (2003). Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the firm, 3rd edition. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
[27] Doherty, A. M., & Alexander, N. (2004). Relationship development in international retail franchising: case study evidence from the UK fashion sector. European journal of marketing, 38(9/10), 1215-1235.
[28] Carlsson Hauff, J. (2014). Trust and risk-taking in a pension investment setting. International Journal of Bank Marketing, 32(5), 408-428.
[29] Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: the role of brand loyalty. Journal of marketing, 65(2), 81-93.
[30] Corby, N., Schnedier-Jamner, M., & Wolitski, R. (1996). Using the theory of planned behavior to predict intention to use condoms among male and female injecting drug users. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26, 52-75.
[31] Petty, R., Unnava, R., & Stratham, A. (1991). Theories of attitude change. In T. S. Robertson & H. H. Kassarjiann (Eds.), Handbook of consumer behavior (pp. 241-280). London, England: Prentice Hall.
[32] Davies, F., Goode, M., Mazanec, J., & Moutinho, L. (1999). LISREL and neural network modelling: Two comparison studies. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 6(4), 249-261.
[33] Swan, G. (1981, January). Tribology and the characterisation of rock joints. In The 22nd US Symposium on Rock Mechanics (USRMS). American Rock Mechanics Association.
[34] Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. Organizational. bureaus. Tourism Management, 22(6), 599–606.
[35] Mair, J., & Thompson, K. (2009). The UK association conference attendance decision-making process. Tourism Management, 30(3), 400-409.
[36] Nordin, M. I.; Amin, A. H. M.; Shah, S. N. M. (2012) Agent Based Resource Broker for Medical Informatics Application in Clouds, in Proceedings of the International Conference on Computer & Information Science.
[37] Ryu, S., Ho, S.H., Han, I., 2003. Knowledge sharing behavior of physicians in hospitals. Expert Systems with Applications 25 (1), 113–122.
[38] Wu, A., & Weber, K. (2005). Convention center facilities, attributes and services: The delegate's perspective. Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 10 (4), 399-410.
[39] Z. Yang, K. Y. Chun, J. Xu, F. Lin, D. Li, and H. Ren, "A Preliminary Study of Motion Control Pattern for Biorobotic Spiders," in Proceedings IEEE 11th International Conference on Control & Automation (ICCA) 2014.
[40] Weber, K. (2000). Meeting planners' perceptions of hotel-chain practices and benefits: An importance-performance analysis. The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 41 (4), 32-38.
[41] Hernon, P., & Whitman, J. R. (2001). Delivering satisfaction and service quality: A customer-based approach for libraries. American Library Association.
[42] Chung, N., & Kwon, S. J. (2009). Effect of trust level on mobile banking satisfaction: a multi-group analysis of information system success instruments. Behaviour & Information Technology, 28(6), 549–562.
[43] Chen, C. (2006). Identifying significant factors influencing consumer trust in an online travel site. Information Technology & Tourism, 8(3/4), 197–214.
[44] Rogers, T. (2013). Conferences and Conventions 3rd edition: A Global Industry. Routledge.
[45] Rogoff, B. (1990). Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive developments in social context. New York: Oxford University Press.
[46] Resnick, L., Levine, J., & Teasley, S. (Eds.). (1991). Perspectives on socially shared cognition. Washington: American Psychological Association.
[47] Anderson, T. (1996). The virtual conference: Extending professional education in cyberspace. International Journal of Educational Telecommunications, 2(2/3), 121-135.