EVENT TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE AND CONFERENCE ENGAGEMENT: A PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. Despite the growing integration of digital tools into conference settings, existing literature remains insufficient in conceptualising how event technology shapes attendees' experiential perceptions and subsequent behavioural responses, particularly within the Malaysian Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry. This conceptual study addresses the identified gap by proposing a theoretically grounded framework that adapts Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy model to the context of conference event technology. Grounded in a systematic review of extant literature, the framework positions four experiential realms, such as entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, as independent variables that collectively shape attendees' event technology experiences. Eight directional hypotheses (H1–H8) are proposed, positing that each experiential realm positively influences two post-event behavioural outcomes: intention to reattend and intention to recommend. The original contribution is a realm-specific mapping between technology-mediated experiential value and behavioural outcome, which supplies a qualitative differentiation that current technology-adoption and stimulus-organism-response models lack and complements, rather than competes with, those models. Practically, the proposed framework gives conference organisers a diagnostic for evaluating technology investments by the specific experiential gap each one closes, rather than by a single composite satisfaction score. The framework also establishes a basis for future empirical validation and the creation of measurement scales.

Keywords: *event technology, experience economy, conference engagement, event management, post-event behavior, technological integration*

Introduction

The conference sector is among the largest and most commercially valuable segments of the business events world, generating considerable economic benefit through networking and professional development (Severt et al., 2007). Malaysia has established itself as a promising MICE destination, with the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) organising a pipeline of 123 events between 2022 and 2030 expected to attract 177,000 delegates and RM1.4 billion in economic impact. Globally, the meetings sector continues to recover and expand, with over 11,000 international association meetings recorded in 2024 and a direct economic impact of USD 11.6 billion that year (International Congress and Convention Association [ICCA], 2025). Despite this importance, scholarly attention remains limited: only 16.5% of event management publications between 2004 and 2016 addressed business events, with 76% concentrating on mega-events, and Chen and Jung (2024) identifies persistent conceptual voids around how event technology shapes the conference experience. Digital technologies, including mobile apps, virtual conferencing, AR/VR, and gamification, have meanwhile redefined conference participation: mobile applications positively affect attendee outcomes (Habachi et al., 2024), and engagement through

technology raises satisfaction and willingness to pay (Jung et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift toward hybrid and virtual formats while exposing difficulties around usability, inclusivity, and experiential quality (Ellis et al., 2022).

In Malaysia's MICE setting specifically, event technology implementation does not match attendee expectations: the determinants of technology use remain unclear (Ramli et al., 2023), and usability and inclusivity barriers continue to constrain hybrid-format adoption (Ellis et al., 2022). This practical gap reflects a theoretical one: TAM addresses adoption behaviour but neglects the experiential, hedonic, and multi-dimensional ways in which attendees derive value from conference technologies (Jung et al., 2024; Assaker, 2020). Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy model, with its four experiential realms (entertainment, education, esthetics, escapism), offers a validated lens for this gap, one whose relevance across digital and event contexts is well established and whose applicability to Malaysian reattendance intentions has already demonstrated. Yet it has not been applied to conference event technology specifically, leaving technology-mediated experiential dimensions conceptually fragmented. This study addresses these gaps through three objectives: (1) conceptualising event technology experience through Pine and Gilmore (1999) four experiential realms; (2) examining the hypothesised relationships between these realms and post-event behavioural intentions, namely intention to reattend and intention to recommend; and (3) proposing measurement constructs for future validation. Two questions guide the study: (RQ1) how can the four realms conceptualise attendees' event technology experiences? (RQ2) what relationships exist between these experiences and post-event behavioural intentions in the Malaysian MICE context? The framework's original contribution is a realm-specific mapping between experiential value and behavioural outcome that supplies the qualitative differentiation current TAM- and S-O-R-based studies lack, giving organisers a diagnostic alternative to undifferentiated adoption metrics.

Literature review

Event technology experience

Event technology experience refers to the attendee's subjective perception of how digital tools shape their interactions and participation throughout the conference lifecycle (Chen, 2024). This concept is different from technology adoption since adoption focuses on the issue of whether the attendee adopts the technology while experience looks at the impact of that technology on the perception and behaviour of the attendee (Jung et al., 2024). Some of the technologies used by conference attendees include mobile applications in events, live polling and interactive engagement tools, augmented reality and virtual reality, hybrid approaches, and gaming technologies (Habachi et al., 2024; Zhou and Li, 2024; Ramli et al., 2023). A number of theoretical models have been used to understand the reaction of attendees towards event technology. The TAM model incorporates factors such as perceived ease of use and usefulness of technology (Talantis et al., 2020); nevertheless, this model has been subject to criticism for failing to consider the emotional aspects associated with technology use (Jung et al., 2024; Assaker, 2020). The S-O-R model recognizes the importance of affect in mediating between stimulus and response (Jung et al., 2024); however, there is no classification scheme for experiential values based on the qualitative aspect of experience. By focusing on the experience and multiple dimensions

of the attendees of the conference and by distinguishing between four domains of experience, which are entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy theory tackles both weaknesses highlighted above. The application and success of this concept within the realms of tourism and events (Seker and Unur, 2022; Manthiou et al., 2014), as well as its congruence with our study's research question, are strong reasons to use this concept as a primary theoretical perspective.

It is worth being precise about how these two perspectives relate, since Experience Economy theory is proposed here as a complement to TAM rather than a replacement for it. TAM is, by design, a pre-usage adoption model: its outcome variable is typically the intention to use a given technology, which is why TAM-based conference studies explain why an attendee opens a mobile app or accepts a wearable device in the first place (Talantis et al., 2020). The outcomes examined in this study are post-usage and event-focused rather than technology-focused, namely intention to reattend the conference and intention to recommend it, both of which presuppose that the technology has already been used. Perceived usefulness and ease of use do not vary across attendees who have already adopted the same conference app, yet those attendees may still differ sharply in how entertained, educated, sensorially immersed, or absorbed they felt while using it. Experience Economy theory supplies exactly this missing differentiation, which is why the two frameworks address different stages of the same technology-behaviour chain rather than competing to explain the same outcome.

The experience economy framework and the four experiential realms

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), experiences can be grouped using two dimensions. The two dimensions are active/passive involvement on one axis and absorption/immersion on the other axis, which gives rise to four domains. The applicability of the framework has been in 548 studies between 1998 and 2023, and its multidimensional explanatory power has more recently been demonstrated outside conference settings as well, for instance in heritage tourism authenticity.

Entertainment

Entertainment refers to passive engagement with technology that evokes pleasant affect and pleasurable involvement (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), measured here as the enjoyment and positive emotion generated by conference-related technologies. Gamification elements such as leaderboards and challenges increase satisfaction and engagement (Jung et al., 2024; Manthiou et al., 2014), AR/VR adds interactive visual appeal, and enjoyment-driven app satisfaction shapes behavioural intentions (Habachi et al., 2024), though Flavian et al. (2024) caution that a poorly designed interface can produce cognitive overload rather than pleasure. Entertainment experience is therefore hypothesised to positively influence intention to reattend (H1) and intention to recommend (H2).

Education

The educational realm reflects the degree to which conference technologies support active knowledge acquisition, skill development, and professional learning (Jung et al., 2024), understood here as the degree to which conference technologies help attendees attain their educational goals. Severt et al. (2007) established educational benefit as one

of the strongest predictors of intention to reattend, while Mhlongo et al. (2023) confirmed that technology-enhanced learning improves satisfaction outcomes that extend to recommendation behaviour. Educational experience is therefore hypothesised to positively influence intention to reattend (H3) and intention to recommend (H4).

Esthetics

Esthetics refers to the sensory perception of an environment and the emotional response it produces (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), encompassing the visual, digital, and atmospheric elements that shape how immersed and satisfied an attendee feels. Audiovisual technologies, projection mapping, and AR/VR enhance this sense of presence and emotional connection (Lee, 2025; Zhou and Li, 2024), and hotel and conference-centre esthetic quality has similarly been linked to guest loyalty (Wong et al., 2023). These sensory characteristics moderate experience-related outcomes and increase the likelihood of memorable, repeat-intending visits. Esthetic experience is therefore hypothesised to positively influence intention to reattend (H5) and intention to recommend (H6).

Escapism

Escapism involves temporarily leaving the mundane aspects of daily work through psychological absorption and flow (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), with pathways including VR worlds, the metaverse, and interactive conference interfaces (Ariza-Montes et al., 2023). Oh et al. (2007) identified escapism as among the strongest predictors of satisfaction and recommendation intentions across tourism contexts, a pattern Seker and Unur (2022) confirmed for revisit and recommendation specifically, while linked perceived interactivity to escapism in virtual conference settings. In the Malaysian MICE setting, where immersive and hybrid technologies are progressively integrated, escapism experience is hypothesised to positively influence intention to reattend (H7) and intention to recommend (H8).

Post-event behavioural intentions

Two behavioural consequences after the event will be considered as the dependent variables in this research, namely, the intention to attend again and the intention to refer others. The intention to attend again reflects the willingness of participants to engage in similar events in future editions. It is an important measure for assessing event sustainability and the value provided by the event. Severt et al. (2007) found that educational value, networking, and satisfaction were critical precursors, whereas Yesil and Ozmen (2024) showed that the quality of the event environment was an essential determinant of participation intention in the future. Participants who perceive their experience as valuable in all four dimensions are more likely to see high event quality and have the intention to return (Habachi et al., 2024). The intention to recommend is frequently measured by word of mouth (WOM) or electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a way for attendees to show their desire to tell other people whether they are social peers, professional contacts or members of a network on positive stories about their experiences at conferences. In the conference sector, referral by peers is one of the main methods used in obtaining delegates (Hashemi et al., 2020). According to Jung et al. (2024), involvement using gamified apps was a strong predictor of WOM intentions. The work of Seker and Unur (2022) corroborated the positive impact of education,

entertainment, and escapism on revisit and recommendation purposes. Overall, these scholarly works prove that the experience quality is a critical predictor of post-event recommendation intentions.

Hypothesis development

Building on the realm-by-realm review above, eight hypotheses (H1–H8) link each of the four experiential realms to the two post-event behavioural outcomes. *Table 1* consolidates these hypotheses with their key supporting literature, and *Figure 1* illustrates the full set of proposed relationships. *Table 1* summarises all eight hypotheses alongside their supporting literature. The directional relationships between the four experiential realms and post-event behavioural intentions are further illustrated in the proposed conceptual framework in *Figure 1*.

Table 1. *Summary of proposed hypotheses.*

H	Experiential Realm	Hypothesis Statement	Key Supporting Literature
H1	Entertainment	Entertainment experience positively influences attendees' intention to reattend the conference.	Manthiou et al. (2014); Jung et al. (2024)
H2	Entertainment	Entertainment experience influences attendees' intention to recommend the conference to others.	Habachi et al. (2024); Jung et al. (2024)
H3	Education	Educational experience positively influences attendees' intention to reattend the conference.	Severt et al. (2007); Yesil and Ozmen (2024)
H4	Education	Educational experience positively influences attendees' intention to recommend the conference to others.	Jung et al. (2024); Mhlongo et al. (2023)
H5	Esthetic	Esthetic experience positively influences attendees' intention to reattend the conference.	Zhou and Li (2024)
H6	Esthetic	Esthetic experience positively influences attendees' intention to recommend the conference to others.	Wong et al. (2023)
H7	Escapism	Escapism experience positively influences attendees' intention to reattend the conference.	Oh et al. (2007); Seker and Unur (2022)
H8	Escapism	Escapism experience positively influences attendees' intention to recommend the conference to others.	Ariza-Montes et al. (2023)

Proposed conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework, building on the literature review and hypothesis development above. The four experiential realms of Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy model, entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism, serve as independent variables representing event technology experience, with post-event behavioural intentions (intention to reattend and intention to recommend) as the dependent variables. The model's eight direct linkages (H1–H8) answer RQ2 by mapping how technology-enabled experiential value affects post-conference behaviour among MICE attendees in Malaysia; as a theoretical study, the model was kept deliberately simple, leaving mediators and moderators for empirical follow-up. Event technology experience is operationalised as attendees' enjoyable, engaging, and memorable encounters with digital tools at the conference, adapted from Oh et al. (2007) and assessed from the attendee's rather than the organisation's perspective, consistent with the subjective, phenomenological nature of experiential value within the Experience Economy framework (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

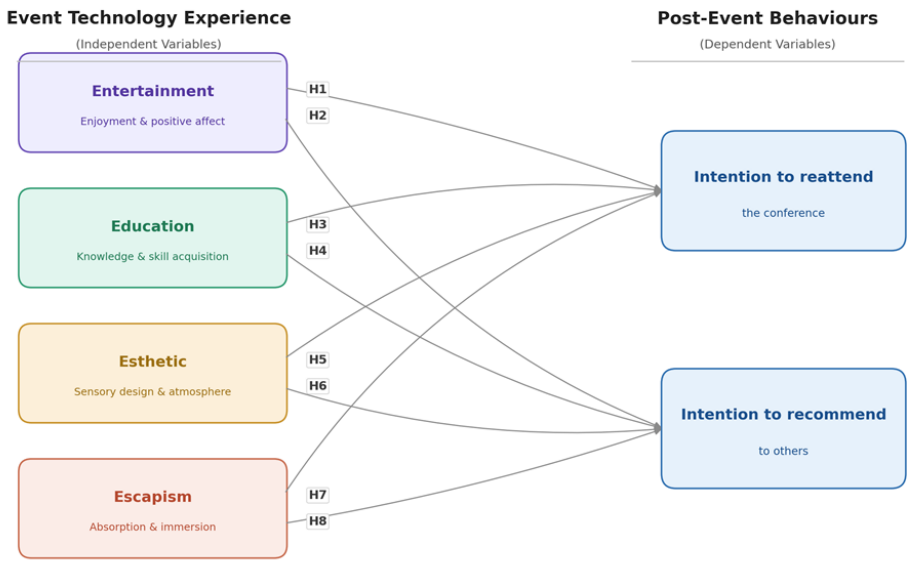

Figure 1. *Proposed conceptual framework.*
Source: Oh et al. (2007); Pine and Gilmore (1999).

Conclusion

This study addressed two research questions: how Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy model can conceptualise attendees' experiences of conference event technology, and what hypothesised relationships exist between those experiences and post-event behavioural intentions in the Malaysian MICE context. In response, a theoretically grounded conceptual framework was developed proposing eight directional hypotheses (H1–H8) linking four experiential realms: entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism towards intention to reattend and intention to recommend to others.

Theoretical and practical contributions

Theoretically, the contribution lies not in the Experience Economy model itself, which is well established, but in two additions to it. The first is conceptual translation: applying four realms built for physical service settings to a technology-mediated conference setting is not a label transfer, and doing so correctly resolves two incomplete lenses in the literature. TAM-based research treats technology as something to adopt or reject (Talantis et al., 2020); S-O-R-based research treats affect as one undifferentiated mediating state (Jung et al., 2024). This framework instead specifies which type of value, hedonic, educational, sensory, or immersive, a given technology generates, and ties each value type to a distinct behavioural pathway rather than one composite outcome. That realm-specific mapping, not the four realms alone, is the paper's original contribution, and it answers calls by Chen (2024) and Jung et al. (2024) for frameworks that move beyond binary adoption logic. The second addition is contextual. This mapping has not previously been tested against both reattendance and recommendation jointly, or within the Malaysian MICE setting, extending prior work by Severt et al. (2007) and Yesil and Ozmen (2024). Practically, the realm-specific structure gives organisers a more concrete diagnostic than a single satisfaction score. An AR/VR

exhibit can be evaluated separately for the esthetic presence it creates (H5–H6) versus the escapist immersion it creates (H7–H8); a gamified conference app can likewise be scored separately for entertainment value (H1–H2) versus educational gain (H3–H4). Two technologies with the same overall rating can therefore still be distinguished by which behavioural pathway they actually strengthen. This moves Malaysian MICE organisers away from undifferentiated adoption metrics, such as app-download counts, towards realm-specific instrumentation that flags which investment to repeat, which to redesign, and which experiential gap a given conference still needs to close. As international meeting volumes and their economic impact continue to grow (ICCA, 2025), this realm-level differentiation becomes an essential tool for competing conference destinations.

Limitations and future research

As a conceptual paper, the framework's eight hypotheses remain untested, and the relative strength of each experiential realm as a predictor is unknown; Seker and Unur (2022), for instance, found the esthetic dimension non-significant in their tourism study, suggesting context-specific variability the framework cannot rule out. It also omits potential mediators, such as overall satisfaction and perceived value (Yesil and Ozmen, 2024; Habachi et al., 2024), and moderators, such as technology familiarity, conference type, or cultural orientation; generalisability beyond Malaysia requires comparative empirical verification. Future research should empirically validate H1–H8 using PLS-SEM, preceded by scale development for the four realm constructs; mediation, moderation, and longitudinal designs would further enrich the framework's explanatory scope. As hybrid formats (Abd Latif and Zamzuri, 2024) and AI-powered personalisation (Lee, 2025) become mainstream in Malaysian conferences, researchers should also examine whether additional experiential dimensions warrant inclusion. In conclusion, this study advances understanding of how conference event technology shapes attendee experiences and post-event behavioural intentions through a conceptual framework grounded in Pine and Gilmore (1999) Experience Economy model. As the conference industry evolves, the ability to design technology experiences that are entertaining, educational, aesthetically immersive, and escapist, rather than merely functional, will determine which events endure and which are forgotten. The immediate next step is to operationalise the four realms into a validated measurement instrument and collect empirical data across Malaysian conference settings, placing the framework's diagnostic claims on an empirical footing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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