

## A REVIEW OF BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA: FINDING THE GAP

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### ABSTRACT

*The business event is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for socio-economic growth and brings significant contributions beyond monetary terms as well as tourism benefits. The past thirty years have seen rapid, increasing recognition in Malaysia that business events are a catalyst for the economic and social well-being of a country. In 2016, a strategic plan called Business Events Roadmap initiated by the Malaysian Government in charting the country as a preferred business event hub by 2020 and beyond not just within the Asia Pacific region, but also globally. However, from a far-reaching view, few challenges must be resolved before and beyond 2020 to boost the positive development of Malaysia's business events industry. This paper critically reviews the findings, themes, and conclusions of each article included in the literature review of the business events industry. Existing reviews of business events literature showed that past research had demonstrated significant challenges affecting host destinations, notably in the event management process, such as marketing, service quality, investment, infrastructure, human resources, risk, and safety as well as environmental. These challenges will not only affect the business events worldwide, but it deprives Malaysia of becoming Asia's top business events hub. Based on an extensive literature review, there is a noticeable paucity of few previous research explored business events in Malaysia, thus, covering only limited particular issues of event management as well as lack of literature on event management process and marketing strategies in the Malaysian context. Thus, the aim of this paper is i) to analyze the connotations of business events based on extensive literature from 2000 to recent 2019; (ii) to examine the emergence of business events industry in Malaysia; and (iii) to identify potential gaps in the Malaysian business events industry relying on a broad literature review. This study aims to assist the business events industry stakeholders in general, and in Malaysia. This study will make an original contribution to academic and practical contribution. The findings will shed light on future studies that lack research in the area of the business events industry, not only in Malaysia but globally.*

**Keywords:** Business events, MICE, event management process, marketing strategies, Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

The business event is increasingly recognized as a catalyst for socio-economic growth and brings significant contributions beyond monetary terms as well as tourism benefits. In Malaysia, the business event plays a vital role in the development of global trade and helps to enrich intellectual engagement. For the past 30 years, the Malaysian Government has recognized the business event as a catalyst for a country's economic and social well-being. In 2016, a strategic plan called Business Events Roadmap initiated by the Malaysian Government in charting Malaysia as a preferred business event hub by 2020 and beyond not just within the Asia Pacific region, but also internationally (MyCEB, 2016). The plans for expansion include the growth of visitor arrivals for international business events' from 5% to 8% of total tourist visits by 2020, to develop Malaysia as a significant business event destination (PEMANDU, 2015; MyCEB, 2019). Thus, business events in the Malaysian context recognized as business tourism that has a substantial multiplier effect on the economy (Yong & Ghazali, 2018). However, from a far-reaching view, few challenges must be resolved before and beyond 2020 to boost the positive development of Malaysia's business events industry.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past century, the business events industry has generally experienced unprecedented growth, with worldwide recognition of its impact on social and economic development (Mair & Jago, 2010). In Malaysia, a business event is a catalyst for socio-economic growth and has been discussed by scholars in the past as a critical contributor to social, economic and cultural transformation (Kumar, Hussain, & Ali; 2014; Zamzuri, Awang, Abdul Aziz, & Samdin, 2015; Yusoff, Ismail, & Rahman, 2015; Nwobodo, 2016). However, from a far-reaching view, few challenges related to the Malaysian business events industry must be resolved. Previous studies have shown few depriving challenges that affect business events' host destinations, particularly in a context of event management process including marketing and service quality, investment and infrastructure, human resources, as well as environmental issues (Weber, & Ladkin, 2003; Zamzuri, Awang, Aziz, & Samdin, 2011; Winkellmann, 2016; Nwobodo, 2016; Khotimah, Sucherly, Sari & Kaltum, 2016; Almubark, 2018). Clearly, all these arising challenges not just affecting the business events' destination all over the world, but it does deprive Malaysia also from becoming Asia's top business events hub (Hamid, Fuza, & Ismail, 2014; Hussain, Kumar, Kannan, & Nor, 2017; Yong et al., 2018). Based on an extensive literature review, the business events industry in Malaysia has still not yet comprehensively studied and underresearched. As a result, a noticeable paucity of few prior studies exploring business events in Malaysia is evident, addressing only limited specific issues of event management as well as an absence of literature on event management process and marketing strategies in the Malaysian framework. Therefore, this research seeks to reveal the potential gap in the Malaysian business events industry.

### THE CONNOTATIONS OF BUSINESS EVENTS

During the past three decades, there is evidence of an increasing amount of literature on business events – in research and practice. This sector was previously known as MICE and continues to apply as such in many countries (Wagen & White, 2018).

According to Mair et al. (2010), the term "business events" is widely being used by academics and industry, thus can be referred to as MICE activities. When it comes to the definition, Edwards, Foley, and Schlenker in 2011 published a paper in which they described "business events come in various forms which include meetings, conferences, conventions, incentive programs, exhibitions, seminars, summits, and training" (p.3). Seven years later, Yong et al. (2018) defined a business event as an extension from the traditional sector of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE). International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA) described a business event as establishing facilities and services for millions of delegates attending meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibitions and corporate hospitality (Yong et al., 2018). Recently, Wagen and White (2018) stated that business events are usually commercially driven, and this industry earlier regarded as MICE and in many nations is still marked as such.

The business events industry is deemed to be very significant to any destinations all over the world and a highly viable component of the event industry in which it stands as the fastest-growing contributor to the tourism industry (Walker & Walker, 2012; Rogers, 2013). The business events industry's impact goes far beyond the real economic return for the local community and economy, and world society at large (Foley, Schlenker, Edwards, & Lewis-Smith, 2013; Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, & Mone, 2016). The past thirty years have seen rapid progress in business events worldwide as a catalyst for many countries' socio-economic development. For example, the business events industry in the U.S. supports 6.3 million employment and generates nearly \$1 trillion a year in direct, indirect, and induced expenditure (Sanders, 2011). Business events are a vital component of the U.K. tourism industry, perceived as one of the U.K.'s largest industries, generating around £ 19 billion annually from 180,000 business and employing over 1.4 million people across the whole tourism and events sector (Raj, Walters, & Rashid, 2017). Raj et al. (2017) further mentioned that the U.K. Conference and Meeting Survey (UKCAMS) estimated that conferences and meetings generated £21.4 billion in 2014 and there were an estimated 1.28 million business events in 2014 as compared to 2013. In 2012, Deery reported that in the State of the Australian Business Events Industry Report, the business events industry was worth about \$10 billion to the Australian economy. Some Asian nations, including Singapore, China, South Korea, and Japan also are willing to provide significant support because they regard business events as a high-value-added sector (Kim, Sun, & Ap, 2008). This statement highlights the importance of business events as one of the economic contributors to the region of the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and the Asia Pacific.

For the past 20 years, the Malaysian Government has acknowledged that business event is a catalyst for socio-economic development and contributes more than tourism benefits. In Malaysia, a business event is considered a reliable tool for developing global trade and enriching intellectual engagement. Within the Malaysian Government and the community, there is growing recognition that business events make a more significant contribution beyond monetary terms. The business events industry was a substantial driver of Malaysia's economic transformation across all twelve (12) key sectors outlined in the Malaysian National Key Economic Area (NKEA) under the Economic Transformation Program (ETP). Business events are considered business tourism with a significant multiplier effect on the Malaysian economy, and the number of visitors attending business events has also increased since 2013 (PEMANDU, 2015; Zamzuri, 2016). Recently, there has been a growing demand and recognition from most stakeholders in Malaysia's business events industry (Deve, 2018). Thus, it is visible that business events have made an immense contribution to socio-economic growth that is beyond monetary gains as well as tourism benefits in Malaysia.

## THE EMERGENCE OF BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

For many years, the business event is going through massive development in Asia and Asia is now one of the main hubs in hosting business events (Ahmad & Daud, 2015; Rogers & Davidson, 2016). Hence, the growth of the business events industry in the Asia Pacific region is "evident from the number of events hosted, the construction of large-scale convention and exhibition centres, as well as the substantial support provided by the governments" to Asia countries such as Singapore, South Korean, Japan and China (Kim et al., 2008, p.206). Besides, Ahmad et al. (2015) mentioned that Singapore and Hong Kong were the two hottest destinations for business events with Taiwan, India and Malaysia "going for the run too" (p.70). Therefore, this section is to answer this call by looking into the evolution of business events in Malaysia.

In the Malaysian context, business events are known as business tourism that has a significant multiplier effect on the economy (Yong et al., 2018; PEMANDU, 2015). Evidence has shown that during the past ten years, the business events industry in Malaysia has undergone a constant significant growth (PMO, 2013). Recent doctoral dissertations established in 2016 by Zamzuri highlighted that the number of visitors attending business events in Malaysia has increased since 2013. In 2017, business events had contributed to an estimation of RM954 million in Incremental Gross National Income (GNI) and had attracted 101,437 delegates, participants, and visitors to Malaysia (MyCEB, 2017). Recently in 2019, it is revealed that through business events, Malaysia by 2020 is expected to contribute Incremental Gross National Income (GNI) of RM3.9 billion, 16,720 jobs creation, as well as 2.9 million visitors, are expected to add into the growth from 5% to 8% of total visitor arrivals (MyCEB, 2019).

Table 1 below illustrates the worldwide ranking by country – Malaysia as well as the Asia Pacific & Middle East ranking by the city - Kuala Lumpur. The figures, as seen in Table 1, were extracted from the ICCA's annual report ranging from 2014 to 2018, and the statistics were being outlined and analyzed by the author. Based on the author's analysis, there is evidence of unstable ranking or declination patterns (Rashid, Ma'amor, Ariffin, and & Achim, 2015) in terms of the country's worldwide ranking starting from 2014 to 2018. The decrease in terms of the number of meetings hosted by Malaysia from 2016 to 2017 lead to the increase of hosting in 2018 with a total of 134 meetings was being held in Malaysia, which led to the country's ranking jumped tremendously into ranking 33 instead of 37 in 2017. In 2014, the worldwide ranking shows that Kuala Lumpur went steadily in

hosting the business events. However, the city came through a tremendous fall again between 2015 and 2017. Kuala Lumpur ranked 34 in 2018 against cities all over the world.

**Table 1: International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) Rankings and Number of Meetings: Worldwide Ranking by Country and Asia Pacific & Middle East by City For the Year 2014 – the Year 2018**

		Rank					No. of Meeting				
		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Country	Malaysia	30	35	35	37	33	133	113	115	112	134
Worldwide Ranking	Kuala Lumpur	28	32	32	38	34	79	73	68	65	68
Asia Pacific & Middle East	Kuala Lumpur	8	9	9	10	9	79	73	68	65	134

Note: The statistics of rankings and number of meetings by country (Malaysia) and city (Kuala Lumpur) (Source: The Author, 2019)

In contrast, the statistics for Asia Pacific & Middle East have shown that Kuala Lumpur has experienced a slight decrease in terms of ranking between 2015 to 2018, yet the number of meetings hosted in 2018 went up steadily with 134 meetings were being organized. These statistics have clearly described that 2018 has shown the positive growth of the business industry in Malaysia and evidently, it comes from the launching of a strategic plan introduced by the Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) mentioned earlier on. However, based on overall analysis, Table 1 has shown the number of meetings hosted in Malaysia or Kuala Lumpur needs to improve due to the reduction pattern, and inconsistency of rankings. A recent statistics in 2018 by International Congress and Convention Association has mapped Malaysia at the world ranking of 33 out of 110 countries as well as being ranked number 9 within the Asia Pacific rankings trailing behind other ASEAN countries like Thailand, Taiwan, India, and Singapore (ICCA, 2018). Furthermore, for the Asia Pacific ranking by city, Kuala Lumpur ranked 10 with 68 meetings hosted, while Singapore ranked first with 145 meetings hosted and Bangkok city second with 135 hosted, followed by Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, Beijing, Sydney, and Shanghai (MyCEB, 2018). It, therefore, puts a strain on Malaysia to compete healthily with other developing and gigantic rising ASEAN countries in the Asia Pacific region, in which there is an urgent need to identify the potential gap of the Malaysian business events industry in this research to assist boost industry growth as well as improve the global and Asia Pacific rankings.

#### FINDING THE “GAP” OF BUSINESS EVENTS INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA

Based on Table 1, the reduction pattern and inconsistency of rankings for Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur are opposite from the strategic plan of Malaysia's Business Events Roadmap. To date, business events particularly in Malaysia still not yet extensively investigated (Kamal, 2013; Ismail, 2014; Hamid et al., 2014; Nwobodo, 2016; Hamid, Fuza, & Zain, 2016; Deve, 2018). However, studies are surprisingly lacking that investigate the aspect of the event management process and marketing strategies in the context of business events literature. Therefore, the potential gap for this study in the context of Malaysian business events industry is twofold: the first gap is **the absence of proper understanding or awareness on the event management process** (Al-Hasan & Chris, 2019) and the second gap is **lack of marketing strategies** (Yusoff, Ismail & Rahman, 2015) among the business event stakeholders in Malaysia.

#### EVENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Over many years since its existence, several authors have provided a large volume of literature on the definition of event management. The definition provided by Thomas, Hermes, and Loos in 2008a meets the aim of this study. The scholars mentioned that event management defined as "*Coordination of all the tasks and activities needed to carry out an event concerning its strategy, planning, implementation and monitoring, relying on event marketing principles and project management methods*" (Thomas et al., 2008a, p.2). They further stated that event management refers to an interdisciplinary field which mostly addressed in various areas, be it to practice and research (Thomas et al., 2008a). In 2014, Goldblatt described event management as involving a process that includes research, design, planning, coordination, and evaluation. Recently, Raj et al. in 2017 defined event management as the capability and control of the process of purpose, people, and place. Goldblatt's definition met the purpose of this study in which the process of organizing an event related to the term "event management," as this much-growing term is used to describe the process flow. Since the 2000s, few academic studies have identified the significance of the event management process (Allan, Harris, Jago, & Veal, 2000; Tum, Norton, & Wright, 2006; Thomas et al., 2008b; Shone & Perry, 2010, Al-Hasan et al., 2019). In 2004, Yeoman, Robertson, Ali-Knight, Drummond, and McMahon-Beattie published a paper in which they described event management organized through the support from a management framework. The framework refers to the identification and distribution of five (5) stages of development for an event. The structure involves:

- i) The decision of whether to proceed with the event or reject,
- ii) the decision making's result – to produce the event, delay or call it off,
- iii) the event planning,
- iv) the implementation by monitoring the progress, set-up standard process or procedures for any occurrence of expectancy or unexpected, and
- v) the evaluation to improve on the event performance in the future.

Additionally, Singh, Racherla, and Hu (2007) described that event management involves complex business processes that require coordination among various professionals. Another study being carried out by Daniel, Bogdan, and Daniel (2012) has mentioned that event management refers to the aspect of design as well as coordination. However, Rutherford in 2008 has reiterated and emphasized that the event management process also can be referred to as the event marketing management process in which this matches the aim of this study to fill in those gaps that do exist in the Malaysian business events industry.

**Figure 1: Event Management Process**  
(Source: Rutherford, 2008)

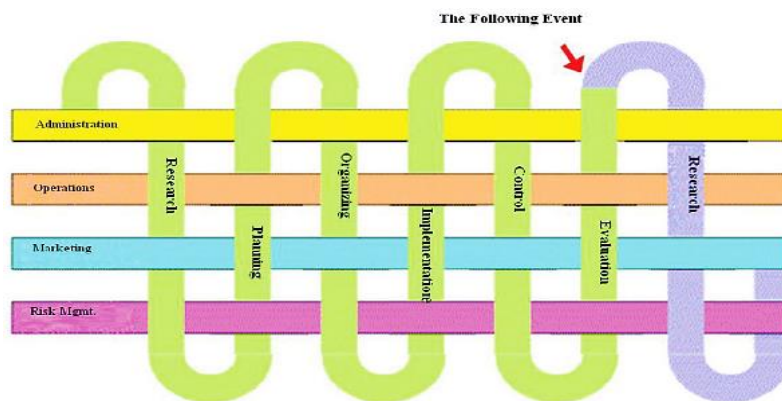


Figure 1 shows that event management is a process that involves the 3P's of an event such as –planning, preparation, and production. The event management process depicted in Figure 1 clearly shows the flows of management functions, which include the management itself (administration, operation, risk management) as well as marketing. The process shown refers to an intricate weaving of the process that includes research, planning, organizing, implementation, control and evaluation with the scope of management functions that differs in terms of administration, operation, and marketing as well as risk management. All different management functions are involved directly or indirectly in carrying out the tasks before, during, and after the event. The intricate weaving also shows that the process will continue again right after one event ended, with a similar process that will repeat. Organizing an event refers to the integration of various interdisciplinary fields and Rutherford further emphasized that for any good evolution and implementation of an event that achieves its objectives, the event must combine at least two subjects or else the event would not exist, and it is referring to management and marketing. Thus, areas for further research in the business events industry of Malaysia are identified based on this strong statement, and this paper proposes to support any future studies in this special-niche areas – event management and marketing.

## MARKETING STRATEGIES

Over the past century, events have become an essential element of destination marketing (Henderson, Foo, Lim & Yip, 2010; Hede & Jago, 2011; Nica & Swaidan, 2014), and thus are an exciting and vital focus of this study. The strategy in utilizing the event to promote a destination is not new. The business event is one of the significant components of marketing strategies (Hoppen, Brown & Fyall, 2014; Rogers et al., 2016). The business events industry received very little attention by event and tourism researchers as compared to other mega-events in general, which resulted to lack of research that focus on how business event can very much assist in accelerating the socio-economic growth of a particular destination through effective marketing strategies. This literature, therefore, much relates to the aim of the researcher to explore the best practice of marketing strategies for business events in Malaysia.

Brassington and Pettitt conducted a study in 2005 defining marketing strategies as "target markets, what direction needed and what needs to be done in broad terms to create a defensible competitive position compatible with overall corporate and competitive strategy within those markets" (cited in Jackson, 2013, p.393). While in a study conducted by Gurung (2013), it has been found that a strong marketing element has adhered to event management, and this statement also is strongly being supported by Chaffey in 2016 that marketing is one of the crucial subjects that cannot be left behind by any event organizers when planning and organizing an event. Most organizations also use event management as strategic marketing and communication tools (Leino, 2016). Thus, this is robust literature that supports the gap and reveals a good start for the Malaysian business events industry to be further explored and investigated. Therefore, a future study on marketing strategies for the business events industry in Malaysia is vital, which aligned with the aim of this paper.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to gain a better understanding of the Malaysian business events industry based on the analysis of the connotations, and the emergence of business events that led to the identification of potential gap based on a broad literature review of business events industry in Malaysia. This study aims to assist the business events industry practitioners in Malaysia among the government agencies, Professional Conference Organizers (PCO), Destination Marketing Companies (DMO), event organizers, event managers, airlines, and hoteliers. One of the significant findings from this conceptual paper is the gap found in the context of the Malaysian business events industry which is twofold: **the absence of proper understanding or awareness on the event management process and lack of marketing strategies** among business events stakeholders in Malaysia. In general, therefore, it seems that future research could address the gap found in this study and make several contributions to the current literature of the Malaysian business events industry. Although the research has adequately investigated the business events industry in Malaysia, it has some limitations. The limitations are the study in favor of researching only business events, a restricted geographical area in Malaysia expanded to other parts of the globe, and an absence of event management and marketing literature from the Malaysian perspective that focuses on the business events. Further research in this field would be of great help in improving the process of managing and organizing business events as well as market it effectively aligned with the goal of the Government of Malaysia.

Further research in the following areas of the business events industry in Malaysia seems crucial: event management process and marketing strategies. Therefore, there is a significant need for Malaysia's government and "peak time" for all concerned business event industry stakeholders to develop a new, specific business event strategy that could act as a guideline for understanding the process of organizing business events. This study have several important implications for the future practice among the practitioners – to ensure constant growth of business events industry in Malaysia, helps to improve the process of event management in organizing business events as well as to cultivate the best practices of marketing strategies among business event stakeholders in Malaysia. Thus, the findings will provide a practical, efficient, and effective solution, e.g., policy recommendations or an effective strategic plan to all the business events industry stakeholders in Malaysia. To conclude, this study will also shed light on future research that can justify possible backgrounds in the business events industry, not only in Malaysia but in other regions around the world.

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