



**ROLE OF VALUE CO-CREATION AND PARTICIPATION MOTIVES IN  
ATTENDEES INTERACTIONS AND EXHIBITORS OUTCOME**

By

**ZHANG RONGTENG**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2023

**Chairman : Professor Azmawani binti Abd Rahman, PhD**  
**School : Business and Economics**

In recent times, exhibitions have undergone a profound transformation, shifting from passive platforms for the dissemination of information to dynamic and interactive experiences that actively engage and enthuse attendees. Exhibitions are no longer merely sales tools; they now serve as meticulously organized hubs for fostering interaction, drawing together resources from a specific or interconnected spectrum of industries. These events, rooted in their interactive nature, not only facilitate resource flow but also play a pivotal role in generating value. Consequently, the comprehension of attendee motivations for participation and the concept of value co-creation have emerged as pivotal considerations in enhancing the outcomes of exhibitions.

In response to the calls of previous studies, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of interaction in exhibition and value co-creation upon attendees level on the exhibition performance and other outcomes upon exhibitor level. Underpinned by the extended Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this study comprises the stimulus (technological interaction and interpersonal interaction), process (value co-creation and exhibition performance), and output (exhibitor satisfaction and re-attend intention) with the guidance of interaction-oriented theory (Ramani & Kumar, 2008), customer participation theory (Chase, 1978), and value co-creation theory (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Data was collected using the purposive sampling approach to identify and pair the dyad of attendee and corresponding exhibitor. Overall, 1497 responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

This study revealed the following key findings: Attendees' value co-creation is influenced by both technological and interpersonal interactions. Technological interaction directly affects exhibitor performance, while interpersonal interaction does not. Attendees' value co-creation activities positively impact exhibitor performance.

Attendees' participation motives moderate the roles of value co-creation in exhibition interactions and exhibition performance. Finally, exhibitor' performance and satisfaction positively influence their intention to re-attend. Apart from contributing to the existing literature, this study also offers practical insights. For exhibitors, it is crucial to recognize that success extends beyond sales activities. Actively fostering interactions among attendees and adeptly analyzing the composition of attendees can guide more effective exhibit planning. Attendees can gain valuable market insights by actively exploring and interacting with exhibition booths, staying informed about emerging trends to remain competitive. Organizers should foster collaborative and interactive environments, utilizing network technology for better communication. Policymakers can use this study to shape intelligent exhibition-related policies. However, there are limitations to acknowledge. Firstly, the study's focus on China may warrant further international exploration. Additionally, expanding the study to include more actors, such as assessing the service quality and reputation of trade show organizers within a triadic framework, could provide a more comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, longitudinal research could be valuable in understanding the evolving behavior of both buyers and non-buyers, as well as the corresponding impact on exhibitor performance over time. These research directions can enrich our insights into the exhibition industry.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERANAN PENYERTAAN BERSAMA NILAI DAN MOTIF PENYERTAAN  
DALAM INTERAKSI HADIRIN DAN HASIL EKSHIBITOR**

Oleh

**ZHANG RONGTENG**

Oktober 2023

**Pengerusi : Profesor Azmawani binti Abd Rahman, PhD**  
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Sejak kebelakangan ini, pameran telah mengalami transformasi yang mendalam, beralih daripada platform pasif untuk penyebaran maklumat kepada pengalaman dinamik dan interaktif yang secara aktif dalam penglibatan dan pemikatan hadirin. Pameran bukan lagi sekadar alat jualan; mereka kini berfungsi sebagai hab yang teratur rapi untuk memupuk interaksi, mengumpulkan sumber daripada spektrum industri tertentu atau saling berkaitan. Peristiwa ini, berakar umbi dalam sifat interaktifnya, bukan sahaja memudahkan aliran sumber tetapi juga memainkan peranan penting dalam menjana nilai. Oleh itu, pemahaman tentang motivasi peserta untuk penyertaan dan konsep penciptaan nilai bersama telah muncul sebagai pertimbangan penting dalam meningkatkan hasil pameran.

Sebagai tindak balas kepada panggilan kajian lepas, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat kesan interaksi dalam pameran dan penciptaan nilai bersama ke atas peringkat peserta terhadap prestasi pameran dan hasil lain di peringkat peserta. Disokong oleh teori Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) yang diperluaskan (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), kajian ini terdiri daripada rangsangan (interaksi teknologi dan interaksi interpersonal), process (penciptaan bersama nilai dan prestasi pameran), dan output (kepuasan peserta pameran dan niat hadir semula) dengan bimbingan teori berorientasikan interaksi (Ramani & Kumar, 2008), teori penyertaan pelanggan (Chase, 1978), dan teori penciptaan nilai (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Data dikumpul menggunakan pendekatan persampelan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti dan menggandingkan dyad peserta dan peserta pameran yang sepadan. Secara keseluruhannya, 1497 respons telah dianalisis menggunakan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur Separa Kuasa Dua (PLS-SEM).

Kajian ini mendedahkan penemuan penting berikut: Penciptaan bersama nilai peserta dipengaruhi oleh interaksi teknologi dan interpersonal. Interaksi teknologi secara langsung mempengaruhi prestasi peserta, manakala interaksi interpersonal tidak.

Aktiviti penciptaan bersama nilai peserta memberi impak positif kepada prestasi peserta. Motif penyertaan peserta menyederhanakan peranan penciptaan nilai bersama dalam interaksi pameran dan prestasi pameran. Akhir sekali, prestasi dan kepuasan pempamer secara positif mempengaruhi niat mereka untuk hadir semula. Selain daripada menyumbang kepada literatur sedia ada, kajian ini juga menawarkan pelbagai pandangan praktikal. Bagi peserta pameran, ia adalah penting untuk menyedari bahawa kejayaan melangkaui aktiviti jualan. Memupuk interaksi secara aktif dalam kalangan peserta dan menganalisis komposisi peserta dengan mahir juga boleh membimbing perancangan pameran yang lebih berkesan. Para hadirin boleh memperoleh cerapan pasaran yang berharga dengan meneroka dan berinteraksi secara aktif dengan gerai pameran, dan sentiasa dimaklumkan tentang trend baru muncul untuk kekal berdaya saing. Penganjur harus memupuk persekitaran kolaboratif dan interaktif, menggunakan teknologi rangkaian untuk komunikasi yang lebih baik. Pembuat dasar boleh menggunakan kajian ini untuk membentuk dasar berkaitan pameran pintar. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini mempunyai beberapa batasan. Pertama, tumpuan kajian terhadap China mungkin memerlukan penerokaan antarabangsa selanjutnya. Selain itu, memperluaskan kajian untuk memasukkan lebih ramai pelakon, seperti menilai kualiti perkhidmatan dan reputasi penganjur pameran perdagangan dalam rangka kerja triadic, boleh memberikan perspektif yang lebih komprehensif. Tambahan pula, penyelidikan membujur boleh menjadi berharga dalam memahami tingkah laku yang berubah-ubah bagi kedua-dua pembeli dan bukan pembeli, serta kesan yang sepadan terhadap prestasi peserta dari semasa ke semasa. Arah penyelidikan ini boleh memperkayakan pandangan kita tentang industri pameran.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |                                                         |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| GDP   | Gross Domestic Product                                  |
| IoT   | Internet of Things                                      |
| VR    | Virtual Reality                                         |
| AI    | Artificial Intelligence                                 |
| 5G    | the Fifth Generation of Mobile Communication Technology |
| UFI   | the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry       |
| IT    | Information Technology                                  |
| ICT   | Information Communication Technology                    |
| RFID  | Radio Frequency Identification Devices                  |
| NFC   | Near Field Communication                                |
| QR    | Quick Response                                          |
| AR    | Augmented Reality                                       |
| S-O-R | Stimulus-Organism-Response                              |
| SDL   | Service-Dominant Logic                                  |
| MICE  | Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events           |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of interactions in exhibitions and outcomes. To achieve this, it conducts a detailed investigation of the effects of interpersonal interaction, technological interaction and value co-creation on attendees' level on the exhibitors' exhibition performance. Then, the impact of exhibition performance on satisfaction and re-attend intention is evaluated, based on the perceptions of corresponding exhibitors. The first section of the study introduces the background, which is followed by the problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance, and scope. Towards the end of the chapter, the definitions of the variables are presented.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Exhibition, also known as trade show or trade fair, is a periodic event where manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors within a specific industry or related industries gather in a single location to showcase products and services (Geigenmüller & Bettis, 2012). Exhibition contributes to the booming tourism industry around the world, with exhibitors being primarily attracted to exhibitions due to the marketing benefits they offer (Breden & Flanagan, 2019).

#### 1.2.1 Global Landscape of Exhibitions

The global exhibition market is valued at roughly \$14 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow to \$36.31 billion by 2026 (Statista & Daedal Research, 2022). Exhibitions can have a significant impact on the economy which can help to promote trade and investment, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth (International Monetary Fund, 2018). According to Global Economic Impact of Exhibitions Research (2022), the \$197.5 billion gross domestic product (GDP) supported by the global exhibition sector is considered to be the 55th largest economy worldwide, more than half of country's economy such as Singapore or Malaysia. This is correspondence to the direct spending by attendees, exhibitors and other exhibition-related expenses in the business turnover generated in the exhibition.

**Table 1.1 : Impact of Exhibitions among the Global Economics Ranking**

| Rank | Country            | GDP      | Rank | Country              | GDP   | Rank | Country            | GDP   |
|------|--------------------|----------|------|----------------------|-------|------|--------------------|-------|
| 1    | United States      | € 19,087 | 31   | Norway               | € 363 | 61   | Kuwait             | € 122 |
| 2    | China              | € 12,750 | 32   | Nigeria              | €359  | 62   | Morocco            | € 107 |
| 3    | Japan              | €4,574   | 33   | Ireland              | €356  | 63   | Ecuador            | € 97  |
| 4    | Germany            | €3,479   | 34   | Israel               | €355  | 64   | Cuba               | € 94  |
| 5    | United Kingdom     | €2,573   | 35   | South Africa         | €347  | 65   | Slovak Republic    | € 94  |
| 6    | India              | €2,505   | 36   | Philippines          | €336  | 66   | Puerto Rico        | € 94  |
| 7    | France             | €2,439   | 37   | Singapore            | €335  | 67   | Kenya              | € 90  |
| 8    | Africa             | €2,227   | 38   | Malaysia             | €326  | 68   | Ethiopia           | € 83  |
| 9    | Italy              | € 1,797  | 39   | Hong Kong, China     | €324  | 69   | Angola             | € 80  |
| 10   | Brazil             | € 1,673  | 40   | Denmark              | €310  | 70   | Dominican Republic | € 79  |
| 11   | Canada             | € 1,556  | 41   | Egypt                | €300  | 71   | Sri Lanka          | € 75  |
| 12   | Russia             | € 1,509  | 42   | Vietnam              | €293  | 72   | Guatemala          | € 69  |
| 13   | South Korea        | €1,475   | 43   | Colombia             | €289  | 73   | Oman               | € 68  |
| 14   | Spain              | €1,244   | 44   | Bangladesh           | €269  | 74   | Luxembourg         | € 63  |
| 15   | Australia          | € 1,238  | 45   | Pakistan             | €261  | 75   | Bulgaria           | € 62  |
| 16   | Mexico             | €1,135   | 46   | Chile                | €250  | 76   | Myanmar            | € 61  |
| 17   | Indonesia          | € 1,000  | 47   | Finland              | €240  | 77   | Ghana              | € 61  |
| 18   | Netherlands        | € 813    | 48   | Czech Republic       | €226  | 78   | Libya              | € 60  |
| 19   | Saudi Arabia       | €718     | 49   | Romania              | €222  | 79   | Panama             | € 60  |
| 20   | Turkey             | € 678    | 50   | Portugal             | €214  | 80   | Costa Rica         | € 58  |
| 21   | Switzerland        | € 654    | 51   | Peru                 | €206  | 81   | Belarus            | € 57  |
| 22   | Taiwan             | € 546    | 52   | Iraq                 | €201  | 82   | Croatia            | € 56  |
| 23   | Poland             | € 533    | 53   | New Zealand          | € 188 | 83   | Uruguay            | € 55  |
| 24   | Iran, Islamic Rep. | € 519    | 54   | Greece               | € 183 | 84   | Tanzania           | € 54  |
| 25   | Thailand           | € 486    | 55   | Exhibitions globally | € 179 | 85   | Cote d'Ivoire      | € 52  |
| 26   | Belgium            | €478     | 56   | Kazakhstan           | € 157 | 86   | Uzbekistan         | € 50  |
| 27   | Sweden             | € 477    | 57   | Qatar                | € 157 | 87   | Macao, China       | € 49  |
| 28   | Argentina          | € 407    | 58   | Algeria              | € 153 | 88   | Lithuania          | € 49  |

**Table 1.1 : Continued**

| <b>Rank</b> | <b>Country</b>       | <b>GDP</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Country</b> | <b>GDP</b> | <b>Rank</b> | <b>Country</b> | <b>GDP</b> |
|-------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|----------------|------------|-------------|----------------|------------|
| 29          | Austria              | € 397      | 59          | Hungary        | €146       | 89          | Slovenia       | € 49       |
| 30          | United Arab Emirates | € 373      | 60          | Ukraine        | € 137      | 90          | Lebanon        | € 48       |

Note: Amounts in billions of Euros

(Source: Oxford Economics & UFI The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry 2022)

The exhibition economy is developing rapidly and has supported a total global economic impact. In fact, global exhibitions have supported \$334.5 billion of business sales and 3.4 million jobs (Oxford Economics & UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2023). Table 1.2 presents the comparison of famous international exhibitions in six countries. Europe and North America dominate the market due to well-established venues and exhibition spaces, while Asia Pacific is anticipated to hold a significant market share, especially in countries like China (Research & Markets, 2023).

**Table 1.2 : Examples of renowned international exhibitions**

| Country | Exhibition Name                    | Industry             | Frequency | Location  | Scale                  | Number of Participants |
|---------|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Germany | Hannover Messe                     | Industrial           | Annually  | Hanover   | 538,838 m <sup>2</sup> | 215,000                |
| Italy   | Milan International Furniture Fair | Furniture            | Annually  | Milan     | 232,257 m <sup>2</sup> | 386,000                |
| USA     | Consumer Electronics Show          | Consumer Electronics | Annually  | Las Vegas | 269,419 m <sup>2</sup> | 170,000                |
| Japan   | Tokyo Motor Show                   | Automotive           | Biennial  | Tokyo     | 121,702 m <sup>2</sup> | 1,300,000              |
| France  | Paris Air Show                     | Aviation             | Biennial  | Paris     | 278,709 m <sup>2</sup> | 316,000                |
| UK      | London International Boat Show     | Boating              | Annually  | London    | 92,903 m <sup>2</sup>  | 35,000                 |
| China   | China International Industry Fair  | Industrial           | Annually  | Shanghai  | 278,709 m <sup>2</sup> | 200,000                |

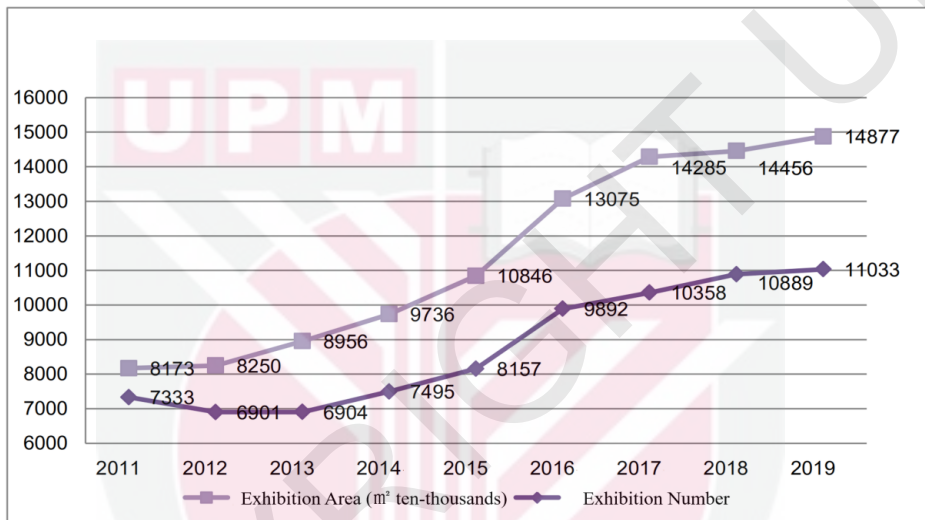
(Source: Compiled and collated by the researcher)

Although the exhibition industry has experienced a significant decline due to COVID-19, its recovery has accelerated since 2022, and continued into 2023. According to the Global Exhibition Barometer report, more than 75% and 95% rise in global exhibition revenues are projected for 2022 and 2023 respectively compared with pre-pandemic levels (UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2023).

### 1.2.2 Current Status of Exhibitions in China

The exhibition industry in China has shifted from a quantitative growth to a quality improvement stage in this rapid development. The substantial increase in total exhibition area suggests a heightened investment in infrastructure, technology, and overall event planning. This investment contributes to the creation of more sophisticated and immersive exhibition environments, fostering a conducive atmosphere for meaningful interactions, knowledge exchange, and business collaborations.

According to China Exhibition Statistics Report (2022), the net increase of exhibitions the year before the pandemic was 65, which was far lower than the net increase of 531 exhibitions *pari passu*. Comparatively, the total exhibition area increased by 3.02 million square meters, which was much higher than the total exhibition area increased by 1.71 million square meters on a year-over-year basis (China Convention and Exhibition Society, 2022). In this case, a larger exhibition area allows for a more strategic and purposeful layout, facilitating enhanced visitor experiences and exhibitor engagement. The correlation between square meterage and the quality of exhibitions is profound. This is in line with the positive changes required for the high-quality development of the exhibition industry.

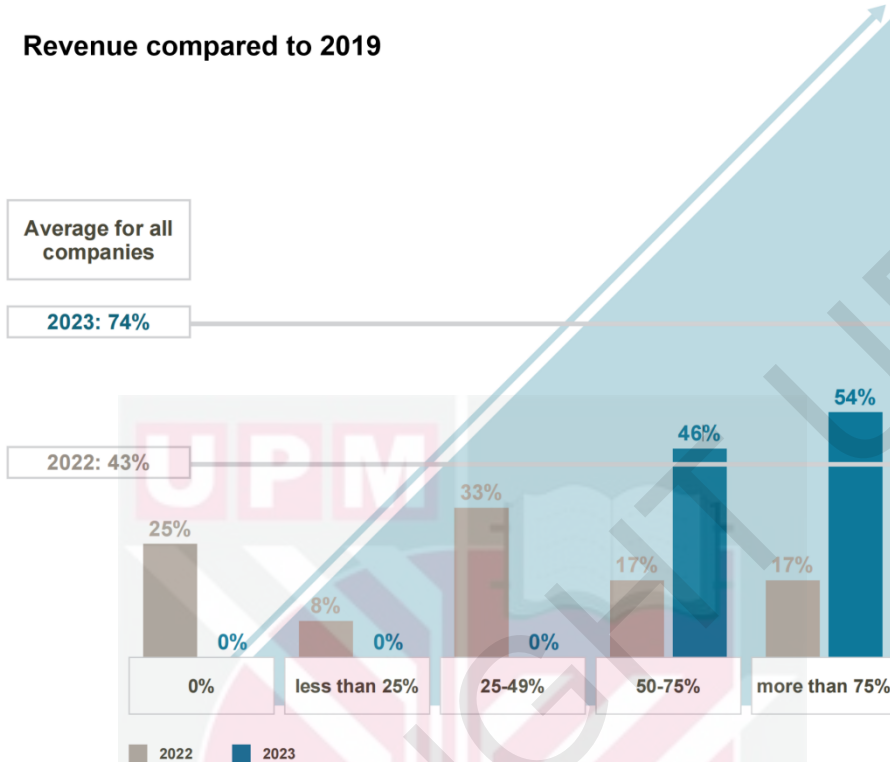


**Figure 1.1 : The exhibition number and exhibition area growth trend in China before COVID-19 pandemic**

(Source : China Convention and Exhibition Society 2019)

China was one of the first countries in the world that held offline exhibition activities normally since the pandemic, and the exhibition market in China was the first to recover from the outbreak (China Convention and Exhibition Society, 2021). The 2021 Annual Report on China's Exhibition Industry shows that 5,281 exhibitions were held nationwide in 2020, covering an exhibition area of 79.51 million square meters, with a direct output value of RMB 460 billion and a comprehensive contribution of RMB 4 trillion of GDP (Global Exhibition Beijing Forum, 2021). Spurred by the strong recovery of the Chinese economy, exhibition development in China is expected to exceed expectations (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, 2021).

## Revenue compared to 2019



**Figure 1.2 : Resilience of exhibition with company operating profits amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in China**

(Source: UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry 2023)

In order to manage the high-quality exhibition, nowadays, with the popularization of the leading technologies, the mode of technological organization of exhibitions has emerged, which highlights technological elements to improve on-site service levels, providing a rich interactive experience. According to the China's Exhibition Industry Annual Report (2021), digitalization and intelligence are main features of the development of the exhibition industry nowadays. China's rapid adoption of advanced digital technologies such as robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), big data, virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and the fifth generation of mobile communication technology (5G) has led to a significant integration between the exhibition industry and the digital economy (Global Exhibition Beijing Forum, 2021). In this way, the exhibition not only provides a platform for exhibitors and attendees to connect supply and demand, negotiate, exchange and cooperate. Besides, it also brings science fiction into reality. For example, by standing in front of the screen, people can see the new outfits with a wave of hand in the air and try everything they like.

### 1.2.3 Evolving Trend towards the Smart Exhibition

Exhibition digital toolkit has become an increasingly important and indispensable element to enhance the attendee experience (Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2016). Digital display flexibly applies sound, light, electricity, film and other technologies to multi-level and multi-dimensional display content. Modern exhibitions have evolved from passive reception of exhibition information by attendees in the past to an interactive visit experience, which greatly increases the entertainment of the display while disseminating knowledge and culture, fully mobilizes the enthusiasm of visitors to participate, and enhances visit experiences. Through the use of evolving technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality, it is becoming a common practice to entertain, provide demos, and sell products or concepts in the exhibition space (Corbin Ball & Co. the Meeting Technology Professionals, 2018).



**Figure 1.3 : Interactions in Exhibition**

With the development and application of technology, the forms of exhibition interaction are getting richer and richer nowadays as exhibitions inevitably evolve into smart exhibitions. The “smart or intelligent exhibition” refers to the exhibition including information technology (IT) devices and/or tools with the aim of obtaining and using multidimensional information to provide efficiency to exhibitors and visitors (Hlee, Lee, Moon & Yoo, 2017). For example, through onsite information communication technology (ICT) tools (Hlee, Lee, Moon & Yoo, 2017), touch-screen and geo-location devices (Chongwatpol, 2015; Lilien & Grewal, 2012) and other technologies, smart exhibition system has been applied (Lee, Li, Lee & Shih, 2021; Han, Koo & Chung, 2018) to enhance multi-sensory realization and exhibition experience elevation process (Kim, Park, Sun & Lee, 2016). According to the pre-show, at-show, post-show stages, the primary typologies and applications of state-of-art technologies have been identified (Singh, Shukla & Kalafatis, 2017; Li, 2010). See Table 1.3 below for a list of examples of commonly used technologies in the smart exhibitions.

**Table 1.3 : Technologies adopted in the smart exhibition**

| IT devices/<br>tools                          | Descriptions                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Studies                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Radio Frequency Identification Devices (RFID) | The potential to gather accurate and up-to-date information about attendees and to adapt communication strategies based on this information                                                                                           | Hlee et al. (2017); Chongwatpol (2015)            |
| Near Field Communication (NFC)                | Facilitating communication between a stationary device and attendees present within the exhibition space, resulting in enhanced interaction dynamics, and the ability to provide personalized content based on attendees' preferences | Hlee et al. (2017); Chongwatpol (2015)            |
| Quick response (QR) code                      | Bridging the gap between the physical and virtual realms, enabling the acquisition of accurate data and the opportunity to redefine communication strategies                                                                          | Han et al. (2018); Hlee et al. (2017)             |
| Touch-screen display                          | Reduction in costs due to the ability to minimize exhibition space, an increase in interactivity, and improved data collection                                                                                                        | Chongwatpol (2015); Lilien & Grewal (2012)        |
| Motion detection devices                      | Enhanced interaction, improved data collection, faster turnaround times, and stimulation of curiosity                                                                                                                                 | Takafuji et al. (2014); Delafontaine et al (2012) |
| Geo-location devices                          | Opportunities for integration with informative social media campaigns and the ability to obtain positioning data.                                                                                                                     | Chongwatpol (2015); Lilien & Grewal (2012)        |
| Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics     | Equipped with face recognition system and AI tool to communicate with attendee; provide consistent interacting quality; catch attendees' attention                                                                                    | Yang et al. (2020); Huang et al. (2016)           |
| Virtual reality (VR)                          | Increased informative provision; possibility of showcasing products/services not exhibited at the show; increase in eye-catching                                                                                                      | Bauer & Hantel (2021); Lee et al. (2021)          |
| Augmented reality (AR)                        | Improve engagement; possibilities of presentation and interaction with digital contents; increased informative and communicative component.                                                                                           | Bauer & Hantel (2021); Lee et al. (2021)          |

(Source: Compiled and collated by the researcher)

Undoubtedly, exhibition is not only a sales tool, but also an organized proximity for the interaction as a set of relational activities for encouraging the mobilization of resources among participants through bringing manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors within a specific industry or related industries gather in one place to showcase products and services. Accordingly, the essence of value creation in exhibition is the communication and interaction among exhibition participants (Blythe, 2010; Wong & Lai, 2018; Wong & Lai, 2019). As a connected activity based on an interactive nature, exhibitions promote the flow of various types of resources such as knowledge and experience among participating parties, and are regarded as the source of value creation. Thus, from this point of view, the key source of exhibition value creation is the communication and interaction in the exhibition. Value co-creation theory believes that customers and companies create value together, and the participation and interaction are important elements of value creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Exhibition performance is the performance result of participating in exhibition activities as the core of exhibition behavior and practical concepts, which is crucial for the sustainability of the exhibition. Previous studies have attributed exhibition performance mostly from the perspective of exhibitors to their internal resource conditions such as spacious booth sizes, sizable trade show budgets, as well as dense booth personnel (Tanner, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008; Skallerud, 2010; Li, Evans & Chen, 2011), or from the viewpoints of organizers and exhibitors to booth rental fees, setup fees, number of service employees (Fang & Ding, 2020).

The core of the exhibition is based on the interactive communication of the participating parties, and attendee is also primary one of them. Some scholars have started to study exhibition performance from the view of attendees as well. For example, Lee et al. (2020) found that the career expo factors influencing student satisfaction are exhibitor performance, pre-event service, event organization, and job information (Lee, Lee, Dopson & Yoon, 2020). Among these factors, exhibitor performance was evaluated from the view of service quality to attendees such as 'recruiters respond to my questions in a welcoming environment', 'recruiters initiate contact and greet me', referring to expo attributes associated with behaviors and attitude of exhibitors toward attendees at the exhibition. Yet, the existing body of literature may not have delved deeply enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interaction with attendees on the exhibitors' performance. This gap in research has resulted in a lack of pertinent insights needed to enhance performance through a comprehensive understanding of the interactive and co-creative essence of exhibitions. Therefore, a timely study on interaction in exhibitions, with a specific focus on both exhibitors and visitor samples, is warranted.

Although the exhibitors may hope that attendees in exhibitions are all buyers and organizers have always used the proportion of typical visitor to promote their exhibitions to the exhibitors, the practical evidence shows that among all the attendees, the typical visitor usually only accounts for 10% or less, and the other 90% are atypical visitors: about 19% are tyre kickers who have no intention or no ability to buy; 8% are wheel-dealers for price inquiry and comparison; 21% are technocrats who are only interested in technical issues; 26% are foxes with other purposes such as selling goods to exhibitors; 26% are day-trippers like students or retirees who come to the show for a day trip (Blythe, 2010).

Borghini et al. (2006) pointed out that atypical visitors are usually suppliers, competitors, and other related companies, which are to explore product innovation information. In addition, atypical visitors also include media, designers, technicians, university teachers and so on. They attend because their work is related to the industry involved in the exhibition (Bello & Lohtia, 1993). Atypical visitors occupy the vast majority of the overall attendees, and there are many professionals who try to communicate with exhibitors with different motives. Therefore, regardless of whether exhibitors are willing or not, they cannot avoid contact and interaction with the atypical attendee (He, Cui & Wang, 2014). To date, little empirical research has been conducted to assess the interaction and its outcomes varying from different attendees participation motives. The study is significant for exhibitors and exhibition organizers as it provides valuable insights for devising exhibiting marketing strategies that cater to the needs of both buyer

and non-buyer visitors.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

#### **1.3.1 Changing Dynamics in the Exhibition Industry**

The exhibition industry is a comprehensive one that promotes the development of trade, technology, tourism, culture, education and other fields (Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, 2020). With the gradual integration of the exhibition space and content, immersive visit experience is becoming the mainstream. Modern exhibition space is not only used as a container for display, but its spatial layout, design concept and display form have also become an important part of the exhibition overall. The exhibition creates a holistic sensory atmosphere for visitors to enter the display system and experience the whole process of display content, and assists in the effective realization of the effects of each display experience link. Despite the uncertainty in a time of pandemic, the high value of the exhibition to help achieve high-priority marketing and sales objectives of exhibitor is the catalyst driving their returning for 2022 (Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2021).

This irresistible digital and technological trend has even been catalyzed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sigala, 2020), since many exhibitions have to suspend on site organization and look for the smart solutions. According to the UFI Global Exhibition Barometer Report in 2020, global results suggest that 57% of exhibitors believed that “COVID-19 confirms the value of face-to-face events”, with potential driving trends anticipated for the exhibition format in the coming years, while 31% are “unsure” and 12% are “unsure at all” or “totally disagreed”. And 82% of exhibitors are positive about “a push towards ‘hybrid’ events, more digital elements at events”, whereas only 3% strongly believe that “virtual events replacing physical events” (UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2020). In this case, the exhibition industry primarily sustains itself as a face-to-face marketing channel, while digital offerings adapt to emerging trends (Hattendorf, 2020).

Although COVID-19 has restricted consumer mobility, the epidemic has brought new possibilities to the exhibition industry, such as virtual trade shows (Juska, 2021; Shang, Pu, Yu, Gao & Lu, 2023), by relying on technology support, service providers provide enhanced aesthetic experiences and higher levels of interaction and engagement with audiences (O'Hagan, 2021). And after effective COVID-19 treatments or vaccines become available, that is, after the pandemic, consumers are considering in-person and VR-based tours. According to Park et al. (2022), more than 80% of respondents stated that advanced immersive display technologies such as 3D video projection and holographic displays can cause a high impact on performance impressions. Exhibitors use these technologies that attendee most want to see in exhibitions, to achieve their exhibition objectives and satisfy target market segments. As a result, the events and trade show industry benefit from expanding its technology-enabled service portfolio (Itani & Hollebeck, 2021; Rogers & Wynn-Moylan, 2022).

### 1.3.2 Exhibition Performance and Its Multifaceted Influences

The exhibition industry's swift progress has emerged as a critical platform for fostering a contemporary market and an open economic system. Exhibition performance reflects the organization and management of the exhibition and it is crucial for the sustainability of the exhibition. Prior research mostly attributed exceptional exhibition performance to the exhibitors' internal resource conditions (Tanner, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008; Skallerud, 2010; Chen, Li & Evans, 2012), like generous booth size, adequate exhibition budgets, and intensive booth personnel. Nonetheless, interactions with other stakeholders such as attendees may also be the important contributor toward exhibition outcomes. On top of this, the re-attend intention of exhibitors is closely related to the sustainability of the exhibition industry. The duty of the organizer is not only just to provide display space for the exhibition, but it is also very important to solicit and coordinate. The organizer is obliged to make exhibitors happy about exhibition outcomes and expect to be back again so that they can organize more in the future.

In fact, an exhibition, especially a commercial exhibition, usually lasts only three to four days. In just a few days, the exhibitors have to interact with countless visitors with limited time and energy, their physical and mental exhaustion is unimaginable. Consequently, scholars have initiated research on various aspects of exhibition interactions, exploring important types, features, percentages, and motivation-related inquiries related to the diverse pool of attendees in an effort to address these challenges (Bello & Lohtia, 1993; Blythe, 2010; Gopalakrishna, Roster & Sridhar, 2010).

Recent research underscores that the essence of value creation in exhibitions lies in the interaction and communication among participants (He, Cui & Wang, 2014). However, it narrowly focused on the impact of pre-show and on-site interaction on sales and non-sales performance, overlooking a deeper exploration of the pivotal factor of value co-creation and its specific roles. In fact, as temporary showcases for products and services (Rosson & Seringhaus 1995), exhibitions not only bring together manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors in the same industrial chain—facilitating market access and reducing costs through face-to-face interactions with customers (Tanner, 2002)—but also attract attendees with non-buying motives, like technicians, fostering information exchange, technology sharing, and the dissemination of market knowledge, leading to the generation of new ideas (Bathelt & Spigel, 2012). In this case, the process of value co-creation significantly influences exhibitor evaluations of performance, subsequently affecting the continued utilization of exhibition services.

With corporate activities such as procurement, production, and marketing increasingly breaking through organizational boundaries, interactions for companies are becoming more frequent and important. For the modern exhibition market, advanced information and technology can enable interactions between visitors and exhibitors, extending networks via communication dyads as more and more exhibitions adopt digital techniques for exchanging information and building contacts (Han, Koo & Chung, 2018). The research on exhibition interactions on exhibition performance could be lacking, for example, the roles of technological interaction in exhibitions have rarely been considered (Lee, Li, Lee & Shih, 2021).

Previous studies have attributed superior exhibition performance to a exhibitor's internal resource conditions, such as spacious booth size, considerable tradeshow budgets, as well as dense booth personnel (Tanner, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2008; Skallerud, 2010; Li, Evans & Chen, 2011). Nonetheless, as the essence of exhibition is about communication between various parties, the interactive perspective of the academia is required to expand from the single perspective of exhibitors to the interaction and role of related parties with the exhibition. Due to this, our understanding is incomplete due to a lack of information about how the pivotal dimensions of interaction in the smart exhibition affect the exhibition performance of exhibitors.

### **1.3.3 Strategic Importance of Exhibitor Satisfaction and Re-attendance**

With the acceleration of world economic integration and corporate globalization, the exhibition industry has rapidly grown into a powerfully influential industry in the tertiary industry. Competition in the exhibition industry is becoming increasingly fierce, and how to stand out from the competition has become a topic of greatest concern to organizers. Exhibition organizers provide a communication platform for exhibition participants, and exhibitors' satisfaction with the exhibition has become the key to measuring the success of the exhibition. Exhibitors play an important role in the exhibition. Throughout the exhibition, the organizer's income mainly comes from exhibitors. The involvement of enough exhibitors is the key to the operation of the exhibition. Exhibitors' attitude towards the exhibition and their repurchase behavior are directly related to the value and sustainable development of the exhibition. Therefore, under the current exhibition situation, continuously improving exhibition performance, increasing exhibitor satisfaction, and cultivating exhibitor loyalty have become the focus of exhibition companies.

At present, academic circles have paid a certain amount of attention to the research on exhibitor results. However, compared with international research, China's research on exhibitor satisfaction started relatively late. Especially compared with developed countries in Europe and the United States, China's exhibition industry still has a lot of room for improvement in terms of economic benefits and social functions. Through the case study of Macao International Trade and Investment Fair, Zhang (2011) stated that satisfaction is the sum of stages before, during and after the exhibition. Only focusing on in-exhibition services, passively providing pre-exhibition services, or paying little attention to post-exhibition services would fail to be able to effectively improve exhibition service satisfaction. He (2015) took the China Wedding Expo (Guangzhou) as a case study to study exhibitor satisfaction in consumer-oriented exhibitions, and grasped exhibitors' consumption behavior patterns and exhibition evaluations from the perspective of exhibitors' perceived value. Through the analysis of the China Wedding Expo, exhibitors generally reported a decline in satisfaction with the exhibition experience, indicating that a loyalty crisis has emerged. Among them, there is a certain difference between the exhibition theme positioning, publicity intensity, and expectations for expanding market relations and sales network indicators, and the actual effect of the exhibition, resulting in low satisfaction with the exhibition.

An inconsistency also exists regarding whether satisfaction necessarily leads to re-attend intention in event settings, for example, Yeoh and Goh (2017) found that participants' satisfaction did not affect their behavioral intention subject to the possible factor of time availability to re-attend. While other studies (e.g. Ko, Kim, Kim & Lee, 2010; Hallmann & Wicker, 2012; Lee, Lee & Joo, 2015) showed that satisfied participants are highly correlated with the positive behavioral intention to revisit a specific event or destination. With the digital era coming and information technology tools widely applied in the smart exhibition with the aim of collecting and applying multi-dimensional information to provide exhibiting efficiency (Hlee, Lee, Moon & Yoo, 2017), the empirical research to investigate the mechanism of exhibition performance on exhibitor satisfaction and re-attend intention in the smart exhibition context remains scarce.

Previous studies on exhibitors' satisfaction and re-attend intention mainly focused on the quality of facility and services provided from the perspective of exhibition organizers (Gu, Yang & Tang, 2010; Lee, Lee & Joo, 2015; Ra, Kim & Yang, 2016), while neglected the point of view of participation of the attendee as the trigger to further improve exhibition outcomes. In the exhibition setting, where exhibitors engage with a large number of visitors within an interactive atmosphere (Whitfield, Dioko, Webber & Zhang, 2014), ongoing research into the specific mechanisms influencing exhibition performance on exhibitor satisfaction and re-attendance intentions remains in the exploratory stage and requires additional validation. To clarify, the existing gap pertains to the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding both the context and the specific mechanisms through which exhibition performance impacts exhibitor satisfaction and the intention to attend future exhibitions. Considering attendees as a critical factor in this equation is essential for bridging this gap and gaining a more nuanced comprehension of the dynamics at play in the exhibition environment.

#### **1.3.4 Gaps in Interaction and Co-creation**

Many researchers have synthesized prevailing theory of co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000) into tourism and hospitality service ecosystems with emerging technological developments (Buhalis, Harwood, Bogicevic, Viglia, Beldona & Hofacker, 2019). The theory of co-creation is instrumental in addressing the research problem of whether interactions in a smart exhibition influence attendees' value co-creation activities. By integrating established theories of co-creation within the context of smart exhibitions, which leverage advanced technologies like robotics, 5G, VR, and AI, the research aims to uncover the intricate dynamics between human-technology interactions and the creation of value during exhibitions.

Gaining insights into customers' perspectives on value co-creation is crucial, as their engagement in these activities can significantly impact the company's performance (Alves, Fernandes & Raposo, 2016). The participation of both parties is not just to create value unilaterally for exhibitors or attendees, but brings benefits to the consortium formed by the two in the value co-creation process, and has an impact on the realization of their interests (Liu, Marrewijk, Houwing & Hertogh, 2019). However, recent research only investigated the impacts of value co-creation activities among exhibitors on perceived performance (Wong & Lai, 2019), lacking similar activities that attendees may

engage in. It is worth emphasizing that value co-creation is a collaborative process that involves both exhibitors and attendees. By only focusing on one party, an important insight might be missed about the impact of this collaborative process on the overall success of the exhibition. Understanding the role of attendees' value co-creation activities like cooperation, co-production, and connection can help exhibitors to better design their exhibitions to meet the needs and preferences of attendees, leading to a more successful and valuable exhibition for all parties involved.

Existing literature has predominantly focused on interpersonal interactions in exhibitions, neglecting the crucial dimension of technological interaction (Buhalis, Harwood, Bogicevic, Viglia, Beldona & Hofacker, 2019). The synthesis of co-creation theories with the unique features of smart exhibitions allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these interactions, both interpersonal and technological, impact value co-creation activities. By exploring the sparks ignited by these interactions and their subsequent effects on the co-creation of value, the research seeks to demystify the black box surrounding the relationship between smart exhibition interactions and value creation. Moreover, there is a significant disagreement between the field of management and the field of economic geography regarding how to treat the attendees: scholars in the management field believe that since the atypical visitors do not intend to purchase exhibitor's products or services, it should not be the target of the exhibitors' communication and interaction; however, the economic geography scholars believe that it is exactly because of the presence of atypical visitors that the flow of knowledge and information in the exhibition has broken through the scope of the market relation (Rinallo & Golfetto, 2011). For example, Ngugi et al. (2010) identified cooperation and value creation are no longer limited to between buyers and sellers, but occur in large numbers between organizations that do not have exchange relationships of product, even between competitors.

Therefore, the inconsistencies in attendees' roles and functions to engage in the exhibition performance represent a challenge for exhibition organizers and exhibitors that invest large amounts of financial, human, and marketing resources to conduct in-depth interactions with key attendees. Based on this, there is a critical gap in the literature by distinguishing the attendees' participation motives and demonstrating how interactions in exhibition affect value co-creation can differ between buyer and non-buyer attendees.

### **1.3.5 Methodologies to Consider Both Parties**

Despite the fact that exhibition industry is specifically designed to facilitate encounters and communication between exhibitors and attendees (Sarmiento, Farhangmehr & Simões, 2015; Lin, 2016), there has been limited investigation into the use of paired samples of attendees and exhibitors to study their interactions and outcomes. The essence of trade show's value creation is the communication and interaction among exhibition participants (He, Cui & Wang, 2014). Through the matching of attendee and exhibitor, exhibition performance, satisfaction, and re-attend intention of exhibitors influenced by the interaction with and value co-created by attendees can be further investigated. Thus, this study collects paired samples of attendees and exhibitors to investigate the proposed

model in the context of smart exhibition.

In previous studies, multiple sources of data like the dyadic (e.g., Yagil, 2012; Zhan, Luo, Ding, Zhu & Guo, 2021) or triadic (e.g., Netemeyer & Maxham, 2007; Yang, Chen, Ma & Wei, 2021) collection techniques have been used to investigate service encounters in various contexts, such as retailing, hospitality, financial banking and health care (Groth, Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2009; Chan, Yim & Lam, 2010; Liu, Chi & Gremler, 2019). For example, by matching employee-customer responses, the employee acting performance and customer value co-creation were investigated from employee and customer in each interaction respectively (Huang & Lin, 2020). Nguyen, Tran and Chylinski (2020) analyzed the paired samples of employees and customers that had distinct service interactions, to investigate the effect of employee empathy on customer delight.

The dyadic samples of service provider and customer are mainly adopted when discussing service interaction and its impact on attitudes and behaviors in the field of organizational behavior research (Yagil, 2012; Huang & Lin, 2020; Nguyen, Tran & Chylinski, 2020). Nonetheless, this technique has rarely been examined in the exhibition, despite this industry being designed for the value created by the communication and interaction among exhibition participants (He, Cui & Wang, 2014). In this vein, there is a critical knowledge gap regarding the way attendees' value co-creation activities affect the exhibition performance of exhibitors using dyadic samples. By using this technique to match attendee and exhibitor data, this study can provide insights into the value co-creation process in exhibitions, which can further improve the performance and success of future events.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

To understand the interaction in exhibition and its outcomes regarding the role of value co-creation and attendees' participation motives, the following research questions are developed.

- i. Do interactions in the smart exhibition have influences on the attendees' value co-creation activities?
- ii. Do interactions in the smart exhibition have influences on the exhibition performance of exhibitors?
- iii. Do attendees' value co-creation activities have influences on the exhibition performance of exhibitors?
- iv. Do attendees' participation motives (i.e., buyer and non-buyer) moderate the roles of value co-creation in exhibition interactions and exhibition performance?
- v. Do exhibitors' exhibition performance influence their satisfaction and re-attend intention in the smart exhibition context?

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to examine the impacts of interaction in exhibition and value co-creation upon attendees level on the exhibition performance and other outcomes upon exhibitor level. Below are the listed objectives for the study:

- i. To identify pivotal dimensions of interaction in the smart exhibition and how the identified dimensions affect the attendees' value co-creation activities.
- ii. To examine how the pivotal dimensions of interaction in the smart exhibition affect the exhibition performance of exhibitors.
- iii. To study the impact of attendees' value co-creation activities on the exhibition performance of exhibitors.
- iv. To explore whether there are significant differences in attendees' participation motives towards the roles of value co-creation in exhibition interactions and exhibition performance.
- v. To verify the mechanism of exhibition performance on exhibitor satisfaction and re-attend intention in the smart exhibition context.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The theoretical and practical significance of this study on exhibitions are elaborated in the following sections.

### **1.6.1 Theoretical Significance**

At present, the concept of value co-creation as a new area of business management has captured the interest of numerous scholars (Frow, Payne & Storbacka, 2011; Ivanov, Gretzel, Berezina, Sigala & Webster, 2019). Generally speaking, the research field is still in the phase of building and advancing. Based on the above literature review, academia has gradually realized that various interactions in exhibitions have an important impact on exhibitor performance. With the deepening of research on exhibitions, the interactive perspective of academia has also begun to expand from the single perspective of exhibitors to the interaction and role of related parties with the exhibition. Even so, there are still a small number of documents dedicated to the study of exhibitor-visitor interaction and exhibition performance. In addition, the few relevant research mainly focus on the performance of a single exhibitor, and lack research on the overall performance of the two connected in the process of value co-creation. Therefore, in general, this study has the following five main theoretical contributions:

Firstly, it extends research on value co-creation in the exhibition environment. The theory of value co-creation is emerging as a fresh paradigm in the realm of management literature, enabling companies and customers to collaborate and generate value collectively by means of interaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). At present, study on value

co-creation includes research on B2C environment and B2B environment, but there is not much research on value co-creation in the exhibition context. The exhibition environment not only makes it easier for the company to cooperate with customers to create value, but also provides a creative platform for collaboration between customers. From a co-creation standpoint, suppliers and customers are no longer viewed as opposing parties in the traditional demand-versus-supply model, but rather engage with each other in order to cultivate new business prospects. As mentioned earlier, the activities for co-creating value at the exhibition are not composed by a single party. It encompasses not only value co-creation in the production domain, but also encompasses value co-creation in the consumer domain. Few researchers have carried out study on the co-creation of value between exhibitors and visitors. Therefore, drawing on the theory of customer participation, this study enhances value co-creation theory by discussing the antecedents and the impacts, bridging the gap of value co-creation activities from the attendee's perspective, and providing theory for enhancing the value co-creation activities of the exhibition.

Secondly, the consideration of the interaction between exhibitors and visitors is not complete (Wang & Xia, 2018; Buhalis, Harwood, Bogicevic, Viglia, Beldona & Hofacker, 2019). Through combing the literature on human-technology and human-human interaction, this study has gained a clearer understanding of the various dimensions of interaction. It is found that the current research on the determination of interaction in the context of the exhibition mainly starts from the perspective of frequency and quality. However, it lacks consideration of the digital factor of interaction between exhibitors and visitors. In other words, only the unilateral impact of interpersonal interaction has been studied. Through supplementary research on the dimensions of technological interaction, this study explores on perceptions and understanding of the important interpersonal interaction and technological interaction factors that trigger value co-creation in exhibition, and enriches the research results in the field of exhibition interaction.

Thirdly, the proposed outcome variables (i.e. exhibition performance, exhibitor satisfaction, re-attend intention) significantly improve the model and provide more reliable finding by investigating the interactions in exhibitions and its outcomes using paired samples. Currently, researches on exhibition outcomes are mainly based on the framework of sales and non-sales, and by emphasizing its importance to theory and practice, to arouse academic and industry interest in exhibition performance (Li, Evans, Chen & Wood, 2011; Jeong, Bautista Jr & Saavedra, 2020). With the development of the exhibition industry in recent years, some scholars have begun to pay attention to the performance of exhibitions and have carried out quantitative research. However, the research is still in the exploratory stage, and the research conclusions need further verification. Therefore, rigorous quantitative research analyzing the factors and ways that affect exhibition performance is needed to explain the benefits that the exhibition brings to exhibitors and visitors.

Fourthly, there is a notable discrepancy between the management and economic geography fields when it comes to the treatment of attendees. Some management scholars argue that exhibitors should not pay attention to visitors who do not intend to purchase their products or services, while economic geography scholars believe that

these atypical visitors play a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and information. As a result, the differing roles and functions of attendees at exhibitions present a challenge for organizers and exhibitors who invest significant financial, human, and marketing resources into engaging with key attendees. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by distinguishing between attendees' participation motives and illustrating how interactions at exhibitions can differ in terms of value co-creation between those with a buying motive and those without.

Last but not least, the underpinning theory is the extended Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to elucidate the logic behind the proposed relationships. In the context of smart exhibition, this research investigates exhibition interaction and its outcomes based on the extended S-O-R theory that comprises the stimulus (technological interaction and interpersonal interaction), process (value co-creation and exhibition performance), and output (exhibitor satisfaction and re-attend intention). This study enriches and enhances the theory in three ways, First, the present study may validate the effectiveness of the extended S-O-R framework that incorporates both technological interaction and interpersonal interaction within the exhibition setting as the stimuli as well as value co-creation as the process. Second, limited research has managed to employ the dyadic sample technique due to various causes, not to mention check the applicability of the S-O-R theory. This study tests the S-O-R theory under the condition of paired respondents. Third, S-O-R theory has been rarely examined in the context of exhibition and this study further extends its usage scenarios.

### **1.6.2 Practical Significance**

As a marketing tool that exchanges development needs, the exhibition provides customers with more interactive opportunities and is a typical value creation platform. In exhibitions, the notion of value co-creation is still relatively novel, and only a limited number of studies have explored the role of value co-creation in exhibition settings. The dearth of academic inquiry into the role and influence of value co-creation on exhibition performance and other outcomes has left exhibition industry professionals with very little empirically-based information on which to base these crucial marketing decisions. Therefore, empirical evidence on the antecedent and outcomes of value co-creation in exhibition is of great significance for industry practitioners to make strategic decisions about whether to participate in exhibiting events. The findings of this study have practical implications for both exhibitors and organizers of exhibitions.

Firstly, the study brings valuable insights to the exhibitors on how to improve their exhibiting management strategies and give attendees better offers. For example, realizing that creating value with attendees is a new source of competitive advantage, and learning how to increase attendee participation, so as to create more value for attendees, and increase attendee's sense of accomplishment as well as the attendee's trust and understanding of exhibitors in the process of realizing self-worth. In the current sharing economy activities, in order to ensure the successful holding and sustainable development of the exhibition, the exhibition participants must be aware of the concept of cooperation and win-win, therefore creating and sharing value together to make the exhibition full of innovation and release in a creative interactive atmosphere. In this way,

the exhibitor can better understand what contributions are more likely to be made by different attendees so as to optimize their exhibiting strategies.

Moreover, the attendees can gain valuable perspectives on market advancements through proactive exploration of exhibition booths, participation in seminars, and staying abreast of emerging trends to maintain a competitive edge. Recognizing potential collaborators, suppliers, or partners at trade shows can foster beneficial collaborations for attendees' businesses. Emphasizing attendance enables participants to acquire fresh skills and stay updated on industry progress. Actively interacting with exhibitors, exchanging insights, and contributing to the enhancement of industry products and services are essential for participants. Demonstrating a commitment to staying informed and engaged through active involvement can play a significant role in establishing and strengthening professional reputations.

Additionally, the organizers are closely involved in this framework and can contribute to a better exhibition. Exhibition organizers also stand to gain valuable insights from this study, particularly with regard to exhibitor satisfaction and their intention to re-attend future exhibitions. For instance, the organizers may organize exhibitions in modern exhibition halls equipped with advanced equipment and services so to meet the basic requirement of technological interaction. Also, provide a collaborative environment and create an interactive atmosphere in the exhibition to better organize the exhibition, for example, initiative the exhibitors update the intelligence exhibition display. Moreover, the organizer who is also responsible for organizing enough attendees onsite, may collect industry information and integrate regional resources, to promote the effective interactive matching and the value co-creation activities of exhibitors and attendees. Therefore, this study provides a reference for developing appropriate exhibition marketing strategies for exhibition organizers.

Lastly, policymakers can utilize the insights from this study as a guide for formulating effective policies to advance the concept of smart exhibitions. This concept has gained significance among governments at various levels, exhibition cities, and exhibition halls. There is a growing emphasis on enhancing platforms, expanding display opportunities, and facilitating increased business cooperation for exhibitors. The study proposes the integration of technology and exhibition information services, consolidating digital exhibitions, on-site interactions, scene marketing, data operation management, and offline services. This study can enhance the efficiency of exhibition operations and organization while elevating the overall participant experience.

## **1.7 Scope of Study**

This research is framed within the perspectives of both exhibitors and attendees. The study contains two levels. For attendee level there are interpersonal interaction, technological interaction and value co-creation; for exhibitor level there are exhibition performance, satisfaction and re-attend intention. This study collects paired samples of exhibitors and attendees by randomly selecting one attendee to conduct research among the visitors who visit booth of each exhibitor. After the attendee completes the booth

visit, he/she fills out the attendee part of the questionnaire on the spot of his/her own free will, and exhibitor who contacts the attendee answers the exhibitor part of the questionnaire in succession. In this way, each pair of the distributed survey contains a participant response and an exhibitor response, marked with unique codes only to match.

Although it's crucial to acknowledge that the roles and contributions of other stakeholders such as organizers and venue providers to the overall exhibition experience are significant, by concentrating on exhibitors and attendees, the research can effectively capture the direct interactions and experiences that shape the success and value creation within the exhibition space. This focus allows for a more in-depth exploration of the relationships and dynamics between these two key stakeholders. Additionally, limiting the scope helps maintain research clarity and avoids potential complications arising from an overly broad examination. By honing in on exhibitors and attendees, the study can provide actionable insights that directly impact the planning, execution, and evaluation of exhibitions, offering practical implications for organizers and venue providers indirectly.

Due to COVID-19, there are many exhibitions suspended. In 2020, the global exhibition industry inevitably suffered heavy losses under the influence of the pandemic. However, according to UFI Global Exhibition Barometer, the latest industry report that examines potential driving trends for the format of exhibitions over the next few years, suggests that globally, 57% of respondents are optimistic that "COVID-19 confirms the value of face-to-face events", predicting that the exhibition industry would experience a rapid recovery, while 82% are in favor of "a move towards 'hybrid' events, incorporating more digital elements into events" (UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2020). China, the only positive GDP growth country among the global major economies in 2020, is also the first country to reopen of exhibition business under strict health screening conditions (Financial Express, 2020). As of 2022, China's convention and exhibition industry has embarked on the journey of recovery at the fastest speed. In 2021, China held exhibitions 5,497 times and the total exhibition area covered 91.89 million square meters (China Convention and Exhibition Society, 2022). According to the Trade Fair Industry in Asia Report released by UFI, most of the companies in the Chinese market think that local and national exhibitions resume in 2022 (UFI the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2021).

According to the evaluation of the Comprehensive Index of China's Urban City Exhibition Industry, the TOP six exhibition cities are Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen, Chengdu and Qingdao (China Convention and Exhibition Society, 2022). In 2021, the exhibition area of these cities are all more than 43 million square meters. There are 17.055 million square meters in Shanghai exhibition accounting for 18.3% in China; the 9.303 million in Guangzhou exhibition accounts for 10.0%; the 5.536 million in Beijing exhibition takes up 6.0%; Shenzhen's 5.439 million takes up 5.8% of the total; the 3.119 million square meters exhibition area in Chengdu accounts for 3.4%; Qingdao's 3.105 million exhibition area accounts for 3.3% nationwide (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, 2022). Therefore, in this study, the scopes of locations are mainly based in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen, Chengdu and Qingdao which are the principal exhibition cities in China.

According to the China Exhibition Industry Report, the manufacturing type exhibitions ranked first among all industries, holding 1327 times in total, accounting for 66.9% of all exhibitions categorized by industry. In 2020, the total exhibition area for these exhibitions was 52.11 million square meters, which accounts for 71.3% of the total exhibition area classified by industry. Service exhibitions comprised 449 exhibitions, accounting for 22.6% of all exhibitions. Agricultural exhibitions, on the other hand, accounted for 140 exhibitions, making up 7.1% of the total number of trade classifications, with an area of 4.98 million square meters, representing 6.8% of the total area of industrial classification (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, 2021).

In the exhibition industry category scales, transportation exhibition held the highest proportion of exhibition area and exhibition number among manufacturing exhibitions, with 534 holding times and 11.31 million square meters of exhibition area in total. The second-highest number of exhibitions was for industrial automation, with a total of 168 exhibitions and an area of 4.93 million square meters. In the service industries category, tourism and recreation exhibitions had the largest total exhibition area of 5.91 million square meters, followed by education and e-commerce exhibitions, which had total exhibition areas of 4.78 million square meters and 3.96 million square meters, respectively. Healthcare exhibitions were held 116 times, and the exhibition area totaled 2.75 million square meters. Technology exhibitions were held 75 times, with 2.03 million square meters of exhibition area in total (China Convention and Exhibition Society, 2021).

Considering the pandemic situation, after screening out those suspended, the exhibition respondents list is arranged (see appendix). The selected exhibitions display advanced technology itself as well as in different industries involving agriculture, industrial automation, transportation, education, healthcare, tourism, e-commerce, and technology that applies leading technology, with scales covering nearly 70,000 to 180,000 square meters. The exhibitions range from the latest science and technology innovations such as 5G and AI, to applications such as smart factories, smart retailing solutions, scientific research equipment and smart research and education.

## **1.8 Definition of the Constructs**

This thesis focuses on eight concepts that are explicitly defined in the course of the study. All these constructs are defined following the common and accepted meanings used by previous scholars. The specific definitions are outlined in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4 : Definitions of the terms**

| No | Construct                             | Definition                                                                                                                                                                      | Source                                         |
|----|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Interaction                           | A communication behavior led by all parties of the subject, a process in which each other interacts or changes                                                                  | Ruekert & Walker (1987)                        |
| 2. | Interpersonal Interaction             | A form of interface process take place between people such as employee and customer during service delivery                                                                     | Bitner et al. (1994)                           |
| 3. | Technological Interaction             | The level of interaction with technology that a service requires from the customer in order to be produced                                                                      | Theotokis et al. (2008)                        |
| 4. | Attendee Participation Motive         | Visitors' motivations for attending trade shows                                                                                                                                 | Haon et al. (2020)                             |
| 5. | Attendee Value Co-creation Activities | The benefit derived from combining resources through the behavioral and cognitive activities of attendees and collaboration with partners across the entire service-value chain | McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012); Yi & Gong (2013) |
| 6. | Exhibitor Exhibition Performance      | The exhibitors' performance result of participating in exhibition activities as the core of exhibition behavior and practical concepts                                          | Hansen (2004)                                  |
| 7. | Exhibitor Satisfaction                | Exhibitor's overall affective reaction to the exhibition                                                                                                                        | Gremler & Gwinner (2000)                       |
| 8. | Re-attend Intention                   | Willingness to attend the exhibition again in the future                                                                                                                        | Lee et al. (2015)                              |

## 1.9 Organization of Thesis

To enhance readability, this thesis is organized in a logical sequence of chapters. The first chapter lays out the study's background, problem statement, research objectives, research question, and the significance and scope of the study. The second chapter focuses on the literature review, exploring topics such as value co-creation and the factors that affect exhibition performance. Chapter three provides hypothesis development and an outline of the conceptual framework. Chapter four details the research methodology and analytical tools that are used to analyze the data. Chapter five presents the study's findings, while chapter six discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the research.

## 1.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined a research schedule for the upcoming chapters. It has introduced the background of the study, discussed the problem statements, presented the research questions and objectives, and emphasized the significance of the study. Moreover, it has provided definitions for the variables used in this study. The subsequent chapter will focus on a critical review of relevant literature that has been considered in

developing the framework for this study.

**Table 1.5 : Summary of problems-gaps, questions, and objectives of study**

| No | Problem-Gap                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Research Question                                                                                                                   | Research Objective                                                                                                                                  |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <p>1) Previous studies in exhibition interactions mostly investigated the interpersonal interaction and rarely considered the technological interaction (Wang &amp; Xia, 2018; Buhalis et al., 2019).</p> <p>2) There is limited empirical evidence to explain the effect of exhibition interactions on value co-creation (Wong &amp; Lai, 2019).</p>                                                                                                                                                                                  | Do interactions in the smart exhibition have influences on the attendees' value co-creation activities?                             | To identify pivotal dimensions of interaction in smart exhibition and how the identified dimensions affect attendees' value co-creation activities. |
| 2  | <p>1) Advanced technology can also help to improve performance such as exchanging information and extending networks. The role of technological interaction has been under-explored so far (Zhang et al. 2021).</p> <p>2) Existing studies on exhibition interaction have primarily focused on measuring the frequency of interactions to impact exhibition performance (He et al., 2014) while overlooking the examination of interpersonal traits. This gap highlights the need to delve deeper into interpersonal interactions.</p> | Do interactions in the smart exhibition have influences on the exhibition performance of exhibitors?                                | To examine how the pivotal dimensions of interaction in the smart exhibition affect the exhibition performance of exhibitors.                       |
| 3  | <p>1) Recent study investigated the effects of value co-creation activities among exhibitors on perceived performance (Wong &amp; Lai, 2019), yet lacking the perspectives of value co-creation activities performed by the attendee.</p> <p>2) The dyadic samples technique (Huang &amp; Lin, 2020) have rarely been examined in the exhibition despite this industry is designed for the value created by the encounters and communication among exhibition participants.</p>                                                        | Do attendees' value co-creation activities have influences on the exhibition performance of exhibitors?                             | To study the impact of attendees' value co-creation activities on the exhibition performance of exhibitors.                                         |
| 4  | <p>1) Previous studies have grouped attendees' motivations for attending trade shows into purchasing and non-purchasing activities (Rittichainuwat &amp; Mair, 2012; Haon et al., 2020). Different motives may have different performances towards the behaviours in exhibition.</p> <p>2) More integrated approach and empirical evidence to grasp different</p>                                                                                                                                                                      | Do attendees' participation motives (i.e., buyer and non-buyer) moderates the roles of value co-creation in exhibition interactions | To explore whether there are significant differences in attendees' participation motives towards the roles of value co-creation in exhibition       |

**Table 1.5 : Continued**

| No | Problem-Gap                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Research Question                                                                                                                                                     | Research Objective                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5  | <p>motives towards different behaviour and outcomes in exhibition is required.</p> <p>1) Previous studies have mostly conducted the relationship between exhibition performance and exhibitor satisfaction or re-attend intention from the exhibition service quality perspective (Lee, Lee &amp; Joo, 2015; Kim &amp; Yang, 2016), have neglected the point of view of attendees value co-creation as a trigger that further advance exhibition outcomes.</p> <p>2) Inconsistency in the findings to prove whether participant satisfaction influences behavioral intention in the event settings (Yeoh &amp; Goh, 2017).</p> | <p>and exhibition performance?</p> <p>Do exhibitors' exhibition performance influence their satisfaction and re-attend intention in the smart exhibition context?</p> | <p>interactions and exhibition performance.</p> <p>To verify the mechanism of exhibition performance on exhibitor satisfaction and re-attend intention in the smart exhibition context.</p> |

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