

## **How do tourists experience a festivalscape? An application of Stimulus Organism Response**

**Keywords:** cultural festival, A-Ma Festival, tourist experience, S-O-R Framework, spontaneous participation, Macau.

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a framework that articulates the complete tourist experience with reference to a traditional Macau local event – A-Ma Festival. The Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) framework is deployed to depict the festival experience as a continuous and multi-stage process. The festivalscape concept provides an elaboration of the festival construct by considering how attendees form enduring attitudes. The authors use the concept as a medium for conveying key festival messages and values from the attendee perspective. They identified a high incidence of spontaneous involvement in the festival. Festival attendance provided respondents with a considerable enhancement of the destination experience.

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## **1. Introduction**

There has been a growing interest in the study of festival and event tourism (Getz & Page, 2016). The focus of researchers has extended to the impacts of events on destination image (Boo & Busser, 2005), destination marketing (Getz, 1997; Hall, 1992), tourist attractions (McKercher, Mei, & Tse, 2006), economic benefits (Litvin & Fetter, 2006) and cultural preservation (McClinchey & Carmichael, 2010). Specific research topics have included tourist motivations to attend festivals (Dewar, Meyer, & Li, 2001), and the relationships between emotions, attitudes, perceived value, experience, satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Lee, Lee, & Wicks, 2004; Maeng, Jang, & Li, 2016; McDowall, 2010; Yang, Gu, & Cen, 2011; Yuan & Jang, 2008). The causal relationships among such factors have not yet been well explained in the cultural festival context

(Savinovic, Kim, & Long, 2012). Festivals have been an expanding type of tourism attractions in destination marketing since the 1980s (Dimmock & Tiyce, 2001; Getz, 1997; Hall, 1992). They are developed and promoted to demonstrate the cultural diversity of a destination (Crompton & McKay, 1997), and bring economic and socio-cultural impacts (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003; Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2003; Hall, 1992; Kim, Scott, Thigpen, & Kim, 1998).

Researchers have defined cultural festivals (or events) in various ways. Some have treated them as “typical” festivals with the addition of a “cultural” component, without providing any interpretation. Others have proposed simple definitions and categorizations, based on the types of cultural activities, such as art festivals or cultural festivals (Kay, 2004). Some have used terms such as aboriginal cultural festivals (Chang, 2006), traditional folk events (Shen, 2014), or traditional cultural festivals (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007) to refer to cultural festivals of different types. Delbosc (2008) proposed the name “community festivals” to highlight the vision of the organizers to share their culture with groups beyond their community. Alternatively, others have defined cultural festivals in terms of attendees’ motivation to search for uniqueness and symbolic meanings (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Brida, Disegna, & Osti, 2013). Within the broader cultural domain, cultural festivals may be viewed as specific events that have significant place-related meanings. They involve a degree of organizational capacity, with a minimum duration and are celebrated recurrently over time (Attanasi, Casoria, Centorrino, & Urso, 2013). From a narrower perspective, Delbosc (2008) defined cultural festivals as representing a particular festival segment targeted at those with strong cultural attachments to a particular cultural community. Lee, Lee, and Arcodia (2014) further claimed that such festivals may also attract those with a lower degree of attachment because of other motivations. In addressing why such festivals are staged, it has been noted that they have attractive cultural characteristics that distinguish one culture from another and involve a collective memory that is attached to a specific culture or cultural community which aims to influence visitor behaviors (Kay, 2004), reveal cultural identities (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007) and renew traditions (Costa, 2002). Cultural festivals are intensely produced experiential events, which draw on accumulated cultural capital, combining

traditional cultural practices with artistic innovations. There is a certain refreshment through each production and each instance of a cultural festival is unique (Attanasi et al., 2013; Del Barrio, Devesa, & Herrero, 2012; Throsby, 1999). Drawing from social science work that refers mainly to social and ritual events, Falassi (1987) has proposed a more precise definition of a festival:

a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview (p. 2).

As the definitions have revealed, cultural festivals demonstrate a multifaceted cultural phenomenon (described by Getz (2008) as “festivalization”). They extend beyond cultural goods to cultural expressions that reflect an active process through which the culture is created, (re)produced and consumed (Attanasi et al., 2013; Frey, 1994; Getz, 2008). Distinct from other festival types, cultural festivals are contingent intangible resources with a unique socio-cultural power to enhance the social cohesiveness among participants (Attanasi et al., 2013) and create spaces for sociability (Costa, 2001). Drawing on this scholarly background, the present study explores the festivals domain with a view to identifying critical contextual issues.

Previous research on festivals has mainly focused on mega events such as sport, music (Bowen & Daniels, 2005) and art festivals (Wooten & Norman, 2008) with growing recent attention to local cultural events such as a Croatian cultural festival – Fešta (Brown, Savinovic, & Kim, 2012), the Qinhuai Lantern Festival (Shen, 2014), and the Tulip Time Festival in Holland (Chang, Gibson, & Sisson, 2014). Local festivals are frequently imbued with unique cultural assets (e.g. cultural heritage, ethnic culture, rituals and customs) and it has been widely acknowledged that cultural values are central to the development of sustainable tourism (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Chhabra et al., 2003; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010). Festivals are important manifestations and interpretations of cultural identity (Duran & Hamarat, 2014) and enable the realisation of various educational objectives (Savinovic et al., 2012). Local festivals provide opportunities for visitors to experience local traditional

cultures (Savinovic et al., 2012). Tourists tend to perceive festivals to be authentic when they are organized by indigenous communities (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Rubridge, 1995). The festival environment or *festivalscape* describes a critical component that determines the visitor experience, whether in terms of a motivation to participate (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012), a factor in perceived experience (Lee, Lee, Lee, & Babin, 2008) or a consideration for behavioral intentions (Bruwer, 2013). To date, it has been noted that few researchers have addressed the topic of festivalscapes in the context of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as is exemplified by the A-Ma Festival, explored in this paper. The preceding review of the literature on festival studies has revealed a phenomenon that is heavily weighted to structural models of construct relationship, using quantitative approaches (e.g. Cole & Illum, 2006; Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015). Few studies have explored the inner thoughts and evolving emotions of tourists towards participation. This study will address the points using a qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews to supplement the current literature on cultural festivals.

As a world-renowned tourism destination, Macau's appeal relies on both its entertainment and its tangible heritage offerings. The Macau Government Tourist Office (MGTO) has been making efforts to promote various other cultural resources to diversify the tourism market in pursuit of sustainable tourism development. Local festivals are an important form of cultural resource which is taken-into-account. In 2013, the MGTO outlined "Six Work Highlights" to position Macau as a "World Centre of Tourism and Leisure". One of these was to develop cultural tourism products and to promote events and festivals (MGTO, 2013). The A-Ma Festival is a typical local cultural religious festival that has received official recognition as an example of intangible cultural heritage at both national and regional levels. As a representation of local history, culture and identity, it is worthy of investigation. Furthermore, it is also included as a tourism event in the event calendar promoted by the MGTO (MGTO, 2018). Traditional cultural heritage festivals are increasingly promoted as tourism attractions and are contributing to the development of cultural tourism and of place (Copley & Robson, 1996; Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Past studies on local festivals in Macau have been confined to a small number of topics, such as food festivals and customs and beliefs (Vong

& Lam, 2009), the factors affecting tourist satisfaction with and loyalty towards food festivals (Wan & Chan, 2013), as well as resident attitudes and support for the festival development (Li & Wan, 2017). Studies on traditional festivals have been scarce. The present study intends to identify the entire process of the tourist experience (pre-event, on-site and post-event stages) of a local traditional festival in Macau: the A-Ma Festival. A comprehensive investigation is conducted to understand the evolving feelings, emotions and experiences of tourists while engaged in a *festivalscape*, from the pre-event stage when they develop an interest to attend the festival to the post-event stage when they reflect on their festival experience.

The researchers propose the following main research question: How do tourists experience a festivalscape? Two sub-questions are proposed: 1) How are tourists' experiences of a local cultural festival constructed during the pre-event, on-site and post-event stages? and 2) What is the role of the festivalscape and how does it affect tourist experience? This study will fill the applicable research gaps by using the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) approach which has not yet been applied in a cultural festival context.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1 Festival experiences***

In the tourism field, a festival is understood as an event celebrated at a specific place and time, in which tourists can also take part or observe and which can have an impact on tourism (Lee, 2016). A festival is a recurrent and thematic celebration of traditional culture that the public are invited to join. They may comprise several events in one (Grappi & Montanari, 2011). A well-organized festival can develop to be a durable social activity and an added value to the society (Getz, Andersson, & Larson, 2007). Hedonic consumption is always emphasized for the festival experience (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Gursoy, Spangenberg, & Rutherford, 2006; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Yang et al., 2011). A holistic experience reflects the interplay of one's sensorial, affective, cognitive, behavioral and social experience towards the subject (Schmitt, 2003).

Recent studies have focused on the measures of festival dimensions and the relationships among variables. Baker and Crompton (2000) identified characteristic of festivals, specific entertainment features, information sources (include printed program, street maps, and information booths), and comfort amenities of the festival participation as the key measures of festival quality (p. 793). With a case study of a wine festival, Bruwer (2014) expanded the scope and identified four festival dimensions including the generic festival features and service staff, entertainment and catering, comfort amenities, and festival venue and information. Emotions evoked by a festival are critical in determining the satisfaction and behavioral intentions of tourists (Lee et al., 2008). Emotion is defined as ‘a psychological state of preparation that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts’ (Yang et al., 2011, p. 26). Tourists’ emotions relating to festivals emerge from their experience and interactions with elements of the physical environment, such as gestures, facilities and programs. Visitors may get excited when enjoying the show (Yang et al., 2011). However, the emotions are quite complex since there is lack of commonly agreed scales to apply in the research. In anthropology, a differential emotion scale with ten dimensions was developed (Izard, 1977). In environmental psychology, three dimensions – pleasure, arousal and dominance of emotions – are generally applied (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). To simplify this complexity, Yoo, Park, and MacInnis (1998) measured emotions in terms of positive and negative feelings. Despite the complexity, it is important to understand emotions as they are the antecedent of perceived value (Petrick, 2002) that affect consumption experience and behaviors (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Lee et al., 2008).

## ***2.2 Religious festivals***

Studies on religious tourism have mainly focused on the contexts related to pilgrimage or sacred sites (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). Religious festivals are considered to be an extension of religious tourism attractions. They are ceremonial events targeted at a spectrum of visitors, appearing most commonly at historical travel destinations, around sites such as shrines, temples and churches (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shackley, 2003). In some definitions, any visit to a religious site may be considered as religious tourism (Davies & Davies, 1982). Other,

more restrictive definitions may define religious tourism only in terms of pilgrimage travel (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). By such definitions, the main difference between religious tourists and other tourists is that the former have a devotional motivation to visit a sacred place whereas the latter are motivated by other factors (Russell, 1999).

Religious festivals are festivals that have an association with a place or site of religious significance (Bond, Packer, & Ballantyne, 2015). Although there have been numerous festival studies, this particular subsector has been under-researched. Bond et al. (2015) compared the tourist experiences at different religious sites, one of which hosted a pilgrimage festival. It was found that tourists at the different sites varied in terms of motivations and perceived experiences. Although, tourists with strong spiritual interests may visit a festival, spiritual benefits are not often the desired or acquired outcomes for many participants, who attend in order to escape from their daily life and obtain the social, educational or leisure outcomes, without any explicit spiritual intent. Nyikana (2017) assessed the ZCC Annual Easter Festival in South Africa in terms of its role in facilitating the planning and marketing efforts for religious tourism to the destination.

Religious festivals are considered as rituals for the transmission and perpetuation of religious and cultural traditions. There is a growing trend of reshaping religious festivals into tourism resources (Shinde, 2010). In China, religious tourist sites represent important cultural assets and become indispensable resources for tourism development. There is a current trend is for non-believers to travel to religious tourist destinations for the cultural experience of these sites (Zhang et al., 2007). Religious places where there are colorful festive activities are more likely to attract tourists. As such spectator tourists are not religious pilgrims, event organizers may adapt their festivals by combining traditional religious activities with new elements that may be of interest to secular tourists (Nolan & Nolan, 1992).

### ***2.3 Festivalscapes***

Festivals have the features of perishability, heterogeneity, intangibility and inseparability, which share the same nature of a service (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). The styles and aspects



of the physical elements in a festival environment appeal to attendees (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). The festival environment was also highlighted as an important dimension for work within the research. For instance, the ambient condition (such as temperature, air quality, sound), space/facility (such as layout, equipment, furnishings), signs, symbols, and artifacts vary between different types of festivals. Lee et al. (2008) determined that these dimensions work collectively in shaping the festival experience. The holistic components of festival environment are commonly referred as festivalscape in many studies. A festivalscape is ‘the general atmosphere experienced by festival patrons’ (Lee et al., 2008, p. 57). The festival atmosphere affects consumers' emotions, satisfaction and reactions through the process of festival production and consumption (Kim & Moon, 2009; Lee et al., 2008). Festivalscapes can be categorized in terms of both tangible and intangible components including program, service, and facilities, which contribute to tourists’ perceived value of the festival (Yang et al., 2011). The festivalscape reflects a holistic pattern of interdependent environmental stimuli including but not limited to the design, esthetics, lighting, atmosphere, layout and accessories (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). In the festival context, such environmental cues allow attendees to perceive the festival with cognitive and affective responses (Lee et al., 2008). These responses shape one’s festival experience. Festivalscape is such a stimulus in the emotional responses of the consumers. However, previous research has considered only limited components in the scope of festivalscapes, and there has been no comprehensive study covering all possible dimensions of festivalscapes. The tested dimensions or attributes are selected to fit the respective aims of each study. Lee et al. (2008) identified seven festival environment cues – namely convenience, staff, information, program content, facilities, souvenirs and food quality. They examined the relationship between these cues and attendees’ emotions, satisfaction and loyalty. In particular, the program content is considered the most important component in arousing attendees’ positive emotions and satisfaction. As a contribution, the role of emotion is determined as a mediator that directly leads to satisfaction and loyalty. Bruwer has investigated wine festivalscapes and differentiated between the purchasing behaviors of first-time and repeat tourists at wine festivals in New Zealand (Bruwer, 2013), Australia (Bruwer, 2014) and the USA (Bruwer & Kelley, 2015). Instead of investigating the micro level dimensions of festivalscape, Ferdinand and Williams (2018)

examined the evolution of a festivalscape in the case of a community-based festival in London through the involvement of government authorities. The study adopted a broader level investigation of the planning and management of the festival. To date though, it is noted by the current authors that research on festivalscapes remains embryonic and underestimated.

#### ***2.4 The formation of festival constructs***

A critical challenge for festival researchers has been the use of multiple categories to measure festival environments and activities. Such practices have led to prospectively inconsistent outcomes (Tanford & Jung, 2017). Quantitative research approaches dominate the studies on festivals in the tourism field. Greatest attention has been given to different variables in examining the relationship among the influential factors and outcomes. Experience quality is closely related to tourists' behavioral intentions (Cole & Illum, 2006). Mason and Paggiaro (2012) identified the relationship between the festivalscape, emotions, satisfaction and behavioral intention. Savinovic et al. (2012) identified the relationship among motivation, satisfaction and behavioral intention. Akhoondnejad (2016) tested the effects of festival authenticity, quality, value, satisfaction and trust as predictors of loyalty to a given festival. Satisfaction is defined as the summary of various psychological states that exceed the expectation prior to consumption (Oliver, 1981). Bruwer (2014) defined the festival satisfaction as a holistic attitude towards a festival that reflecting the overall evaluation of the festival consumption experience over time. Lee (2016) investigated the festival attendee's on their perceptions of the government's support to festivals and its influence on the attitudes to the event and behavioral intentions. Furthermore, these studies also admitted and advocated future research to test the relationship among performance quality, experience quality and satisfaction in the context of cultural festivals. It is also suggested to use the qualitative method to investigate the audience experience at cultural festivals (Savinovic et al., 2012). Therefore, this research investigates the festival experience using a qualitative approach to supplement the results of these quantitative studies and to further identify the overlook considerations through the interviews.

The A-Ma Belief is an official recognized intangible cultural heritage (ICH) item in Macau, of which the A-Ma festival is a celebration. There is a lack of studies on the tourist experience in local cultural festivals. Past studies on Macau only cover a few topics. McCartney (2005) investigated the impacts of grand event of Macau Grand Prix in destination image. Wan and Chan (2013) investigated the factors affecting the level of tourists' satisfaction and loyalty to a food festival. Li and Wan (2014) examined residents' attitudes and support for festival development in Macau, while Wu, Wong, and Cheng (2014) studied the tourists' behavioral intentions in the food festival. Similarly, an extended study was conducted to analyze the festival quality, emotion, image, satisfaction and loyalty to the same food festival (Wong, Wu, & Cheng, 2015). However, all these studies used a quantitative approach which focused on identifying the relationship among festival variables. There has been, however, no study on the A-Ma festival, a practice that is closely related to a belief that is officially recognized as an important ICH item of the region. Likewise, there is a lack of an in-depth study and analysis of tourist festival experience that considers a more comprehensive range of factors than can be explored through a questionnaire alone. This research addresses these gaps.

### ***2.5 Study context - A-Ma Festival***

Located on China's southeast coast, the city of Macau was originally a fishing port. It has a tradition of worship of Matsu (a typical goddess of fishermen in southern China), who is also known as Tin Hau, Matsu or A-Ma (Macau Temple Civilization, 2012). The A-Ma Festival is a typical religious worship in Macau, which originated in Fujian province. A-Ma is a goddess who protects fishermen in southeast China's coastal areas. Macau's A-Ma Temple has a history of more than 500 years (Macau Goddess A-Ma Foundation, 2015). It is one of the famous tourism spots in Macau, and also part of the Historic Centre of Macau (UNESCO, 2005). Matsu's birthday is celebrated with a festival at the A-Ma Temple every year on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third lunar month. Originally, it was celebrated among fishermen to pray for safety when fishing on vessels. Later, when fishery was no longer an economic pillar of the city, the old fishermen still kept up the tradition to pray for protection and prosperity and better life for the residents. The festival gradually began to attract believers from other places

of the same religion, as well as tourists who come to visit the Temple and for worship (Macau Temple Civilization, 2012).

The celebration of Matsu's birthday has a history of more than one hundred years. The traditional festival has been transformed into a fiesta to attract religious tourists by expanding the extent of not only the forms of worship, but also the dances, exhibitions and leisure activities to enhance public awareness and participation. During the celebration, various programs are organized including the lion and dragon dance, thanksgiving ceremony, worship, sparkler grabbing, a parade and traditional Cantonese Opera held in the temporary built bamboo-shed theater (Figure 1), while the program is adjusted in accordance with specific conditions. This is one example of how Macau has repackaged itself through the transformation of traditional heritage into tourism events to enlarge its audience (Vong & Lam, 2009).

*Please insert Figure 1 here*

### **3. Methodology**

Constructivist approaches have been commonly adopted in cultural studies to explore how individuals engage in active construction of experiences associated with a particular culture (Fosnot, 1996). With the guidance of the paradigm of constructivism, this study used a qualitative approach to investigate the tourist experience of the A-Ma Festival. The rationale of applying this approach is that qualitative research has the advantage when the content is not easily transformed into numbers, as with emotions, attitudes, and opinions (Marvasti, 2004). The qualitative approach is considered the most suitable one for the analysis of tourism experience (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005). It also allows interview participants to express their thoughts freely (Walle, 2015). Again, it is also critical to investigate how patterns are constructed through the responses and the conversations (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

The A-Ma Festival is held annually. It includes different programs including a lion and dragon dance, a prayer ceremony and a Cantonese Opera performance. These different elements are staged based on an arranged schedule. The duration of each activity ranges from several minutes to an hour. The main interview questions covered three stages of tourists'

festival experience: before reaching the event, during their attendance and after leaving the event: in short, the pre-event, on-site and post-event stages. The pre-event element mainly covers questions regarding tourists' motivations and expectations of the event. The on-site section then focuses on tourists' experiences at the event, particularly those obtained from participation and observation of the physical and social surroundings. The post-event experience part collects retrospective remarks on their festival experience, with particular regard to the influence of the festival on attitudes and behaviors. Using semi-structured interviews, the researchers approached tourists on-site who participated in the A-Ma festival and asked about their festival experience pre-event, on-site and post-event. A major consideration was the challenge of collecting data from the same informant over separate stages and on three occasions, thereby potentially interrupting their on-site enjoyment. Furthermore, the festival is held in an open space in which is difficult to lock an interview target. In considering the various potential shortcomings, a compromise was reached to approach the tourists towards the end of their participation when they were about to leave. The researchers needed to grasp every chance to identify potential interviewees at the start of the event. Taking account of the duration of each in-depth interview, the researchers could only approach a limited number of tourists who joined the event and were willing to stay around for interviewing. To ensure smooth data collection and sufficient interviewees, it was necessary to recruit on-site helpers to conduct surveys with multiple attendees simultaneously. The main criterion for selecting informants was based on their willingness to be interviewed and only those who completed their interview were considered in the final tally. The interviews were conducted at A-Ma Festivals over two consecutive years: 17-21 April 2017 and 6-10 May 2018. A total of 25 tourist interviewees successfully completed the interview. Each interview lasted around 20-30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in either Chinese or English, depending on the interviewee's nationality. The Chinese version of the interview questions was back-translated into English to ensure consistency of meaning. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees. They were then transcribed verbatim and all Chinese transcripts were translated into English for data analysis. NVivo was used for data analysis. Open coding and latent content analysis were used during the process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The codes and themes were double-

checked and confirmed by another researcher who is proficient in both languages. If any controversy was evident, the transcripts were re-visited and reviewed until reaching consensus.

### ***3.1 The Stimulus - Organism – Response (S-O-R) Framework***

Based on environmental psychological theory as developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), physical environment stimuli are an important factor in arousing participants' emotional responses, which determine approach-avoidance behavior. It is known as the S-O-R framework, where the environment cues act as stimuli (S) that affect organisms/consumers (O) on their internal states and external responses (R). This framework is widely applied in online retailing studies (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001; Richard, 2005; Wang, Minor, & Wei, 2011). Turley and Milliman (2000) identified the relationship between physical stimuli and consumer's emotional status in shopping behavior. Mason and Paggiaro (2012) argue that consumers' search for specific stimuli help them generate emotions towards the product or service they consume and further induce behavioral response. Peng and Kim (2014) examined the stimulation effect of an online shopping environment on consumer's emotions and repurchase behavior. Based on appraisal theory of emotions (Frijda, 1994), if the hedonic attributes of environment stimuli can match an individual's goal, it will lead to positive emotions of the person, otherwise. Few studies have used the S-O-R framework in festival contexts, particularly in the case of local cultural festivals. The S-O-R framework reflects a chain reaction which reflects a continuous process of mental and behavioral responses. This conforms with the fact that experiences are aroused continuously through pre-, on-site and post-stages. By dividing event experiences into stages, it is possible to analyze the components of S-O-R as applied in festival contexts. The interview structure of pre-, on-site and post-stages that has been adopted here, aiming to track the process of one's festival experience from the beginning when tourists start to generate interest in response to the various stimuli to the ways they participate in the festivals and create their own experience. As such, the effects of participation are found principally at the post-event stage, when such responses have the power to shape behavioral intentions.

Most previous studies have approached the topic through the medium of motivations (Xiang & Petrick, 2006), expectations (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2012), prior experiences (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008), festival environments (Lee, 2014), satisfaction (Anil, 2012), and loyalty (Chang et al., 2014). The various angles are used as a basis for generating the tourist interview questions (Appendix 1).

#### **4. Findings and Discussions**

The demographic features of the interviewees are summarized in Table 1. Unsurprisingly most interviewees were from China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), which accounts for 66.1% of all tourist arrivals to Macau (DSEC, 2017). The other 10 interviewees were from overseas countries including New Zealand, the USA, France and Finland. The distribution of the interviewees from Mainland China varies by region (e.g. Fujian, Hubei, Anhui), to prevent the dominant effect of cultural similarity in the response. For such reasons, their profile of origin was sorted in terms of city of origin to have a clear overview of the data. 14 tourist interviewees were female. 11 were male. The majority were from 24-44 years old. Most of them were well educated, holding a bachelor degree or higher qualification. Most of them were coming to Macau for the first time.

*Please insert Table 1 here*

##### **4.1 Pre-event experiences**

Most interviewees viewed their festival attendance as spontaneous (18 out of 25). Since the A-Ma Festival was celebrated in front of A-Ma Temple, a hot tourism spot located in the Historic Centre of Macau, tourists came to visit the site and stopped over to enjoy the festival. Most indicated that they knew nothing about the festival before their visit. Even those few tourists who knew about the festival either from a website or friends, only knew the name of the event, and that it celebrated the birth of A-Ma, without elaborating upon other details on the event programs or activities. Almost all of them were first time visitors to the event, even among those who were repeat visitors to Macau.

When asked about the reasons for joining the event, the majority reported that they were first attracted by different stimuli including the sound, performance and decoration. These visual impressions can be interpreted as the components of physical environment as well as the entire festival atmosphere. As introduced in the literature review, this is regarded as festivalscape. Because of the lively atmosphere created by the drumbeats, colorful decoration and performers' active involvement, tourists chose to stay and have a look. *"The gesture, the dance, the drum, we hear the sound, it guides us here."* (Interviewee 10). *"The decoration is colorful, and the sound attracts us to join."* (Interviewee 12). *"I don't know anything about it, but after I see the [name displayed on the] decoration, I know it is the birth of A-Ma."* (Interviewee 5). One interviewee also mentioned that it is a rare opportunity to join such a festival.

It was the sound attracted me first, I don't know, it seems like it is not something specifically for tourists. You know, it is often, when you are a tourist, you tend to have more authentic experience. It is hard to have such a thing during the trip. (Interviewee 24).

Later, they expressed that their motivation for participation was for hedonic reasons, and that they were also curious about learning about the local culture. This conforms with previous studies that indicate that cultural exploration is a key motivation for tourists to attend cultural festivals (Akhoondnejad, 2016; Chang, 2006; Duran & Hamarat, 2014; Getz, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2006). *"I want to see how different people perceive religions differently [through my participation in this event]."* (Interviewee 16).

It is very good, unbelievable. I really like to experience Asian culture, especially the traditional culture. I like to know about traditions and family of the place. That is why I come. (Interviewee 15).

Although the A-Ma Temple is a religious place, most of the interviewees were not Taoist adherents: they treated the A-Ma Temple as a tourism site rather than as a religious place. This is similar to the case of China's Wutai National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site that is also a sacred place within the Buddhist religion. Shepherd (2018) found that apart



from Mongolians, Tibetans and others who identify themselves publicly as believers, all others visiting Wutai National Park should be categorized as tourists to the site without a religious purpose. The Chinese Central Government currently treats that park as a heritage site, within which the religious elements are managed as amenities for educational and recreational purposes. This is similar to the context of Macau, as the A-Ma Temple is located in the Historic Centre of Macau (also a World Heritage site), and most tourists who come to visit the A-Ma Temple are secular tourists without a religious goal, often brought by tour bus to explore the site as part of an itinerary of heritage sites. Few tourists evidently travel for purely religious purposes (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). In the case of the A-Ma Festival, only two of the interviewees indicated that their attachment to the religion motivated them to join the celebration. They treated their attendance of a local event tied closely to a religion as a devotional activity. Even these tourists, though, happened upon the festival by chance and not because they had planned their travel to coincide with it.

I didn't know it [the A-Ma Festival] before. It can be called "destiny or luck" [for me to join this festival] ... The festival is a charity with sharing good things and speaking to people with positive attitude. It transmits such tradition of a belief. (Interviewee 8).

I don't know about this event actually, even I don't know it is the birth of A-Ma. I just passed by and saw the event here. When I asked the lady selling the incense I know, it is the birth of A-Ma. (Interviewee 1).

The above motivations are different from those identified in previous research by Savinovic et al. (2012). They identified eight motivations for attending cultural festival through the study of an ethnic minority festival: community support, escape, knowledge/education, food, wine and entertainment, novelty, family togetherness, marketing and socialization. In the A-Ma Festival, motivation is derived from the stimuli when tourists were attracted by the festivalscape (i.e. sound, decoration and physical surroundings), then started to generate interest in learning, experiencing and supporting this local festival.

Although they joined the event because of different stimuli, when asked about their considerations when joining this kind of local festival, the majority of them mentioned that

they are seeking particular elements that reflect local culture. *“One is the performance [the form of the expression]. And the human culture, like these. Also, the local customs and traditions.”* (Interviewee 1). *“I am really interested in culture and the history stuff”* (Interviewee 25). *“It must be very traditional in culture.”* (Interviewee 5). It can be concluded that traditional local cultural features are critical components in attracting tourists to join the local festival.

During the pre-event stage, tourists were also asked if their participation of A-Ma Festival was possibly influenced by their previous event experience, either in their home culture or during their travels. Among the 25 interviewees, 18 had previous event experience. The majority of the associated memories were related to experiences in their own areas of residence. Tourists were asked to associate elements of the A-Ma Festival with festivals they have experienced before. Although there are similar elements, both Chinese and foreign tourists reported that they were also able to identify the differences between them.

In my hometown Anhui, there are similar events, but the performance and the form of celebration are different. We mainly have prayer ceremony, but there is no lion dance or other performance like this. (Interviewee 9).

The stage performance is similar to the ones I saw in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. But, culturally, [they are] very different. The expressions, the way they perform, the emotions, are very different. The costume is different, the facial expression, the dialect, [are all different]. (Interviewee 15).

Reported elements of similarity included the stage performance (i.e. opera, lion dance), religious activities or other local celebration scenes. *“There are celebrations in Chinatown during the new year. The sound in general, the way they did the performance, the costumes they have are quite different from the ones in Europe”* (Interviewee 12). It is concluded that previous festival experience enabled interviewees to recognize some similar elements in the A-Ma Festival, but that they were also able to express the elements of uniqueness in the A-Ma Festival that distinguish it from their previous experiences.

## ***4.2 On-site experiences***

Based on the tourists' responses and the researchers' observation, the majority of the interviewees took on the role of spectators of the festival. Many of them indicated that they took photos or videos of the performance. Only a few others revealed a deeper engagement with the event, recounting that they would memorize the details of the event and even forget time when enjoying the event. For instance, "*It was great and cool, I think I will remember this for long time.*" (Interviewee 14).

I could not imagine I can stay here for that long. I come here around 3 o'clock, but you can see the time: it is already two or three hours later. Originally, I'd like to leave earlier, but once I engaged with the performance, I found their performance is quite humorous and interesting, and also raises the concern of people's livelihood. And it transfers the message of a positive attitude towards life. Therefore, I cannot stop enjoying it for such a long time (Interviewee 16).

In the S-O-R framework, the responses can be categorized as cognitive and affective responses. As previously mentioned in the literature review, environmental stimuli arouse attendees' cognitive and affective responses to the festivals (Lee et al., 2008), which reflects their festival experience. Attendee's festival experience is mainly derived from the festival environment and the festival itself (Tanford & Jung, 2017), that is the festivalscape (S). The cognitive responses represent a knowledge of environmental features (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997). They are the "mental structures and the processes involved in thinking about, understanding and interpreting the stimuli and events of the environment." (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006, p. 395). They can be summarized as the reflections on the physical environment and tourist experience on the performance. They describe a detailed observation of the physical environment. "*The stage is built of bamboo, it is quite huge.*" (Interviewee 12). "*I find the festival is very traditional, and the scale of the festival is big, yes, it can be said, 'big'. I feel like having the atmosphere of the old times.*" (Interviewee 4)

The festival performance stimulated tourists' cognitive responses as stated, with typical festival components like lion dance, opera, sound and costumes. The performers are also part of the performance whose efforts were appreciated. *"In the lion dance, I saw two persons play to make the lion stand, I find this very memorable, I like this event."* (Interviewee 10). *"The performers are so skilled, they seem so young, but they are so good. The one who picked the other one up and turned them around. That was very impressive. So, they are great."* (Interviewee 25)

I could see that even those performers who were not performing on stage were practicing at the back of the stage. Some may have just finished performing, they are quite hard working. There is no air conditioning on the stage, only a few fans, but those fans are pointed towards the audience... I remember, there is one scene with snow, the performers need to wear very heavy clothes, I could feel they must be hot with the costume. (Interviewee 16)

Tourists' affective responses imply emotions towards their participation in the festival and vary in intensity. They interpret tourists' internal feelings towards consumption objects (Sánchez et al., 2006), in particular the pursued feelings in hedonic experience (Duman & Mattila, 2005). They are considered the antecedents of post-event evaluative constructs (Duman & Mattila, 2005; Westbrook, 1987). In the A-Ma Festival, the affective responses revealed tourists' feelings towards the local culture. First, as commonly reflected, this festival represents the local culture.

It is incredible, truly truly incredible. The dance was amazing. It was so much better than the one we have at home as well. Maybe I am not being so fair, because I didn't see so many at home. But they are like so good... Everyone seems very happy in the team. Like a celebration, it is happy to see. It is awesome. (Interviewee 25).

As for foreigners, the festival experience provided an angle for them to learn about Asian culture and they found the experience quite impressive. *"It looks quite like what one imagines about China, of traditional China [Chinese culture] and... Asian culture."* (Interviewee 12).

Other examples of affective responses were feelings of appreciation feelings of the local culture. Compared to other tourism activities, festivals are more likely to engage tourists' active participation. Such active participation is also beneficial to delivering educational messages and experiences to the audience (Savinovic et al., 2012). Tourists feel appreciation for the preservation of the local culture and local people's persistence in maintaining the traditional culture. *"It convinces me that it is important to keep the culture and tradition, also for the younger generation."* (Interviewee 15)

It is a local feature. It is rare to see such a religious ceremony in other places, such as lion dance, worship. I think it is from the Lingnan culture, exclusively from the area of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. I think it is meaningful and symbolic... to perform and celebrate this ritual. (Interviewee 13)

Apart from the affective responses associated with the local culture, these tourist interviewees also revealed a wide range of intrinsic feelings to the festival as a whole, like happiness, relaxation and enjoyment. *"The air is good, and also the environment and the architecture is very beautiful. People here seem care-free and happy. All this makes me relaxed and happy."* (Interviewee 3)

What is worth mentioning is feelings of luckiness, since most interviewees joined the festival spontaneously. They felt themselves quite fortunate in joining the festival.

I just had the feeling that I couldn't believe that they have such a structure. It isn't held all the time. So, I thought I walked into something that you know, if I hadn't been here today, I wouldn't have gotten to see a lot of things, I wouldn't have seen this festival. So, I feel lucky. (Interviewee 24)

As a summary, the overall on-site experience is reported as quite positive as tourists used various emotional responses to summarize their experience of the event. The intangible festival attributes can evoke attendees' emotional feelings, which can make a long-term impression in memory. Such feelings can stimulate behavioral intentions (Tanford & Jung, 2017).

### ***4.3 Post-event experiences***

Both cognitive and affective responses are critical drivers of satisfaction (del Bosque & San Martín, 2008). It is argued that satisfaction can result from either an affective response or a final cognitive evaluation of one's experience (Babin & Griffin, 1998; Oliver, 1996). In the experience of an event, the reported satisfaction reveals both the emotional and evaluative responses of one's participation (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Therefore, it is not hard to see the reflection of satisfactory responses during the on-site festival experience as a summary of interviewees' experience in general when, during the post-event experience, tourists were asked to reflect upon their overall evaluation to their festival experience. In general, almost all tourist interviewees expressed their satisfaction with the festival to some extent. The post-event experiences were mainly concentrated on four aspects. First, the reflection of the image of the city. A festival experience can enhance the overall value of the tourist experience at a destination (Tanford & Jung, 2017). The impact of the local festival is effective, in particular in its effect in building the image of the city. Local festivals are effective in creating the theme in representing the local cultural heritage and enriching the place identity (Duran & Hamarat, 2014; Schofield & Thompson, 2007). In the A-Ma Festival, tourists revealed their new perception of the city, as: *“Originally, I thought the cultural atmosphere of Macau was not that strong, but after I attended this event, my thought changed, because I think it becomes stronger in the cultural atmosphere.”* (Interviewee 9)

Second, more than one third of the interviewees found the event experience memorable and impressive. When tourists discussed the festival experience's influence on their trip, more than half found that the festival experience added value to their trip in Macau. *“After attending this event, I feel the trip to Macau becomes even more wonderful.”* (Interviewee 13)

As a result, tourists' feelings of satisfaction were also revealed in their expressed intentions to join other cultural festivals in future. Tourists who are easily attracted by the strong visual appeals of festivals are most likely to join other festivals, irrespective of their religious orientation (Nolan & Nolan, 1992). Half of the tourist expressed that if they know of a festival in advance or if the festival fits their itinerary, they are likely to attend. Half of the

interviewees declared that they would definitely be likely to join other similar cultural festivals in the future. A well-planned festival that actively engages tourists can increase the appeal of a place and motivate tourists to revisit the place (Savinovic et al., 2012). Except for a few older tourists who are not likely to revisit the city again with the constraints of uncertain health conditions, the majority of the tourist interviewees intended to revisit the city. Such a high instance of intention to revisit indicates that interviewees anticipate more opportunities to experience local cultural events in future. This A-Ma Festival added value to the trip and enriched tourists' perception of the destination image in Macau, which also contributed to the intention to revisit. The majority of tourists also said that they would stay longer next time to explore more of the city. Due to the fact that many tourists initially thought Macau is a small city that is easy to explore, they had only planned a few days in the city. After experiencing the local festival and alteration of the destination image, though, interviewees were curious to explore those parts of the city that they had missed this time. What's more, the satisfaction of the festival experience also prompted their willingness to recommend to others.

Based on the S-O-R framework, the festivalscape (S) is the stimulus that attracted the tourists to join the festival as spectators. Tourists gradually generate interest in the festival and develop a desire to attend (O), which is considered as the organism. Once tourists participate in the festival, they started to generate their own festival experience with rich reflections on their cognitive and affective responses, which further concluded with their satisfaction and behavioral intentions (R). This entire process is depicted in Figure 2.

*Please insert Figure 2 here*

## **5. Conclusions and implications for future research**

Tourist experiences of A-Ma Festival demonstrate the entire process of the S-O-R framework. It has successfully indicated how tourist participation in local cultural festivals is influenced by the festivalscape. Their responses were rich and comprehensive in reflecting their festival experience. These cognitive and affective responses finally summarized their satisfactory

feelings about the festival, which further motivated behavioral intentions to join other cultural events and revisit Macau. It is worth mentioning that interviewees did not join local events purposefully because they had not expected to encounter the festival. Most participation was spontaneous. The stimulation effect of festivalscape helped tourists to generate interest progressively about discovering the local culture and hedonic experiences. Though some tourists may recall their memory of a similar experience they had in their normal places of residence because they saw some similar festival components, this is not the case for many tourist interviewees. Many of those who had associated memories, were able to identify differences.

Festivalscapes have a critical influence on the emotional experiences of attendees and this relates closely to their satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Lee, 2016; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). The festivalscape is evidently an influential factor. In the present study, the authors have attempted to argue that a festivalscape is more than a festival construct. The festival space may be understood as constantly evolving in the entire process of the festival experience. The festivalscape influences the enduring attitudes of attendees when they reveal their intentions to join other similar events and to return to the host city. Festivalscapes contain both durable and fleeting elements, thereby demonstrating the static physical environment and the mobile forms of performance involved (Ferdinand & Williams, 2018). This study used the approach of S-O-R framework to investigate the festivalscape in the study context of the A-Ma festival.

Festival planners are concerned with both performance and the quality of the environment (Lee, 2016). Locating festivals in or near hot tourism spots offers one means of attracting spectators, and of ensuring access for attendees to sufficient facilities while joining the event (Akhoondnejad, 2016). Because of this, A-Ma Festival can attract tourists who joined the event spontaneously. It is both an opportunity and challenge. In other words, those tourists who miss visiting the site would also miss the festival. Therefore, the promotional efforts of the festival can be strengthened by both destination management organizations (i.e. Macau Government Tourist Office) and festival organizers. Most interviewees were not aware of the event before happening upon it, and even those few who knew of the festival knew



nothing about its background, programmes and nature. Government support will be essential in promoting the festival and spreading awareness to those who had not intended to join the festival initially (Lee, 2016). It is strongly suggested that more educational efforts can be undertaken to inform the public on a more detailed interpretation of the festival. On-site interpretation is also critical in helping spectators better understand and learn about the local culture. It will help them to appreciate the festival in depth so that when tourists share their festival experience with others after their participation, the shared information is not limited to only snapshots or superficial observations on the celebrations, but also more articulate narratives based on a more in-depth understanding and transmission of the key messages and values of the festival as conveyed by the festivalscape as an experiential landscape.

As a limitation, the study was unable to cover interviewees from all tourist source regions. In terms of the demographic features, the current study scope can be expanded to a larger group and involve as many non-Asian perspectives as possible. Using the case of the A-Ma Festival as a model, it is possible to investigate other local cultural festivals and examine if such spontaneous participation phenomenon occurs in other local cultural festivals. It is also possible to compare the tourist experience of different local cultural festivals by conducting more cases in the future.

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## **Appendix 1. Main interview questions**

The main interview questions include:

### Pre-event experience

- 1) Why did you decide to join this A-Ma Festival?
- 2) What are your expectations when joining this festival?
- 3) How did you come to know about the festival?
- 4) How much do you know about this festival?
- 5) How do you think you can participate in this festival?
- 6) Have you had any previous memorable experiences of local cultural festival/event(s)?

### On-site experience

- 1) What has been your experience of the festival so far?
- 2) What do you think of the festival environment?
- 3) How has the festival environment impacted on you?

### Post-event experience

- 1) How would you describe your enjoyment of Macau?
- 2) How would you describe your attitude towards the experience on festival, compared to your pre-event expectations? Has it changed?
- 3) How does your festival experience influence your overall Macau experience?
- 4) Will you come back to Macau again?
- 5) Will you consider staying longer the next time you visit Macau?
- 6) Will you consider joining any other cultural festival/event(s) next time?
- 7) Will you consider recommending this event to others, based on your experience?

**Table 1.** Tourist interviewees' demographic features

<b>Interviewee #</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Time of Visit</b>
1	Female	Fujian	30	Accountant	Bachelor	Third time
2	Male	Hong Kong	79	Part-time Taxi Driver	Middle School	Once a year
3	Male	Fujian	65	Retired	Associate	First time
4	Female	Hong Kong	15	Student	Middle School	Every half a year
5	Male	Hubei	72	Retired	High School	First time
6	Female	Hong Kong	45	Accountant	Middle School	Once a year
7	Male	New Zealand	42	Yoga teacher	Doctorate	Once a month
8	Male	Shanxi	41	Journalist	Associate	Second time
9	Female	Anhui	32	Administration	Bachelor	First time
10	Male	India	24	Designer	Master	First time
11	Female	Finland	73	Retired	Bachelor	First time
12	Male	France	34	Engineer	Doctorate	First time
13	Female	Guangzhou	25	Student	Master	Third time
14	Male	Poland	44	Freelancer	Master	First time
15	Male	India	26	Photography	Master	First time
16	Female	Guangzhou	26	Administration	Bachelor	Fifth time
17	Female	Zhuhai	35	Freelancer	High diploma	Once a week
18	Female	Jiangxi	24	Saler	Bachelor	First time
19	Female	Shenzhen	25	Educator	Bachelor	First time
20	Female	Taiwan	24	Student	Master	First time
21	Female	Nanjing	21	Student	Bachelor	First time
22	Female	USA	66	Retired	Doctorate	First time

23	Male	Czech Republic	38	Translator	Master	First time
24	Male	USA	38	Educational consultant	Master	First time
25	Female	UK	20	Student	Bachelor	First time