



Case study

Attendees' perspectives on the service quality of an exhibition organizer: A case study of a tourism exhibition

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify a comprehensive list of dimensions/determinants of the service quality of an exhibition organizer as perceived by attendees. Such determinants were constructed from an analysis of previous studies and identified from data obtained from 241 questionnaires completed by attendees exiting an exhibition hall. Statistical indicators and methods used to analyze the data include frequency distribution, mean, percentage, standard deviation, and path analysis (SPSS Amos). The results outlined six dimensions of service quality: booth management, content, registration, access, booth layout and function, and exhibition and booth attractiveness. The results showed that the service quality of exhibition organizers has a positive impact on attendees' overall satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry is a mature, multibillion-dollar global industry and an important index for measuring the prosperity of cities. In Germany, trade fairs are a vital feature of the national and regional business environment; they improve the qualitative and structural competitiveness of the region (Kim, 2007). In many Asian countries, exhibitions are becoming an increasingly popular marketing medium.

In the exhibition industry today, organizers provide services for exhibitors not only at trade shows but also before and after the shows. They also promote shows by trying to attract qualified attendees whom exhibitors will want to meet (Smith, Hama, & Smith, 2003).

Over the past three decades, service sectors have become dominant elements of many economies (Yilmaz, 2010). Interest in service quality has increased noticeably, and studies have shown that service quality is a prerequisite for success and survival in today's competitive environment (Ghobadian, Speller, & Jones, 1994). Shemwell, Yavas, and Bilgin (1998) indicated that the key to achieving a sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers. Because both exhibitors and organizers rely on the satisfaction of visitors for the success of an exhibition venture, organizer service quality is ultimately established through the perceptions of the attendees.

Tourism has been one of the world's largest and strongest industries since the 1990s (Hall, 2006). Taiwan is currently attempting to develop itself as a tourist hub; therefore, tourism is being promoted through culture- and health-related attractions. A series of international promotions since 2004 has seen a marked increase in visitors to Taiwan. According to the World Economic Forum's 2008 Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Report (Blanke & Chiesa, 2008), Taiwan was ranked the 43rd most popular travel destination among 133 countries surveyed in terms of total number of inbound travelers; it was seventh in Asia, behind Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand. As of June 2009, there were 2139 travel agents in Taiwan (including 88 consolidated travel agents) with an estimated 34,000 employees (Department of Investment Services MOEA, 2009).

The objective of this study was to identify comprehensive determinants/dimensions of the service quality of an exhibition organizer as perceived by attendees of tourist exhibitions and to examine the structural relationship between organizer service quality and attendees' overall satisfaction. The empirical setting for this study was the 2011 Summer International Travel Show in Taichung, Taiwan's third-largest city and a major seaport. The event took place on May 20–23, 2011, at the World Trade Center Taichung and featured some 250 domestic tourism companies. The Summer International Travel Show has been held every year since 2008, and in 2011, it attracted more than 120,000 visitors.

2. Theory

The satisfaction of exhibitors and attendees plays an important role in the success of an exhibition. Attendees assume that exhibitions

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Table 1
Summary of reliability and factor score.

Dimensions	Cronbach's α	Factor scores*	Eigenvalues
Booth management (4)			
•Explanation of booth staff helped better understand travel packages and services.	.814	.805	4.1102
•Booth staff was well mannered.		.788	
•Booth staff was knowledgeable and proficient on travel packages and services.		.704	
•Sufficient exhibitor-related information material such as brochures and flyers was provided.		.542	
Registration (4)			
•Pre-registration through Internet made attendance simpler and easier.	.711	.510	2.414
•Registration procedure was easy and speedy.		.826	
•Registration desk was placed conveniently.		.779	
•Registration support staff was well mannered.		.716	
Content (4)			
•Sufficient number of exhibitors participated.	.762	.705	2.512
•Sufficient exhibition guide material was provided.		.668	
•The travel packages and services exhibited were appropriate for the exhibition theme.		.648	
•Exhibition-related conferences, seminars, and events were well organized and instructive.		.546	
Exhibition and booth attractiveness (4)			
•Pre-exhibition promotions through TV, Internet, radio, and newspaper helped attract visitors to the exhibition.	.722	.419	2.018
•Exhibitors' giveaways (bags, notepads, cups, pens, etc.) helped attract visitors to the booth.		.730	
•Promotional special events offered by exhibitors helped attract visitors to the booth.		.813	
•Free entry vouchers, invitation letters, brochures with invitations, etc. helped attract visitors to the booth.		.711	
Booth layout and function (4)			
•Booth layout was adequate to deal with aisle traffic flow.	.703	.448	2.167
•Signage at the exhibition was well designed and easily visible.		.511	
•Booths were well designed for comfortable visit and convention.		.765	
•Conference (or seminar) rooms and other facilities such as rest areas were convenient for use.		.740	
Access (2)			
•The exhibition center was adequate in terms of location, size, and quality of facilities.	.720	.798	1.817
•Duration of the exhibition was appropriate.		.506	

are an “industry showcase” where we can see new products and services firsthand and gather information within a relatively short time (Blythe, 1999). Therefore, exhibitors should be able to provide information regarding products and services to facilitate the needs of the attendees. Dickson and Faria (1985) indicated that firms were concerned with the quality and number of attendees, display locations (e.g., booth

position on the floor, aisle traffic density), and logistics (e.g., easy registration and pre-registration). However, other researchers have indicated that poor overall exhibition ratings by attendees are often attributable to booth personnel problems (Chonko, Tanner, & McKee, 1994; Cox, 1993; Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992). Furthermore, from the standpoint of attendees, Jung (2005) pointed out that accessibility (e.g.,

Table 2
Descriptive statistical data.

Dimensions	Average	SD
Content (4)	4.35	
•Sufficient number of exhibitors participated.	4.42	0.76
•Sufficient exhibition guide material was provided.	4.30	0.67
•The travel packages and services exhibited were appropriate for the exhibition theme.	4.39	0.71
•Exhibition-related conference, seminars, and events were well organized and instructive.	4.30	0.84
Booth management (4)	3.87	
•Explanation of booth staff helped better understand travel packages and services.	3.76	0.96
•Booth staff responded with good manners.	4.13	0.82
•Booth staff was knowledgeable and proficient on travel packages and services.	3.73	1.10
•Sufficient exhibitor-related information material such as brochures and flyers was provided.	3.84	1.04
Access (2)	4.11	
•The exhibition center was good in terms of location, size, and quality of facilities.	4.05	0.82
•Duration of the exhibition was appropriate.	4.16	0.62
Registration (4)	4.00	
•Pre-registration through Internet made attendance simpler and easier.	3.89	0.98
•Registration procedure was easy and speedy.	3.89	0.85
•Registration desk was placed in a convenient spot.	4.11	0.79
•Registration support staff was well mannered.	4.11	0.81
Booth layout and function (4)	4.12	
•Booth layout was adequate to deal with aisle traffic flow.	4.05	0.71
•Signage at the exhibition was well designed and easily visible.	4.33	0.58
•Booths were well designed for comfort.	4.10	0.89
•Conference (or seminar) rooms and other facilities such as rest areas were convenient for use.	4.00	0.77
Exhibition and booth attractiveness (4)	4.25	
•Pre-exhibition promotions through TV, Internet, radio, and newspaper helped attract visitors to the exhibition.	4.32	0.90
•Exhibitors' giveaways (bags, notepads, cups, pens, etc.) helped attract visitors to the booths.	4.29	0.84
•Promotional special events offered by exhibitors helped attract visitors to the booth.	4.37	0.73
•Free entry vouchers, invitation letters, brochures with invitations, etc. helped attract visitors to the booth.	4.01	1.03
Overall satisfaction (2)	3.94	
•Overall satisfaction with the exhibition	3.98	0.75
•Overall satisfaction with acquisition of information or knowledge on the exhibition	3.90	0.72

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