

**An Analysis of Conference Attendee Motivations:
Case of International Conference Attendees in Singapore**

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Abstract

This research intends to capture the underlying motivations for the decision of conference attendees to participate in an international conference. This study also aims to investigate if motivational differences exist among attendees with different gender, age, and nationality. Data were collected through a survey, target specific information about the motivational attitudes of conference attendees. The findings revealed that there are four dimensions of conference motivations: professional and prestige, pleasure seeking, destination factors, and conference factors. The results also showed that the relationship between demographic characteristics and the motivational attitudes are statistically not significant.

Keywords: Conference attendees, Motivational factors, International conference, Singapore.

Introduction

In recent years, meeting tourism has become globally recognized for its valuable economic contribution to tourism destinations and its significant growth potential (Dwyer, 2002). The chief activity in conventions and meetings is business rather than leisure, and this component of the tourism industry is the least responsive to price changes and helps reduce shoulder the seasonal patterns (McCabe et al., 2000; Oppermann, 1996). As Yoo and Chon (2008) noted about the rapid growth of the convention industry, tourism authorities has struggled to attract a larger number of delegates to conventions and conferences. The reason is that hosting conferences at an international level has recently been considered prestigious. Therefore, hosting international conferences are not only effective but also important (Weber and Chon, 2002).

Singapore is a well known destination and one of the top international meeting cities in the world and is the meeting, incentives, convention and exhibition “king in the Southeast Asia region” (Singapore Convention and Exhibition Directory, 2010: p.16). Singapore as a strong business environment is an ideal destination for meeting planners. In 2008, Singapore’s business travel industry welcomed three million business and meeting visitors and contributed nearly US\$4.2 billion in tourism receipts. At the same time the Singapore Tourism Board aims to raise tourism receipts to US\$21 billion and increase

visitor arrivals to 17 million by 2015 (STB, 2010). One important issue for a successful meeting industry is to attract as many attendees as possible (Zhang, 2010); therefore Singapore has to understand the needs of convention attendees in order to entrench as a premier meeting destination.

One key player in the selection decision of conference destination is the attendees, people who are invited to conferences and have the choice between attending and not attending (Oppermann, 1997). International convention/conference attendees are precious resources for the tourism industry since their attendance benefits both convention organizers and host locations. They bring multi-economic benefits to the host location through their expenditure on accommodation, food and beverages, local transportation as well as benefiting hotels and conference facilities by balancing off-season tourism and spreading positive word-of-mouth (Astroff & Abbey, 199; Oppermann and Chon 1997; Rogers and Davidson, 2006).

Because of the growing intensity of competition for attracting international attendees among associations and host destinations (Lee and Back, 2008; Oppermann and Chon, 1997; Shure, 2004) association conferences become an increasingly important market for business tourism destinations (Mair and Thompson, 2009). Lately more attention has been given to the marketing of association meetings to help associations and host destinations better design and manage their meetings and therefore draw more delegates to their meeting destination (Jago and Deery, 2005; Lee and Back, 2007). However, similar to the wide differences in tourism experiences among tourists and their different wants and needs, convention attendees also have different requirements and may participate in one conference for completely different reasons. Moreover it has been suggested that still little is known about the attendees (Price 1993; Rittichainuwat, et al., 2001), and only a few recent studies (Lee and Back, 2007; Mair and Thompson, 2009; Severt, Wang, Chen and Breiter, 2007; Zhang, et al., 2007) have shed light on the motivations for attending conventions (Yoo and Chon, 2008).

Determining the attitudes behind tourism behaviour has been a long-term issue in scholarly literature (Ngamsom and Beck, 2000; Oppermann 1995). The literature also shows that some studies are designed to identify the attitudes behind convention participation. This wealth of research pertaining to the attitudes of the participants is mainly concerned about 'convention site selection' (Baloglu and Love, 2001; Chacko and Fenich, 2000; Clark and McCleary, 1995; Crouch and Ritchie, 1998; Crouch and Louviere, 2005; Fortin and Ritchie, 1977; Grant and Weaver, 1996; Jun and McCleary, 1999; Oppermann, 1994), 'association members' participation in annual conferences' (Jago and Deery, 2005; Ngamsom and Beck, 2000; Oppermann, 1995; Oppermann and Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Witt et al., 1995), 'convention decision-making models with no empirical basis' (MalekMohammadi and Mohamed, 2010; Zhang et al., 2007), 'image of the convention destination city' (Fenich, 1992, Oppermann, 1996), and 'delegates' behaviour at regional conferences' (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Severt et al., 2007). Although several scholars have recently addressed the research need, still there has been a distinct lack of studies on the motivation decision to convention participation (PCMA Survey, 2003; Yoo and Chon, 2008). Thus, more empirical studies are needed (Zhang et al., 2007).

At the same time demographic segmentation of respondents has been used in marketing research in order to break down a target market into a more manageable section. Since smaller group of buyers with distinct needs and behaviours require separate product (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). In conference literature only a few studies examined demographics characteristics of attendees with their motivation (Mair, 2010).

Consistent with this view, the following research questions are addressed in this study: (1) what are the most important factors that motivate conference attendees to participate in an international conference? (2) Does motivation differ significantly among participants to the same conference who are from different countries and with different ages and genders?

Literature Review

Conference Participation Motivation

Knowing the motives of international attendees is considered to be an important advantage for conference organizers (Heungand Qu, 2000). The decision to participate in conferences can be identified by motivational factors. Mair and Thompson (2009) stated that the consumer behaviour displayed by delegates attending an association conference has significant similarities with that of leisure tourists. According to them, in the first stage of decision making, attendees receive an invitation by mail from an association, a call for papers for a forthcoming event, or perhaps an invitation by word of mouth that will motivate them to evaluate the conference and the characteristics of the destination, and later participate in that conference (Mair and Thompson, 2009). Oppermann and Chon (1997) also believe that association conference segment has great similarities to leisure travelers regarding the decision-making process undertaken by conference delegates in choosing to attend an association conference. According to Oppermann and Chon (1997) the main reason for conference attendance is largely discretionary from the attendee's perspective which means attendees have "freedom of choice" for the most part of decision making process same as leisure travelers.

Consumer behaviour motivations stand for individual internal forces that lead to action (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). Tourist motivation has also been referred to as "...a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such as decision..." (Dann, 1981, p. 205). Crompton (1979) introduced the 'push and pull' factors of motives that show the process of using the components of tourists' choice of destination into two separate forces. The push factors are an effect of the motivational influences on a particular individual, whereas the pull factors are related to the attractiveness of a destination (Crompton, 1979).

Travel motivations have also been studied in relation to the decision-making process (Jang and Cai, 2002). Mansfeld (1992) explained the role of motivation in travel behaviour and stated that once there is motivation to travel; people collect information and plan their trips. He believed that travel motivation is a key stage that triggers the travel decision before the actual travel. Researchers also believe there is a strong link between motivation and destination choices (Dann, 1981; Mansfeld, 1992).

For marketers to know why attendees choose to travel abroad to attend a specific conference is very important (Mok and Armstrong, 1995) because attendees have a large selection of meetings and conferences choose from, it is more critical than ever to have a better understanding of the assessment process used in the attendance decision. By determining the motivational factors of conference attendance, event producers can design conferences so that the attendees are more likely to participate and they can also provide services and facilities that meet the needs and expectations of the participants (Severt et al., 2007).

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) stated that the motivations of tourists are multiple and that they have different reasons for taking domestic or international vacations. Conference attendees may also have different reasons to travel to a destination and participate in a specific conference. With a review on previous studies in conference decision-making area (Oppermann and Chon, 1997; Zhang et al. 2007) several common factors were identified which believe to act as effective factors in conference delegate's decision-making process in international level. These common factors are professional and personal motives, pleasure-seeking motives, networking, cost factors, career enhancement destination factors, conference/association factors and intervening opportunities. The present study adopted the motivational items from previous conceptual models of convention decision-making. The first model suggested by Oppermann and Chon, (1997) addresses the convention participation decision-making process by potential attendees. The second model proposed by Zhang et al. (2007) is a refined model of factors affecting convention participation decision-making. Both models have never been empirically tested. This study is therefore, taking the first step to make some empirical contributions to the further study of convention participation.

Demographic Segmentation

Previous studies have indicated that different factors, such as age, income, cultural backgrounds, and nationalities influence destination choices (Jang et al., 2009; Jonsson and Devonish, 2008; Kim and Lee, 2000; Kozak, 2002; Seddighi et al., 2001; Meng and Uysal 2008). Many studies have identified the significant differences among tourists based on nationality and effect of motivation, and other travel-related variables (Kim and Lee, 2000; Kim et al., 2002; Master and Prideaux, 2000; Reisinger et al., 2001). However, despite the extensive research in this area, there is still a gap in the literature in terms of empirical studies (Kim et al., 2003; Mair and Thompson, 2009). For this reason, tourist motives and the differences among tourist groups are still under investigation (Kozak, 2001).

In conference attendance context, only a few studies investigate the differences among attendees' motivation and their demographic characteristics. Mair, (2005) identified there are differences in motivations of attendees based on gender. But Severt, et al., (2009) found that there are few statistically significant differences in motivations based on generation of the attendees. However, more empirical studies are needed to investigate the differences between motivations and demographic characteristics of attendees in order to uncover further detailed information and provide more reliable marketing strategies.

In the light of these, the current study examined the differences in participation motivations to travel and participate in an international conference in Singapore among different age groups, gender groups, and nationalities.

Methodology

Questionnaire Design

The present study uses an instrument developed through an extensive literature review on convention and conference attendee behaviour. This was done to generate the measurement items, including the motivation of attendees, for the specific questions raised in this study. The questionnaire divided into three sections to measure the motivations of conference attendees for travelling to Singapore to attend the five international conferences in 2010. First, the questionnaire focused on the basic demographic and background data of the respondents. This section comprised of seven questions. The second part of the questionnaire was based on the trip characteristics of the conference attendees' items and was comprised of seven questions. The third part involved a list of ten potential 'push' motives to participate in an overseas conference and 18 pull motives as the destination and conference-based factors. The above mentioned motives were adapted from previous conceptual models of convention decision-making.

Kozak (2002) argued that multidimensional measures of motivation with a continuous scaling format (i.e., Likert) are most appropriate for tourist-based studies and for this reason seven-point Likert scale ranging from: 1- extremely disagree to 7- extremely agree utilized.

Data Collection

This research used convenience sampling where the convenience to researcher was to approach respondents before during and after conference sessions. These conferences namely are: International Conference on Business, Economics, and Tourism Management (CBETM 2010), International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences (CHHSS 2010), International Conference on Good Governance and Human Rights (CGGHR 2010), International Conference on Business, Economics and Tourism Management (CBETM 2010), and International Conference on Innovation, Management, and Service (ICIMS 2010). The above mentioned conferences were on the same date, same place and by one organizer. The reason of selecting 5 different international conferences is that the majority of the researches that has been carried out into conference attendees focused only on specific cases of conference attendance, where all the attendees were like-minded and this does not allow for either generalization of the results or for a broader understanding of conference delegates (Mair, 2010). But this study tried to fill a gap in the understanding of conference delegates in general rather than delegates that are part of one specific conference population.

Data were collected in Singapore in Peninsula-Excelsior Hotel from 26–28, February 2010. The attendees of these conferences were estimated to be 500. The

conference attendees were approached and invited to participate in the data collection process on a voluntary basis. Data collection was conducted over the duration of the conferences. Out of the 500 attendees, 150 of them accepted to participate in the study with a response rate of 30 percent. Although, 150 observations may look rather limited yet according to Hair et al. (2007) this figure is sufficient enough to run both descriptive and factorial analyses with the given number of questions. These 150 questionnaires were collected on the conference day by the researcher and with the help of the conference organizers.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysed by using SPSS version 16. Following analyses carried out; descriptive analysis, factor analysis, descriptive statistics, reliability test, T-test, and ANOVA were the analysis tools used in this study.

Demographic Breakdown of the Respondents

The majority of the respondents were male participants (58%) and educators (54%) between the age of 31 and 40 (43%). Educational level of the majority of respondents was doctoral degree (61%) with an income level of less than \$25,000 (46%) per year. Most of the respondents participated in international conferences four to five times (32%) every three years. Majority of the respondents had their conference fees paid partially by themselves and their organizations (45%). Table 1 shows the breakdown of the demographics and trip characteristics of the sample respondents.

Analysis of Motivations

The principle component analysis using the orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX) was used for the factor analysis in favour of a true factor analysis method (Ekiz and Bavik, 2008; Floyd and Widaman, 1995) to identify the underlying dimensions of the motivations for convention participation. The calculation of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistics of 0.75 for the push motives, which can be described as 'middling', indicated that the data seemed suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). The factor analysis for the push factors was extracted from two main components with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00 (Korn and Korn, 2000) and explaining 58.93 percent of the total variance (Table 2). Anti-image statistics suggested that one item (push factor 7= getting promoted in job) should be deleted. This item was not used in further analysis. These two main components were then renamed to 1= professional and prestige; and 2= pleasure seeking. The alpha values for each of the factors were high enough to be acceptable that is, 0.65.

Table 1: Demographics breakdown of the respondents

Demographics	Percent %	Trip characteristics	Percent %
Gender		Conference as primary propose of trip	
Male	58%	Yes	88%
Female	42%	No	12%
Age		Respondents take the conference as:	
21_30	20%	Work	38%
31_40	43%	Holiday	3%
41_40	27%	Combination of work and holiday	59%
51_60	10%		
Profession		Participation in conference excursion	
Educator	54%	Always	31%
Student	39%	Often	23%
Industry professionals	7%	Sometimes	31%
		Seldom	11%
		Never	4%
Education		Participant conference trip extension	
Doctoral degree	61%	Always	21%
Master's degree	31%	Often	17%
Bachelor's degree	2%	Sometimes	30%
Technical certificate		Seldom	29%
		Never	3%
Annual income		Participants length of trip	
Less than \$25,000	46%	2-3 days	36%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	40%	4-5 days	43%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	11%	More than 6 days	21%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	3%		
Number of international conferences (in last 3 years)		Number of travel party	
1	13%	Alone	53%
2-3	30%	1-3 person	30%
4-5	32%	4-6 person	11%
More than 6	25%	More than 6	6%
Conference payment		Personal travel party relationship	
Fully paid by myself	19%	Alone	53%
Fully paid by my organization	36%	Family/Friend	18%
Partially by me and by organization	45%	Colleagues	23%
		Both	6%
Total	150	Total	150

Table 2: Factor analysis for motivation items (Push Motives)

Items	Factor Loading	
	1	2
Professional and prestige		
Push 1. Building professional relationships.	.772	
Push 2. Having personal interaction.	.892	
Push 3. Feeling in a global community.	.519	
Push 4. Gaining new knowledge and skills.	.650	
Push 5. Meeting like-minded people.	.839	
Push 6. Looking for a peer reputation.	.728	
Pleasure-seeking		
Push 8. Getting away from home.		.604
Push 9. Getting new experiences.		.805
Push 10. Visiting a new destination.		.855
<i>KMO</i>	.754	
<i>Chi²</i>	544.151	
<i>Sig.</i>	0.000	

Notes:

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy) → 0.604

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity → 544.151 p<0.0001

Overall alpha coefficient = 0.86

The criteria were based on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= extremely disagree to 7= extremely agree.

The factor analysis for the pull factors was also extracted from the 17 items for the two major components, with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00 and explaining 52.69 percent of the total variance (Table 3). These components were then renamed to 1=destination factors; and 2= conference factors. The calculation of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistics of 0.85 for the pull motives, which are considered 'good', indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Most of the factor loadings were greater than 0.35 in both the push and pull motives, indicating a good correlation between the items and the factor grouping to which they belonged.

Table 3: Factor analysis for motivation items (Pull Motives)

Items	Factor Loading	
	1	2
Destination Factors		
Pull 1. Positive Image of destination		.547
Pull 2. Climate/good weather		.503
Pull 3. Safety/ security		.631
Pull 4. Accommodation facilities		.524
Pull 5. Availability of nightlife		.742
Pull 6. Language used in the country		.540
Pull 7. Scenery and sightseeing opportunity		.461
Pull 8. Food and restaurant facilities		.758
Pull 9. Previous experience		.807
Pull 10.Distance of trip		.784
Pull 11. Direct flight		.555
Pull 12. Trip cost		.821
Conference Factors		
Pull 13. Conference quality	.870	
Pull 14. Interesting topic of the conference	.882	
Pull 15. Conference organizer	.676	
Pull 16. Networking opportunity	.737	
Pull 17. Well-known speakers	.616	

Notes:

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy) → 0.853

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity → 1711.665 $p < 0.0001$

Overall alpha coefficient = 0.92

The criteria were based on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= extremely disagree to 7= extremely agree.

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and reliability alphas for the push and pull motivational items. Pleasure-seeking dimension contributed the highest mean for all factors (mean=4.88, SD=1.27), followed by conference dimension (mean=4.74, SD=1.50). The other motivational factors were professional and prestige (mean= 4.67, SD=1.21) and destination dimension (mean= 4.60, SD=1.05).

Reliability estimates of the four motivational factors were all adequate: professional and prestige motivations (Cronbach Alpha .83), pleasure-seeking motivations (Cronbach Alpha .64), destination-based motivations (Cronbach Alpha .85), and the conference factor (Cronbach Alpha .91). These reliability estimates confirmed that the individual items under each of the factors were internally consistent (Ekiz and Bavik, 2008).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alphas

Motivations	Mean	SD	Alpha
Professional and prestige	4.67	1.219	0.836
Push 1. Building professional relationships.	4.93	1.836	
Push 2. Having personal interaction.	4.70	1.745	
Push 3. Feeling in a global community.	4.61	1.638	
Push 4. Gaining new knowledge and skills.	4.77	1.728	
Push 5. Meeting like-minded people.	4.51	1.455	
Push 6. Looking for a peer reputation.	4.55	1.436	
Pleasure-seeking	4.88	1.271	0.649
Push 8. Getting away from home.	4.25	1.780	
Push 9. Getting new experiences.	5.18	1.537	
Push 10. Visiting a new destination.	5.21	1.649	
Destination Factors	4.60	1.052	0.855
Pull 1. Positive Image of destination	5.13	1.627	
Pull 2. Climate/good weather	4.57	1.517	
Pull 3. Safety/ security	5.11	1.663	
Pull 4. Accommodation facilities	4.62	1.553	
Pull 5. Availability of nightlife	4.04	1.702	
Pull 6. language used in the country	4.63	1.709	
Pull 7. Scenery and sightseeing opportunity	5.11	1.614	
Pull 8. Food and restaurant facilities	3.89	1.837	
Pull 9. Previous experience	3.99	1.988	
Pull 10. Distance of trip	4.49	1.845	
Pull 11. Direct flight	4.57	1.961	
Pull 12. Registration cost	4.78	1.893	
Pull 13. Trip cost	4.88	1.667	
Conference Factors	4.74	1.497	0.912
Pull 14. Conference quality	5.58	1.516	
Pull 15. Interesting topic of the conference	4.95	1.731	
Pull 16. Conference organizer	4.21	1.830	
Pull 17. Networking opportunity	4.89	1.841	
Pull 18. Well-known speakers	4.07	1.763	

Notes:

KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy) → 0.811

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity → 1634.142 p<0.0001

Overall alpha coefficient = 0.90

The criteria were based on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= extremely disagree to 7= extremely agree.

Analysis of Motivations of Attendees by Gender, Age, and Nationality

An independent sample t-test was carried out on the mean scores of each factor and item level to determine whether significant differences existed among the mean scores assigned to the motivation items by gender. The results revealed that there were no significant differences in the conference participants' motivations on the four general factors ($p > 0.05$) or on the 27 individual items (all items $p > 0.05$). Therefore, gender does not significantly influence motivation to participate in a conference.

ANOVA was conducted to examine whether the motivations of the respondents (at the factor and item level) differed significantly by nationality and age. Post hoc tests were carried out to determine which nationality and age groups differed considerably from each regarding these motivations. Although the ANOVAs results that nationality and age of the attendees did not have a notable effect on the four general factors, it was evident that nationality differed significantly in only one of the 27 items (destination factor: Safety/security, $p\text{-value} = .048$, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this research is to identify important factors motivating conference attendees to participate in an international conference. The analysis of factor results yielded four types of important tourist motivations: professional and prestige motives, pleasure-seeking motives, destination factors, and conference factors. The pleasure-seeking motives and the conference factors were ranked as the most significant motivations for conference participation. These motivational factors strongly confirm the previous related works by other researchers (Mair and Thompson, 2009; Oppermann and Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat, et al., 2001; Severt et al., 2007; Zhang, et al., 2007).

The destination factor strongly confirmed the results of previous studies by Oppermann (1995), Oppermann and Chon (1997), Var et al. (1985), Witt et al. (1995) and Yoo and Chon (2008), which proved that sightseeing, destination stimuli, and destination attributes are very important factors in motivating attendance in conference participation. Oppermann (1995), Oppermann and Chon (1997), Price (1993), Rittichainuwat et al., (2001), Yoo and Chon (2008) stressed the importance of networking and conference factors, such as conference quality, topic, and others in their sample attendees and believed that networking is one of the most important reasons for attending overseas conferences. They also stated that the quality of a conference and the presence of well-known speakers increase the number of participants. However, the professional and prestige motives can be partially found from previous studies. The personal and professional factor found in the studies by Oppermann (1995) and Oppermann and Chon (1997) is indeed very close to the professional and prestige motives of this study.

Notably, amongst the findings in this research, the conference motivation component, namely, the pleasure-seeking factor has not been cited in previous investigations in this area. Therefore, it is included in the decision-making literature as a body of knowledge in conference participation.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that there are no significant differences among age, gender, and nationality, and conference participation motivations. This study is valuable in terms of the choice of variables in view of the fact that no previous study has examined the relationship among gender, age, and nationality regarding the motivations of conference attendees. This research provided significant findings to the body of knowledge on the exploration of conference participation motivations and also examined the differences in the set of attendees' motivations among gender, age, and nationality.

Findings of this research should be interpreted in light of the following limitations. In this study, a non-probabilistic sampling technique - convenience sampling - has been used; future studies should consider one of the probabilistic sampling techniques. Due to conference attendees' busy schedule, presentations, discussion and other social events, collecting data was challenging, for this reason the sample size is comparatively small. Although, this size is considered to be adequate to run the needed analysis and drive meaningful conclusions (Korn and Korn, 2000), future studies should reach out more respondents. Finally, this study investigated possible relationships between demographics and motivational factors of international conference attendees in Singapore, future studies should consider investigating other factors (entertainment and social activities, traveling distance, cost and financial support etc.) in similar destinations.

This study provides valuable information on the conference participation motivation of international attendees that can be considered practical implications for decision makers and marketing managers of conferences. The results of this study can be considered as an important tool for conference marketers to attract future international attendees and improve the overall quality of their destinations and conferences.

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