

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Does the Organizer's Reputation Affect Exhibitors' Satisfaction?

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This research surveyed 229 exhibitors of the Manila FAME Trade Fair held last October 19–21, 2018, in the Philippines to find out if the trade fair organizer's reputation was significant to exhibitors' satisfaction. The other variable that was studied to determine if they affected exhibitors' satisfaction was the quality of service dimensions of booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management. The quality of these service dimensions was tested using structural equation modeling to determine if there is a relationship between the quality of the service dimensions and the trade fair organizer's reputation, exhibitors' satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The behavioral intentions were re-exhibit intentions and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions. The findings showed that only the trade fair organizer's reputation was significant to exhibitors' satisfaction. The quality of the service dimensions was not significant to exhibitors' satisfaction. However, the exhibitors' satisfaction was significant to behavioral intentions (re-exhibit intentions and WOM intentions).

Keywords: trade fair organizer's reputation, quality of service dimensions, exhibitors' satisfaction, re-exhibit intentions, word-of-mouth intentions

JEL Classifications: D21, L21, M31

Participating in trade fairs is one of the promotion strategies adopted by firms that want to export. This is often used as a promotional strategy because it brings the exporters to the importers rather than vice-versa (Lee, Lee, & Young, 2015).

In the context of services given by trade fair organizers, it is also important to note that trade fair organizers are involved in relationship marketing in the following stages: before the fair, during the fair, and after the fair (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Through their interactions with the trade fair

participants in these three stages, such as the exchange of information, trade fair organizers can create customer value. These interactions and the customer value that they can create can build their credibility in an industry that has become competitive. To their existing exhibitor or to potential exhibitors, this reputation is important as it may affect the decision to join or not to join a trade fair (Kalafskya & Gress, 2014; Santos & da Silva, 2013).

There are very few researches involving trade fairs as a promotional strategy in business-to-

business or business-to-consumer settings (Jha, Balaji, Rajan, & Sharma, 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Sarmiento & Simoes, 2018; Tafesse & Skallerud, 2016). Of these researches, there were few that studied the service quality from the exhibitors' perspective (Sarmiento & Simoes, 2018). There are scant articles on trade fairs from the perspective of other stakeholders such as the trade fair organizer and visitors (Lin, Kerstetter, & Hickerson, 2015). According to Sarmiento and Simoes (2018), most of these studies were in the context of developed countries such as the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, Norway, and Japan. This empirical study explored the trade fair organizer's reputation/service dimensions-exhibitor satisfaction-behavioral intention framework in the context of a developing country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Trade Fair Industry

Trade fairs have been at the center of commerce for centuries (Cateora, Gilly, & Graham, 2011). They are part of the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibition (MICE) category in the service industry (Hsieh & Yuan, 2019). More countries invest in the MICE industry, which can generate USD 280 billion per year globally (Hsieh & Yuan, 2019). Delivering quality services for exhibitors and importers is crucial to be competitive in the MICE industry. The efficient and effective management of trade fairs involves services that are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, and perishable (Chien & Chi, 2019; Sarmiento & Farhangmehr, 2016).

In Europe, Asia, and North America, trade fairs have been marketing events where large companies spent resources to establish "live contacts," but recent trends in technology have encouraged firms to use the internet in their trade fair program (Golfetto & Rinallo, 2014; Ling-yee, 2010). Ling-yee (2010) summed up the use of internet in trade fairs:

1. Before the trade fair, email marketing can be used.
2. During the trade fair proper, sales force automation can be used for at-show selling.
3. After the trade fair, real-time lead management can enhance post-trade fair follow-ups.

Ling-yee (2010) pointed out that the use of internet marketing for trade fairs can even go beyond the pre-trade fair, trade fair proper, and post-trade fair sequences since the sales function can be continuous. The use of internet marketing for trade fairs has affected attendance in physical trade fairs as more firms get used to electronic interaction versus physical interaction (Ling-yee, 2010). However, there will still be a need for traditional trade fairs where there is physical interaction as cultivating trust, developing shared norms, involvement, and bonding are difficult to replicate electronically (Geiger & Martin, 1999). This implies that trade fair organizers must embrace new marketing strategies to surmount challenges.

Messe Frankfurt GmbH, one of the largest trade fair organizers in the world, had to organize trade fairs in Asia, because the European trade fair industry reached a plateau (Golfetto & Rinallo, 2015). Using a brand extension strategy, it organized an extension of its successful flagship trade fairs in large and high-growth geographical markets to Asian sites (Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing) characterized by high international accessibility and numerous local clients (Golfetto & Rinallo, 2015). Messe Frankfurt GmbH is a member of the Union des Foires Internationales (UFI), which is a global association of trade fair organizers in the world ("About Union des Foires Internationales", n.d.). While Messe Frankfurt GmbH became a UFI member in 1925, the Center for International Trade Exhibitions and Missions, Inc. (CITEM) became a member in 2000 ("About UFI," n.d.). The UFI logo carried by members connote the seal quality in organizing trade fairs ("About UFI," n.d.).

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises and the Manila FAME Trade Fair

According to the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry, of the 1,003,111 firms operating in the Philippines as of 2018, 998,342 or 99.52% were micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) while only 4,769 (0.48%) were large enterprises (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.). MSMEs' employees and assets are shown in Table 1 (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.).

MSMEs accounted for 25% of export revenues through subcontracting with large firms or as suppliers to exporting firms (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.). As of 2018, it was estimated that 60% of exporting firms are MSMEs that contributed to 63.19% of jobs

Table 1. MSMEs Definition According to the Number of Employees or Assets

Type	Number of Employees	Assets in Philippine Pesos	Assets in US Dollars
Micro	1–9	3,000,000	58,824
Small	10–99	3,000,001–15,000,000	58,824–294,118
Medium	100–199	15,000,001–100,000,000	294,118–1,960,784

Note. Exchange rate used in conversion: USD 1.00 = PHP 51.

in the country (Department of Trade and Industry, n.d.; Leano, 2004). MSMEs accounted for 32% of the country's GDP (Leano, 2004).

To sustain the contribution of MSMEs to export growth, the Department of Trade and Industry through CITEM organizes trade fairs such as the Manila FAME Trade Fair. This trade fair is part of the export promotion program (EPP) to support MSMEs. As one of the longest running trade fairs in Asia, the Manila FAME Trade Fair is also accredited by UFI. Held at the World Trade Center, the Manila FAME Trade Fair displays furniture, furnishing, gifts, toys, houseware, fashion accessories, and garments to importers from various parts of the world. The Manila FAME Trade Fair has catapulted the Philippines as the Milan of Asia because of the craftsmanship and design of Filipino exhibitors (Ang & Teo, 1995). There are studies that show that MSMEs gain from trade fairs as part of EPP (Monreal-Perez & Geldres-Weiss, 2019).

MSMEs not only may want to join the trade fairs in their countries but also may opt to join overseas trade fairs. This is because trade fairs can allow them to reach a wider body of potential buyers, while minimizing many of the costs and risks associated with venturing into individual markets (Kalafskya & Gress, 2014; Seringhaus & Rosson, 1994). At these fairs, firms not only meet with potential and existing customers but also can engage with suppliers, agents, and competitors (Kalafskya & Gress, 2014).

The success of a trade fair depends on the number of exhibitors as importers want to see as many exhibitors as possible (Lee, Seo, & Yeung, 2012). Thus, there are many efforts from trade fair organizers to attract as many exhibitors as possible. However, the number of exhibitors joining the Manila FAME Trade Fair has decreased over the years (Suplico Jeong & Arcilla, 2017). It has been observed that the attendance in trade shows all over the world has decreased because people travel less to attend trade fairs (Yamsun, 2016).

Information about exhibitors and their products can now be obtained online. The trade fair industry has been affected by virtual trade shows, which tend to be more cost-effective than traditional trade fairs (Ling-ye, 2010). Lost exhibitors represent lost sales, and attracting new exhibitors involves costs (Lee et al., 2012). CITEM's website also shows that the Manila FAME will be organized only once a year effective 2020 instead of twice in a year (CITEM, n.d.). With the effect of COVID-19, more apparent in 2020, air travel, even for trade fair visitors and exhibitors, will be affected (Nguyen, 2020).

Service Dimensions as Collaborative Services Between Trade Fair Organizers and Exhibitors

Collaboration of joint projects that will benefit all partners is difficult, but this can be beneficial for the trade fair industry (Proszowska, 2018). The service dimensions where exhibitors and fair organizers can collaborate are booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management (Lee et al., 2015; Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017).

While booth design and layout and exhibition logistics happen before the trade fair, venue services and show management occur during the trade fair proper (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). According to Siemieniako & Gebarowski (2017), the collaborative behavior and partnering, which are key features of relationship development in real estate trade fairs, can also be applied in the context of trade fair organizers and exhibitors. In this context, the trade fair organizer and the exhibitors commit to shared objectives, shared responsibilities, and shared monitoring of the partnering process (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Timely information is exchanged between the trade fair organizer and exhibitors so that the exhibitors can fully participate before the trade fair, during the trade fair proper, and after the trade fair (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). These service dimensions where

exhibitors can fully participate are as follows (Lee et al., 2015):

1. Booth design and layout. Exhibition booth design and layout can promote the exhibitors' interaction with importers. It is crucial that this service dimension should include enough space to accommodate importers and that the display should communicate effectively and efficiently the exhibitors' products or services.
2. Exhibition logistics. This dimension includes venue accessibility; shipment of products, promotional materials, and props to the venue; transport from the exhibitors' hotel to the venue and vice-versa; and information about the exhibitors' directory, schedule, and events during the trade fair.
3. Venue services. These services can include business services such as microphones, audiovisual equipment, internet access, interpreters' services, accommodations, food and beverage, entertainment, exhibitors' lounge, storage space, maintenance services for cleaning of exhibit areas and restrooms, and bank services.
4. Show management. This dimension includes booth assignment, booth rental, and professionally trained exhibition staffs.

The collaboration and partnering between trade fair organizers and exhibitors in these service dimensions are part of relationship marketing that provides socialization episodes (Sarmiento, Simoes, & Farhangmehr, 2014; Siemieniako, & Gebarowski, 2017). Towards this end, trade fair organizers should highlight relational benefits of a trade fair setting by organizing activities that lead to collaborative relationships. Physical space, activities, and events during the trade fair proper should highlight the trade fair as a relationship marketing stage that can enhance the collaboration between the trade fair organizer and the exhibitors (Sarmiento et al., 2014).

In these service dimensions, crucial information exchange takes place through direct interaction between the trade fair organizer and the exhibitor (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Consequently, if the exhibitors are satisfied with these four services, including the information exchange, positive outcomes such as intentions to re-exhibit and intentions to spread

positive word of mouth (WOM) will occur (Lee et al., 2015). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

- H1. The quality of service dimensions (booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management) has a positive effect on exhibitors' satisfaction.

Trade Fair Organizer's Reputation

While studies showed that service quality affected customer satisfaction and, thus, behavioral intention (Lee et al., 2015), the research by Chien and Chi (2019) also showed that the trade fair organizer's corporate image can positively affect the exhibitors' satisfaction. Chien and Chi (2019) concluded that big enterprises are more conscious of the trade organizer's reputation in joining trade fair. The decision to join the trade fairs is dependent on the trade fair organizer's reputation (Proszowska, 2019). Thus, the trade fair organizer's reputation should also be studied as it may affect satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Portuguese managers considered trade show reputation and its management as factors to consider in joining a trade fair (Santos & da Silva, 2013). According to Santos and da Silva (2013), the reputation of the trade fair organizer is based on the outcome of previous events, which may come from the personal experiences of exhibitors, buyers, and guests. This reputation is enhanced by sponsorship and/or endorsement by the government and industry associations and media exposure (Santos & da Silva, 2013). This implies that when the government organizes trade fairs, exhibitors find the reputation favorable as government subsidizes part of their booth rental fees (Suplico Jeong & Arcilla, 2017). This leads to the following hypothesis:

- H2. The trade fair organizer's reputation has a positive effect on exhibitors' satisfaction.

Exhibitors' Satisfaction

In a trade fair setting, such as the Manila FAME Trade Fair, the trade fair organizer has to satisfy not only the importers who visit the trade fair but also the exhibitors. Trade fairs exist because they serve exhibitors' needs (Lee et al., 2015). When the benefits of joining a trade fair are more than the costs, exhibitors are likely to be satisfied (Lee et al., 2015).

Lin, Kerstetter, and Hickerson (2015) developed a scale to measure the exhibitor's overall satisfaction.

This scale consisted of the following dimensions: 1) exhibitor's self-performance, 2) exhibitor–visitor link, and 3) exhibitor–organizer link. According to Lin et al. (2015), the exhibitor–organizer link is crucial as it stresses that exhibitors are more valuable than visitors because trade fair organizers collect most of their revenues from exhibitors. This implies that exhibitors' satisfaction is crucial for behavioral intentions.

Intentions to Re-Exhibit

The intention to re-exhibit is important to trade fair organizers as obtaining new customers is likely to be more expensive (Spreng, Harrel, & Mckoy, 1995). It will be more cost-effective for a trade fair organizer to have loyal exhibitors. This implies that satisfied exhibitors are likely to join the trade fair again. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H3. Exhibitors' satisfaction has a positive effect on their re-exhibit intentions.

Intentions to Spread Positive Word of Mouth

The exhibitors' postpurchase behavior can include a favorable or unfavorable WOM intention that can be relayed person to person or online (Ok, Back, & Shanklin, 2007). Potential exhibitors can ask previous or present exhibitors for their feedback on their trade fair participation. Thus, positive WOM can influence potential exhibitors to join the trade fair (Ok et al., 2007). This leads to the following hypothesis:

- H4. Exhibitors' satisfaction has a positive effect on WOM intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

The study's questionnaire consisted of two parts: a) demographic variables and b) close-ended questions that measured the respondents' agreement to the study's variables using a 7-point Likert scale, where 7 indicates a positive view (strongly agree) and 1 represents a negative view (strongly disagree). It was pilot tested among 15 exhibitors. Revisions were made after the pilot testing to improve the questionnaire (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). The variables were measured in the statements in Table 2.

Research Design, Area, and Subject of Study

A person-assisted questionnaire was used to collect the data from the exhibitors. The respondents, who were surveyed using convenience sampling, were composed of 229 exhibitors based in the Philippines. The exhibitors were owners or managers of MSMEs in apparel, fashion accessories, furniture, gifts, and housewares. All of them have previous experience in joining the Manila FAME Trade Fair. Based on the number of employees, most of the respondents' firms were small (90%), medium (8%), and micro (2%).

Statistical Analysis

To test the model of green purchase intention, *t*-tests, correlation, and path analysis were conducted using SMART PLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of reliability of the model is presented in Table 3. In order to test the quality of the measurement model, its reliability and validity are evaluated by testing its indicator reliability, internal consistency via the composite reliability and Cronbach alpha, average variance extracted (AVE), and the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which compares the square root of each construct's average variance extracted with its correlations with all other constructs in the model.

The results revealed that the construct measures are reliable and valid since they have attained AVE values of 0.50 or higher, which means that, on average, the constructs explain more than half of the variance of its indicators. In terms of its internal consistency reliability, the Cronbach alphas are considered satisfactory since they fall above 0.70. The composite reliability values are considered satisfactory since they fall between 0.70 and 0.90 (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994).

Evaluation of the constructs' discriminant validity is shown on Table 4. The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used as the approach in order to assess the constructs' discriminant validity, which compares the square root of the AVE values with the latent variable correlations. The result showed that the square root of each construct's AVE is greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. This shows that the constructs are truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards.

Table 2. *Variables and Survey Statements*

Variable	Statements
Trade fair organizer's reputation	The organizer is a highly regarded organizer. The organizer is a successful organizer. The organizer is a well-established organizer.
Booth design and layout	Booth design, theme, and functionality were appropriate and satisfactory. Booth location was adequate/sufficient. Booth space was adequate/sufficient.
Exhibition logistics	It was easy to transport our materials to the exhibition. The amount of time given for setup was adequate/sufficient. It was easy to find our booth in the exhibition directory.
Venue services	Venue was accessible. Venue was safe. Venue services were easy to obtain.
Show management	Registration process was easy. Registration fees were easy to pay. The fair helped us learned more about the market and competitors.
Exhibitors' satisfaction	I am satisfied with the trade fair. I am pleased with my trade fair experience. I am happy with this trade fair.
Re-exhibit intention	I intend to re-exhibit at this trade fair. I plan to re-exhibit at this trade fair in the future. I will make an effort to re-exhibit at this trade fair.
WOM intention	I will spread positive reviews about this fair. I will encourage others to exhibit at this fair. I will recommend this trade fair to others.

Note. WOM = word of mouth.

Table 3. *Validity and Internal Consistency and Reliability*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Booth design	0.946	0.965	0.902
Exhibition logistics	0.946	0.965	0.902
Re-exhibition intention	0.974	0.987	0.975
Reputation	0.992	0.995	0.984
Satisfaction	0.983	0.989	0.967
Show management	0.633	0.803	0.599
Venue services	0.931	0.956	0.879
WOM intention	0.986	0.991	0.973

Note. WOM = word of mouth.

Table 4. *Discriminant Validity*

	Booth Design	Exhibition Logistics	Re-exhibition Intention	Reputation	Satisfaction	Show Management	Venue Services	WOM Intention
Booth design	0.950							
Exhibition logistics	0.879	0.950						
Re-exhibition intention	0.762	0.731	0.987					
Reputation	0.737	0.758	0.842	0.992				
Satisfaction	0.732	0.741	0.849	0.841	0.983			
Show management	0.702	0.774	0.684	0.672	0.696	0.774		
Venue services	0.831	0.812	0.773	0.771	0.767	0.758	0.938	
WOM intention	0.752	0.766	0.883	0.921	0.852	0.692	0.784	0.986

Note: The numbers in bold font show that the AVE of each latent construct is higher than the construct's highest squared correlation with any other latent construct (Hair et. al., 2011).

Table 5. *t-Tests of Path Coefficients*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t Statistics (O/STDEV)	p Values
Booth design > satisfaction	0.091	0.086	0.102	0.894	0.371
Exhibition logistics > satisfaction	0.013	-0.009	0.137	0.093	0.926
Reputation > satisfaction	0.561	0.535	0.122	4.582	0.000
Satisfaction > re-exhibit intention	0.844	0.850	0.032	26.684	0.000
Satisfaction > WOM intention	0.852	0.852	0.036	23.427	0.000
Show management > satisfaction	0.134	0.231	0.171	0.782	0.434
Venue services > satisfaction	0.147	0.105	0.127	1.158	0.247

Note. WOM = word of mouth.

Table 5 shows that except for hypothesis 1, hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 are supported. Figure 1 shows the significant variables in the framework.

Figure 1 shows that booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, and venue services were not significant to exhibitors' satisfaction. This did not support the existing literature (Lee et al., 2015). This may be due to the fact that the exhibitors collaborated and partnered with the trade fair organizer for these service dimensions (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Since trade fair participation is viewed as collaborative and partnering behavior between the trade fair organizer and the exhibitors, the exhibitors are in control of the quality of the service dimensions

of booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Further, these are not the primary goals of exhibitors in joining the trade fair, but these are services for which the exhibitors had shared responsibility and accountability with the trade fair organizer (Lee et al., 2015).

Show management was not significant to exhibitors' satisfaction. This finding supported the existing literature (Lee et al., 2015). As collaborators and partners in the trade fair program, exhibitors were equally responsible (just like the trade fair organizer) in managing their trade fair participation (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). Further, show management was

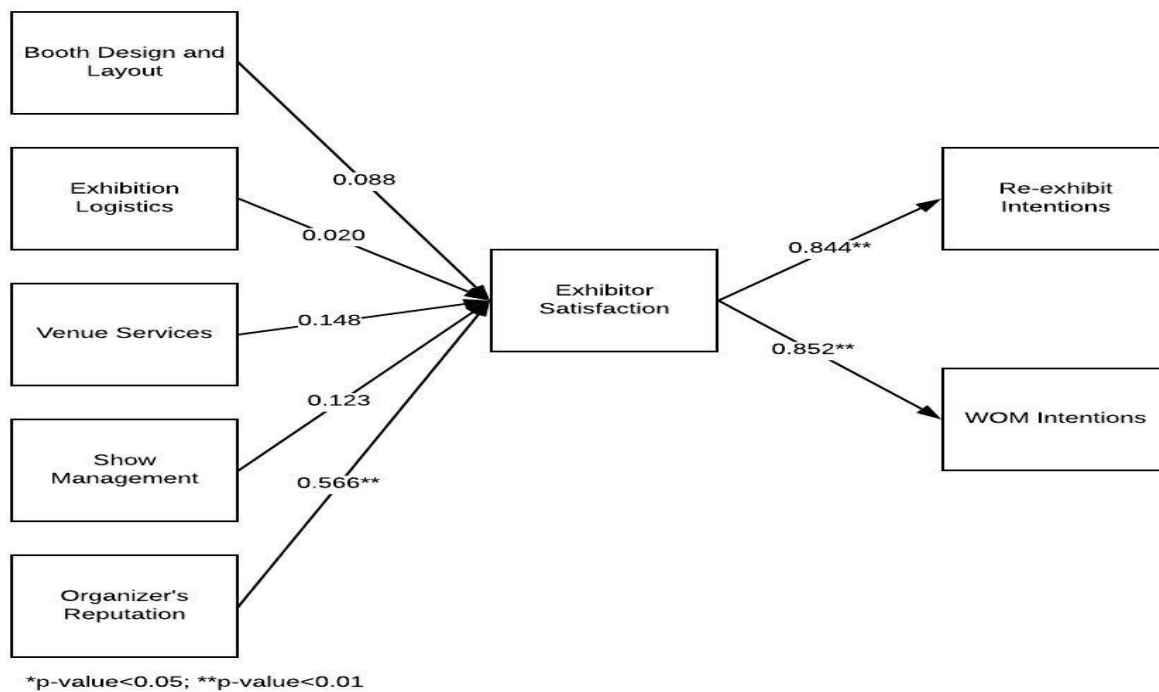


Figure 1. Effect of service dimensions and organizer's reputation on exhibitors' satisfaction and behavioral intentions (adapted from Lee et al., 2015).

not directly related to exhibitors' major goals of sales generation and meeting new and existing importers (Lee et al., 2015).

The trade fair organizer's reputation was significant to the exhibitors' satisfaction. While the exhibitors were in control of the quality of service dimensions since they were partners and collaborators in the trade fair program, the exhibitors were not in control of the trade fair organizer's reputation. Thus, this variable was significant to exhibitors. This supported existing literature that the trade fair's reputation is significant to the exhibitors' satisfaction (Chien & Chi, 2019; Proszowska, 2019; Santos & da Silva, 2013). Since the Manila FAME Trade Fair exhibitors are MSMEs, this does not validate the existing literature that states that large enterprises are most likely to consider the trade fair organizer's reputation before joining a trade fair (Chien & Chi, 2019).

The results showed that the exhibitors' satisfaction is significant to behavioral intentions, may they be re-exhibit intentions or WOM intentions. This validates existing studies that show that exhibitors' satisfaction can lead to re-exhibit and WOM intentions (Lee et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2015; Ok et al., 2007; Spreng, Harrel, & Mckoy, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The trade fair organizer's reputation can affect exhibitors' satisfaction and, consequently, positive behavioral intentions (Chien & Chi, 2019; Lee et al., 2015). CITEM, as a trade fair organizer, should strive to have a good reputation as this can affect the exhibitors' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Since CITEM is a government agency under the Department of Trade and Industry, this reputation is enhanced by endorsement by other government agencies, industry associations, media exposure, and UFI membership (Santos & da Silva, 2013).

The quality of the service dimensions of booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management should be viewed as part of collaborative and partnering efforts between the trade fair organizer and exhibitors. This is part of business-to-business relationship marketing that exists under a culture of shared goals, shared responsibilities, and shared outcomes (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). These service dimensions may not be significant to exhibitors' satisfaction as exhibitors are collaborators and partners in these services (Siemieniako & Gebarowski, 2017). With the trend in trade fairs to go

virtual, these service dimensions may not be crucial to exhibitors in the future (Golfetto & Rinallo, 2014; Ling-ye, 2010).

This empirical study validated the trade fair organizer's reputation, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention framework.

There is very limited research on trade fairs in the context of a developing country in Asia. This research fills this gap. Trade fair organizers need to communicate to exhibitors that they are partners and collaborators in service dimensions of booth design and layout, exhibition logistics, venue services, and show management. This collaboration and partnership, including the important exchange of communication before the trade fair, during the trade fair proper, and after the trade fair, is an important component of relationship marketing.

LIMITATION AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Convenience sampling was used to gather data. Thus, the results cannot be generalized for the trade fair industry. Future studies can study exhibitors from other industries and from other Asian countries.

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