

Overall Performance of Exhibitors at Tradeshaw: Visitors Perspective

RAVI SHANKAR C AND L .SRIVIDHYA

A tradeshow is an excellent place to learn about the industry trends by observing who is exhibiting, the products and services they are promoting, the new products they are introducing, who else is attending the show (job functions and companies), and so on. Many companies send employees to tradeshow to gather intelligence about their competitors. You can pick up valuable information by keeping your eyes and ears open, speaking to a wide range of exhibitors and attendees, and absorbing what's going on around you.

Tradeshow rank second to advertising in the business marketing communications budget for many companies. That is why tradeshow have emerged as an important component of business companies' marketing strategies. This paper seeks to examine the overall performance of the exhibitors at tradeshow. The paper helps the exhibitors to analyse their Return on Investment (ROI) for the tradeshow.

Key words: Tradeshow, Tradefairs, Tradeshow performance, Exhibitors Show Performance, Marketing Strategy, Visitor Perspective, Coimbatore Tradeshow, Return on Investment.

INTRODUCTION

In India, Trade Shows or Trade Fairs have now developed into an essential part of the metropolitan life style of its people. In these eventful occasions, these Trade shows all over India act as reliable platforms for an interaction between participants and customers and buyers to generate business. Business needs are met through these events. Trade shows in India are opportune events for the manufacturers.

The Great Exhibition was the first international trade fair. It was the ultimate example of a horizontal exhibition where a multitude of products and services in specific industry groupings as well as by country or geographic region were presented – not only to industrial users but to the general public as well.

Dr. Ravi Shankar C is an Assistant Professor, School of Commerce and International Business, Dr.G.R.Damodaran College of Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, Mobile: 09150417068.

Ms. L .Srividhya, Research Scholar, Department of English, Government Arts College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, Mobile: 9150430137.

India has carved a niche for itself in the global commercial market owing to its steady economical boom. As a result, several countries find this to be a huge prospect from which they may benefit. These Indian Trade Shows are also good opportunities for the multi national companies as they can come to this land and access the Indian market's response towards their products.

In brief, these Trade Shows in India present a win-win position for both the companies as well as the consumers. These fairs and trade shows are one of the best methods to expand and gain knowledge of some innovative business strategies as well as market conditions of India.

For many people, attending tradeshows is a major part of their business activities, and for some it is just an entertainment. Some people go to tradeshows only to buy products, but if someone starts thinking about the opportunity of a tradeshow for business networking, they do not want to miss a single tradeshow around their area. Further, attending tradeshows for many people is a great way to learn about new products and get their name out there as tradeshows will expose new ideas, innovation and greater opportunities to consumers (visitors). Tradeshow marketing consists of not only driving visitors to tradeshows, but the experience they have when they are there.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING TRADESHOW

Once a firm decides to implement its marketing strategies partly through exhibiting at tradeshows, it must also decide on which tradeshow it will attend in about a year in advance in order to make all the necessary arrangements. However, there is very little information in the literature to aid the foreign exhibitors in making their decisions regarding tradeshow selection. Yet, in the absence of clear analytical guidance, decisions should be made.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bonama (1983) provided two perspectives on the reasons why companies attend a trade show for both existing and potential customers. From the selling standpoint, variables such as clientele assurance and new market development, access to key decision makers, information dispersal regarding the product and service, actual product sales, and the opportunity to service customers were addressed. From the communication standpoint, variables such as maintaining the company's image for customers, competitors, and the media, information collection about competitors and the market, the opportunity to boost employee morale, and the chance to test new products were addressed. Smith, Hama, and Smith (2003) investigated the exhibitors' show performance

among Japanese companies at the NAHB IBS (National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show). Results suggest that managing suppliers, understanding the products and industry trends, analyzing sales trends, and educating employees were the four dimensions of show performance.

For Chinese exporting firms participating in international trade shows, Fu, Yang, & Qi (2007) analyzed trade show performance according to 8 categories: acquire customers, collect orders, seek customers' opinion for product improvement, speak with existent customers, conduct a competitor analysis, explore industry and technology trends, find distributors, boost company reputation.

In general, previous studies saw trade show performance from a selling and non-selling perspective (Bonoma, 1983; Fu, Yang, & Qi, 2007; Hansen, 1996, 2004; Kerin & Cron, 1987; Shoham, 1992). The non-selling point of view can be classified into information collection activity, image building activity, and networking (Hansen, 2004). Maintaining employee morale, brought up by Bonoma (1983) and Shoham (1992), can be reclassified as a motivation activity. New product testing, from Bonoma (1983), was classified as a sales activity in the studies of Kerin and Cron (1987) and Hansen (2004).

Taken as a whole, the findings from the literature review suggest the dimensions of a trade show performance as sales, information collection, image building, networking, and motivation.

MEASURING EXHIBITOR ACTIVITIES

The process of trade fair exhibiting involves several phases, each comprising numerous activities. The time period involved—from the first notion that a company might exhibit at a trade fair to taking the final follow-up action—often spans a number of years. Good marketing and project management skills are required if a trade fair exhibit is to achieve its goals. Many activities have to be planned and managed and the literature offers many views as well as some research-based findings about appropriate behaviour.

Gopalakrishna & Lilien 1995¹ found that companies exhibit for a variety of reasons. The market situation facing a company will be a primary determinant of its precise fair objectives, which could vary from "awareness creation" at one extreme to "seek new or repeat sales" at the other. Such objectives will shape much of the planning for the exhibit, especially the selection and training of the people who will staff the operation.

1. Gopalakrishna, Srinath & Lilien, Gary L. (1995), "A Three-stage Model of Industrial Tradeshow Performance," *Marketing Science*, 14 (1), pp. 22-42

IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF TRADESHOWS

Trade fairs play a key marketing role in most industries and many firms allocate a significant portion of their marketing budgets to participation at these events. There is a growing interest in trade fairs (shows or exhibitions) on the part of academic researchers. Further, the importance of tradeshow in the promotion mix is increasing.

Tradeshows, meetings and events of all types are the primary venues where promotional products are given out to increase brand awareness, corporate recognition, or to remind recipients of the purpose of an organization. Promotional items distributed at these gatherings provide a long-lasting reminder of exhibitors' message or marketing theme through repeated exposure of their logo and message. Tradeshows offer a strong opportunity to enhance brand recognition, launch new products, promote company, generate leads and drive sales. Meetings, whether intra-corporate or to an audience of potential clients require a different and generally more upscale group of promotional items to drive home the themes of vision, direction, creativity, or the benefits of more expensive products and services.

Trade Shows are a complicated form of Marketing- they encompass practically every sales and marketing tool available – Direct Mail (Postcards before the show in particular), trade journal advertising, some mass media advertising (TV, radio, newspapers), public relations and now, more than ever, social media. Developing a strategy utilizes the best mix and at the same time effectively implements many, if not all, of these tools is essential. Most organizations overlook the different synergies that may be applied or, worse yet, fail to recognize the unique potential these tools encompass.

Every Show is Different- and because of this exhibitors fail to consider the characteristics that make each show unique. For example, factors such as attendance, time of year, competition, the state of the industry, educational opportunities (seminars, symposiums, etc), even geography. Approaching each show the same way you have done it before is not a good idea. Using your best management practices analyse the show's potential and develop the best strategy for that particular show to achieve maximum success.

Most Organizations Exhibit for the wrong or unrealistic reasons- How many companies go to a trade show because they are told there will be thousands of attendees; yet wouldn't know what to do with the crowds if they came? If you go to these types of shows do you have plans in place to qualify leads and follow up properly once the show is over? And how many organizations go because 'We'd be conspicuous by our absence'? Trade shows are an extraordinary opportunity when used properly and realistically.

Unfortunately, most organizations don't understand the truest measure of any tradeshow is its overall purchasing power and how much they can realistically expect to harvest.

Most Corporations don't know how to measure trade show success-when it comes to measuring ROI; most organizations are in the dark. That's precisely what's happened to the trade show industry during this economic downturn (2007 to the present). As a result, the vast majority of corporations in the US have either have cut back or curtailed their trade show budgets (it's one of the first line items to be cut). Unless exhibitors know how to put a realistic forecast in place to measure ROI with an achievable strategy for sales; then this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Most staffers don't know why they're there and/or what to do-most organizations place little or no emphasis on training exhibit staffers on what to do once in the trade show display area and how to sell at a trade show.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

For the present study, the following objective is framed:

To discuss the visitors perception towards the overall performance of exhibitors at tradeshow.

METHODOLOGY

The study is restricted to Coimbatore city. Visitors of various trade shows are sample respondents. Simple random sampling technique has been administered in the study. 530 questionnaires were distributed to the visitors of tradeshow, of which 260 were usable. The following statistical tools were applied in tune with the objectives: Percentage analysis, t-test, f-test and factor analysis. All tests were carried out at 1%, 5% and 10% level of significance. The primary data related to the study was collected in various exhibition halls such as CODDISIA trade fairs, Padmavathi cultural hall, Jayam's hall and Coimbatore Central Jail ground.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**Profile of visitors**

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Tradeshow Visitors in the Sample

Demographic Factors	Number of Respondents	Relative Frequency (%)
Location		
Rural	42	16.15
Semi-urban	99	38.08
Urban	119	45.77
Sex		
Male	134	51.54
Female	126	48.46
Age		
Up to 25 Years	52	20.00
26 – 35 Years	84	32.31
36 – 45 Years	80	30.77
> 45 Years	44	16.92
Educational Qualification		
Up to Secondary	82	31.54
Graduation	129	49.62
Post graduation	49	18.85
Family Size		
Up to 3 members	92	35.38
4 – 5 members	121	46.54
> 5 members	47	18.08
Occupation		
Student	48	18.46
Housewife	66	25.38
Govt Employee	38	14.62
Private Employee	55	21.15
Business / SE	53	20.38
Family Income		
Up to Rs.10000	83	31.92
Rs.10001 – 20000	110	42.31
> Rs.20000	67	25.77
Total Sample	260	100.00

Source: Primary Data.

It is understood that from the table 1 that the majority of the respondents are male 51.54%. Of the total respondents 32.3% fall under the category of 26-35yrs. 45.7% of the respondents are urbanites and 46.5% of the respondents family consists of 4-5 members.49.62% of them are graduates and 42.3% of the respondents' monthly income ranges between Rs.10,000 – Rs.20,000. 25.3% of the respondents are housewives who are much eager to visit trade shows.

Table 2. Profile of the Tradeshow Visitors Based on their Status Relative to Tradeshows

Visitors Status Relative to Tradeshows	Number of Respondents	RelativeFrequency (%)
Time of Visit		
First Time	126	48.46
Long Time	134	51.54
Frequency of Visit		
One Time	109	41.92
2 – 3 times	76	29.23
> 3 Times	75	28.85
Sources of Information		
Friends & Relatives	140	53.85
Newspapers / Magazine	42	16.15
Television / Radio	56	21.54
Poster / Pamphlet	22	8.46
Number of Products Purchased		
One product	84	32.31
2 – 3 products	99	38.08
> 3 products	77	29.62
Total Sample	260	100.00

Source: Primary Data.

Table 2 presents that in case of time of visit of respondents 51.54% seem to be long term visitors. Most (41.92%) of the respondent's frequency of visits to a particular trade show is once. Maximum (53.8%) respondents are aware about trade shows from their friends and relatives. 38.8% of the respondents have purchased an average of 2-3 products from trade fairs.

OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF EXHIBITORS AT TRADESHOW

Visitors' perception about the overall performance of exhibitors at tradeshows is evaluated here. In the questionnaire, 5 items are used in the scale measuring overall performance among visitors. First reliability of the items in the scale is undertaken followed by factor analysis to identify the dimensionality of the overall performance of exhibitors at tradeshows based on the views expressed by visitors. The results of the analysis with discussion are presented here.

Table 3. Reliability of the Items in the Scale Measuring “Overall Performance of the Tradeshows” among Visitors

	Items in the Measurement Scale	Item to Total Correlation	Alpha if Deleted
1	After Tradeshow, we follow up with exhibitors (sales leads)	0.51	0.68
2	TS helps us to know in-depth about market (market penetration)	0.50	0.69
3	Creates / increases awareness about our products among us	0.51	0.68
4	Creates / improves positive perceptions about various products among us	0.41	0.72
5	Helps us gather competitive information about a product	0.54	0.67
Cronbach Alpha Coefficient		0.73	

Source: Primary Data.

It is apparent from table 3 that the calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.73 is above the minimum required value of 0.70 for the items to have internal consistency. Also, item-to-total correlation shows consistent pattern of sufficient correlation (> 0.30) and elimination of any one of the items would not be going to increase Cronbach alpha coefficient value further. It is thus apparent that all 5 items in the scale used for measuring exhibitors' overall performance at tradeshows for visitors are reliable.

The scale scores are analysed with factor analysis to find out the dimensions underlying the overall performance of exhibitors at tradeshows as has been perceived by visitors. Table 4 shows the results of factor analysis.

Factor analysis of the overall performance scores has produced two underlying factors with eigenvalue above 1. The proportion of variance in the original scores explained by first factor is 38.06 per cent and second factor is 31.88 per cent. Both factors account for around 70 per cent of the variance in the actual score. Items 1, 3 and 5 has the substantial loadings with first factors, items 2 and 4 have high loadings with second factor. Also, from the factor loadings of items with first factor, it is known that loading of item 3 is higher followed by the loading of item 1 compared to that of item 5.

Table 4. Results of Factor Analysis showing Underlying Dimensions of Overall Performance of the Tradeshows Based on the Views Expressed by Visitors

Items in Measurement Scale	Underlying Factors (Dimensions)	
	1	2
1 After TS, we follow up with exhibitors (sales leads)	0.80	
3 Creates / increases awareness about exhibitors products among us	0.85	
5 Helps us gather competitive information about a product	0.69	
2 TS helps us to know in-depth about market (market penetration)		0.82
4 Creates / improves positive perceptions about various products among us		0.89
Eigenvalue	1.90	1.59
% of Total Variance	38.06	31.88
Cumulative % of Total Variance	38.06	69.94
Factor Label	Creates / Increases Awareness about Products	Creates / Increases Positive Perceptions about Various Products

Source: Primary Data.

Similarly from the factor of items with second factor, it is clear that item 4 is higher than that of item 2. This in turn shows that first factor refers to “creating / increasing awareness about products” and the second factor reflecting “creating / increasing positive opinion about products” exhibited at tradeshows. On the whole, it is found that overall performance of the exhibitors at tradeshows is characterised by how they create / increase awareness about their products and how they create / increase positive opinion among visitors about products they display at tradeshows according to viewpoints of the visitors.

The visitors’ opinion about the above two aspects of overall performance of the exhibitors at tradeshows is compared by their personal characteristics and the results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Comparison of Visitors' Opinion about Overall Performance of Tradeshows in respect of "Creating / Increasing Awareness about Products" by Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Mean	SD	Test Stat	Test Value	DF
Location					
Rural	3.48	0.71	F	0.25 ^{NS}	2, 257
Semi-Urban	3.52	0.63			
Urban	3.56	0.54			
Sex					
Male	3.53	0.61	t	0.08 ^{NS}	258
Female	3.53	0.60			
Age					
Up to 25 Years	3.50	0.57	F	2.04 ^{NS}	3, 256
26 – 35 Years	3.61	0.61			
36 – 45 Years	3.41	0.67			
> 45 Years	3.64	0.47			
Education					
Up to Secondary	3.51	0.66	F	1.87 ^{NS}	2, 257
Graduation	3.49	0.59			
Post graduation	3.68	0.53			
Family Size					
Up to 3 members	3.47	0.62	F	1.00 ^{NS}	2, 257
4 - 5 members	3.59	0.58			
above 5 members	3.51	0.63			
Occupation					
Student	3.51	0.59	F	0.64 ^{NS}	4, 255
Housewife	3.48	0.69			
Govt Employee	3.49	0.59			
Private Employee	3.52	0.57			
Business / SE	3.65	0.55			
Family Income					
Up to Rs.10000	3.41	0.70	F	5.25 ^{***}	2, 257
Rs.10001 - 20000	3.51	0.55			
> Rs.20000	3.72	0.50			

SD – Standard Deviation; DF- Degrees of freedom; NS – Not significant

***Significant at 1% level.

An examination of table-5 shows that the mean scores vary from 3.48 to 3.56 for age groups, 3.53 to 3.54 for sex, 3.41 to 3.64 for age, 3.49 to 3.68 for education, 3.47 to 3.59 for family size, 3.48 to 3.65 for occupation and from 3.41 to 3.72 for visitor groups by family income. While mean scores for most of the visitor groups across the categories are in the "good"

opinion range (≥ 3.50 and < 4.50), it is below 3.50 for rural groups (Mean = 3.48), aged between 36 – 45 years (Mean = 3.41), graduates (Mean = 3.49), with family size up to 3 members (Mean = 3.47), housewives (Mean = 3.48) and government employees (Mean = 3.49) and for visitor group with family income up to Rs.10000 (Mean = 3.41).

Though there is difference in the level of opinion among groups across all categories by demographic characteristics, group means differ significantly only by family income as the obtained F statistic value of 5.25 is significant at 1 per cent level while for other categories test-statistics are insignificant. In sum it is understood that most of the visitor groups have perceived good and group means does not differ significantly.

From the overall results, it is thus found that exhibitors have shown good performance at tradeshows in terms of creating / increasing awareness about their products according to the opinion of visitors at tradeshows.

Table 6. Comparison of Visitors’ Opinion about Overall Performance of Tradeshows in respect of “Creating / Increasing Positive Attitude towards Products” by Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Mean	SD	Test Stat	Test Value	DF
Location					
Rural	3.64	0.74	F	3.24**	2, 257
Semi-Urban	3.95	0.89			
Urban	4.00	0.71			
Sex					
Male	3.86	0.74	t	-1.36 NS	258
Female	3.99	0.85			
Age					
Up to 25 Years	3.86	0.82	F	2.01 NS	3, 256
26 – 35 Years	3.79	0.80			
36 – 45 Years	4.08	0.81			
> 45 Years	3.97	0.70			
Education					
Up to Secondary	4.00	0.85	F	3.86**	2, 257
Graduation	3.79	0.77			
Post graduation	4.13	0.73			
Family Size					
Up to 3 members	3.94	0.80	F	1.00 NS	2, 257
4 - 5 members	3.97	0.81			
above 5 members	3.78	0.74			

Occupation					
Student	3.91	0.83	F	1.04 ^{NS}	4, 255
Housewife	4.05	0.80			
Govt Employee	4.00	0.74			
Private Employee	3.89	0.87			
Business / SE	3.76	0.71			
Family Income					
Up to Rs.10000	4.04	0.86	F	1.40 ^{NS}	2, 257
Rs.10001 – 20000	3.88	0.81			
> Rs.20000	3.85	0.67			

SD – Standard Deviation; DF- Degrees of freedom; NS – Not significant

**Significant at 5% level.

From Table 6, it is apparent that the mean scores for all visitor groups across categories by location (Rural = 3.64, semi-urban = 3.95 and urban = 4.00), sex (Male = 3.89 and Female = 3.99), age (Up to 25 years = 3.86, 26 – 35 years = 3.79, 36 – 45 years = 4.08 and > 45 years = 3.97), education (Up to secondary = 4.00, graduation = 3.79 and post graduation = 4.13), family size (Up to 3 members = 3.94, 4 – 5 members = 3.67 and above 5 members = 3.78), occupation (student = 3.94, housewife = 4.05, government employee = 4.00, private employee = 3.89 and business / self-employed = 3.76) and by family income (Up to Rs.10000 = 4.04, Rs.10001 – 20000 = 3.88 and > Rs.20000 = 3.85) are well above 3.50 and within 4.50, the lower and upper bound for 'Good' opinion range with regard to overall performance of exhibitors in creating / increasing positive attitude towards products displayed at tradeshows.

Though opinions among visitor groups are in the good opinion range, the levels of opinion among them vary significantly by location (F value = 3.24, $p < 0.05$) and education (F value = 3.86, $p < 0.05$). However differences in group means across most of the visitors' categories are almost zero as the calculated test-statistic values are insignificant. Hence, it is summed up from the above results that overall exhibitors have shown good performance in respect of creating / increasing positive attitude towards products they have displayed at tradeshows as has been perceived by the visitors.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed the overall performance of exhibitors at tradeshow, based on the views expressed by visitors. It is found that the overall performance of the exhibitors at tradeshows is based on how they create / increase awareness and how they create / increase positive opinion about products they display at tradeshows. And also it is found that the overall performance of the exhibitors

in creating / increasing awareness about their products at tradeshows has been good according to visitors at tradeshows. Visitors have perceived overall performance of the exhibitors in creating / increasing positive attitude towards products they have displayed at tradeshows as good. The overall performance of the exhibitors is mainly based on creating / improving awareness as well as positive perception about various products. To conclude, tradeshows prove to be an effective marketing tool to make the potential to prospective buyers. Thus, trade shows are connecting a link between the customer and the manufacturer directly.

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