

Performance Evaluation of Service Quality Implementation by Exhibition Manufacturers Based on Data Envelopment Analysis

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Abstract

In recent years, the convention and exhibition industry has garnered global attention and is experiencing rapid growth. Concurrently, the Asian convention and exhibition market is expanding at an impressive rate, growing twice as fast as its European and American counterparts. This remarkable growth highlights the significant potential of the Asian market. As competition in the exhibition industry intensifies, maintaining high quality has become a crucial differentiator. In this era where service and quality are paramount, understanding the aspects of service quality that customers truly value has become a key trend. Consequently, this study focuses on evaluating the service quality of exhibition manufacturers' effectiveness evaluation. This research targets Taiwanese convention and exhibition manufacturers, evaluating a total of 12 decision-making units (DMUs). The findings are as follows: 1. The service quality efficiency of one DMU was found to be exceptionally strong. Four DMUs exhibited service quality efficiency ranging between 0.9 and 1, while the remaining seven DMUs had efficiency values below 0.9. 2. The study also analyzes the variables contributing to these differences, offering directions for improvement by addressing areas of both overinvestment and underinvestment. By reducing investment in overfunded projects and increasing investment in underfunded ones, the industry can enhance both service quality and efficiency. Based on these results, recommendations are made to assist exhibition manufacturers in organizing professional events, providing a reference for exhibition organizers. These improvements aim to establish a strong reputation and attract more consumers to future exhibitions.

Keywords: exhibition industry, service quality, performance evaluation, data envelopment analysis (DEA)

1. Introduction

In recent years, the convention and exhibition industry has attracted significant global attention and is experiencing rapid growth. Governments worldwide are recognizing this sector as a crucial area for development and are actively supporting its expansion. Many economies, particularly those reliant on foreign export trade, are seeing a rise in international trade exchanges and an increasing demand from enterprises and manufacturers to promote their products through exhibitions. Exhibitions provide potential buyers with essential information and offer sellers invaluable opportunities to engage directly with buyers and showcase their products in person. Major industry exhibitions worldwide serve as critical venues for sealing deals and establishing trade pipelines. However, hosting a successful exhibition that attracts numerous manufacturers requires understanding the services that exhibitors prioritize. Many exhibitors consider the venue's location and the quality of services provided to be paramount.

As competition intensifies, the quality of facilities, accommodations, and services becomes a key differentiator.

Currently, most research related to the convention and exhibition industry tends to combine both conferences and exhibitions, focusing primarily on industry development and location selection. While studies on the exhibition industry often emphasize the performance and marketing strategies of exhibition manufacturers, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the service quality of exhibitions. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided by exhibition vendors. By identifying the aspects of service quality that exhibitors value, this study aims to provide valuable insights for organizing successful professional exhibitions. These insights can help exhibition organizers build a strong reputation and attract more participants, thereby contributing positively to the growth and success of the exhibition industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Exhibition

Exhibitions encompass expos, trade fairs, and other similar events, where exhibitors showcase their goods for buyers to view (Jian & Wang, 2013). Given the transactional nature of these activities, general non-commercial exhibitions, such as art exhibitions, historical cultural relics exhibitions, and other artistic and academic displays, are excluded. The International Federation of Exhibitions defines an exhibition as "a time-sensitive temporary market that allows sellers and buyers to engage in on-site display and sales activities, such as viewing samples, consulting, and placing orders, under planned organization" (Bocken et al., 2014). Many scholars, both domestic and international, have proposed various concepts and definitions for exhibitions. DaSilva & Trkman (2014) define an exhibition as an event designed for shareholders or suppliers to display, introduce, and promote their products to a specific market. Liu et al. (2015) identify the main advantages of exhibitions as guiding future sales, facilitating face-to-face interactions with customers, gathering information about competitors, and establishing a brand image in customers' minds. Baranwal & Vidyarthi (2016) argue that the primary purpose of exhibitions is to display products for public relations, marketing, and sales, with the main function being the detailed introduction of product-related information. Exhibitions are often held in conjunction with conferences and serve as a platform for conference organizers, providing a significant source of income and fostering communication within the industry, while typically being closed to the public. The professional nature of these exhibitions is evident. Philipson (2016), in "How to Participate in Foreign Exhibitions," describes commercial exhibitions as short-term professional events aimed at promoting business, trade, and profit. These exhibitions recruit manufacturers to showcase products or services, allowing buyers to view and negotiate.

2.2 Service Quality

Lusch & Nambisan (2015) assert that the discussion of service quality should encompass the following three characteristics:

- (1) Service quality is more challenging to measure than product quality.
- (2) Service quality is determined by comparing customer expectations with the services received.
- (3) The measurement of quality includes both service outcomes and the service process.

Achtenhagen et al. (2013) categorize the effect and impact of service quality on users into five components:

- (1) Internal Quality: The quality that users cannot see.
- (2) Hardware Quality: The visible, tangible quality.
- (3) Software Quality: The intangible quality that users can see.
- (4) Timeliness: Refers to service time and promptness.
- (5) Psychological Quality: Pertains to the attitude of service personnel.

Kim (2013) also divides service quality into technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality refers to what customers actually obtain from services, such as technical solutions, employee skills, and knowledge. Functional quality, on the other hand, pertains to how the service is delivered, including the service attitude of employees, tangible equipment, or appearance, all of which impact functional quality. Chen et al. (2016) argue that the most appropriate method to evaluate service quality is to measure the quality perceived by customers. They define service quality as "the degree of difference between customers' expectations for services and their perceptions of actual service performance."

2.3 The Importance of Service Quality in Exhibitions

Barnham (2015) conducted a study through the American Association for the Advancement of Associations. Among the 18 primary considerations for hosting a conference and exhibition, the facilities of the exhibition venue are deemed the most important, followed by the equipment of the conference center, and subsequently by the efficiency of professional service quality, the number of hotel rooms, the attitude of government units, and the attractiveness and image of the venue. The institute listed the following factors for consideration: (1) Exhibition hall and conference center facilities (85%), (2) Efficiency of service quality in convention and exhibition majors (64%), (3) Number of hotel rooms (54%), (4) Government support (53%), (5) Attractiveness of the venue (42%), (6) Image of the venue (41%), (7) Safety and friendliness of the location (33%), (8) Transportation convenience (32%), (9) Quality of catering services (27%), (10) Overall cost (26%), (11) Accessibility of the exhibition location (17%), (12) Festival activities (16%), (13) Scenic tours (12%)

Entertainment activities (11%), (14) Climate (10%), (15) Others, including shopping, language skills of local residents, and barrier-free space facilities, etc. (10%).

Lin (2015) employed the 7P model to depict the marketing mix of the exhibition venue:

- (1) Products: The products of convention and exhibition tourism consist of hardware facilities, brand (the venue's image), service level and quality, ancillary services (such as audio-

visual services), and marketing packaging (through the local tourism bureau or conference management company).

(2) Location: The exhibition's location acts as an intermediary in exhibition sales and significantly influences the decision-making process. Therefore, the venue's location and the city where the exhibition is held are crucial, with transportation convenience being another significant factor.

(3) Promotion: Exhibition promotion enhances its attraction. It can be achieved through discounts, auxiliary and public relations activities, with official endorsement aiding in establishing a strong positive image of the venue.

(4) Price: The local price of the host city is a vital marketing variable, covering conference and exhibition venues, food and accommodation, and other associated costs.

(5) Personnel: Service personnel play a crucial role in the success of exhibitions, as the products provided are essentially an experiential process. Their behavior and interaction with customers require meticulous attention in ensuring service quality.

(6) Physical Environment: The exhibition's physical environment encompasses decoration, atmosphere, lighting, signs, temperature adjustment, aesthetics, equipment, staff clothing, and exhibition space design.

(7) Process: Exhibition products include all experiences and perceptions from the beginning to the end of the event for participants and customers.

Carlborg et al. (2014) emphasized in their book "Exhibition Planning and Marketing" that a successful exhibition requires not only a certain number and quality of exhibitors and visitors but also high-quality exhibition services and effective showroom management. In today's increasingly homogenous marketing methods and publicity strategies in the exhibition industry, the competitiveness of an exhibition often hinges on the quality of its exhibition services. Lin et al. (2016) examined exhibition services from various perspectives and made the following distinctions:

(1) Distinguished by the recipients of exhibition services:

A. Services to exhibitors: Exhibitors are crucial customers with specific service requirements, including reporting on exhibition preparation status, providing industry development information, facilitating trade transactions, exhibit transportation, booth construction, on-site services, and business travel arrangements.

B. Services to visitors: Visitors, both professionals and the general public, have distinct service needs, including access to exhibition information, industry updates, product supply information, recruitment of suitable exhibitors, on-site services, and business travel arrangements.

C. Services for other stakeholders: This includes news media, industry associations, chambers of commerce, industry authorities, international organizations, and foreign institutions in China.

(2) Distinguished by different stages of exhibition preparation:

A. Pre-exhibition services: These are services provided to exhibitors, visitors, and other parties before the exhibition begins, such as notification of exhibition preparation status, exhibit transportation, exhibition visit consultation, and display planning services.

B. In-exhibition services: These services are provided from the opening to the duration of the exhibition and include venue security, cleaning, visitor registration, etc.

C. Post-exhibition services: After the exhibition, follow-up services are offered to exhibitors, visitors, and other parties, such as mailing exhibition results, providing traffic information, and introducing the sources and composition of exhibitors and visitors.

(3) Distinguished by the function of the exhibition:

A. Exhibition services: These encompass traditional services like product display, business dealings, new product releases, and exhibition planning, primarily provided and completed at the exhibition site.

B. Information consulting services: Providing business information and consulting services on industry development, trade needs, market analysis, etc., to exhibitors, visitors, and related industries.

C. Business travel services: Offering consultation and organization for business travel inspections to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the local market to exhibitors and visitors in need.

2.4 Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation often revolves around the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness, which gauge an organization's resource utilization and goal attainment. Charlesworth (2018) defines effectiveness as the ability to do the right thing, focusing on achieving goals and generating revenue while maximizing value for customers. It emphasizes outcomes and assesses whether the organization can effectively meet its objectives over time. On the other hand, Chen et al. (2016) posit that efficiency is about doing things right, concentrating on the optimal use of resources in the short term. It measures how effectively resources are utilized to maximize output or minimize costs, thereby enhancing organizational productivity.

Efficiency can be viewed as the performance of converting input factors into output, emphasizing the effective utilization of production resources. Zhang et al. (2016) explain it in economic terms, akin to Plato's optimal state. From an input-oriented perspective, it means maintaining the same output while either not increasing input resources or reducing input resources for other outputs. From an output-oriented standpoint, it involves maintaining the same input volume while either not decreasing one input or increasing investment resources in other input items. In both cases, the organization operates efficiently.

3. Research Method

Methods for Establishing Research Indicators. Drawing from the indicators proposed by the aforementioned scholars for evaluating the service quality performance of exhibition companies, this study employs the Delphi method to devise evaluation indicators. The Delphi Method, also known as the expert judgment method, is a group decision-making approach

characterized by both qualitative and quantitative aspects. It integrates interdisciplinary knowledge and future trends and is utilized in research settings where there is insufficient information or unknown conditions on a particular topic. Through anonymous expert surveys and iterative rounds of voting and feedback, differences in expert opinions are minimized until a consensus is reached. Experts selected for this method must possess knowledge, credibility, and accuracy, with a deeper understanding of the industry compared to laypeople, thereby rendering their judgments closer to factual accuracy. The value of the Delphi method lies in its ability to provide commonly accepted answers.

Establishment of Evaluation Indicators. This study establishes evaluation indicators based on the Durfee method, with the following definitions provided for each variable:

(1) Input Variables:

A. Financial Aspect: This encompasses costs associated with implementing service quality improvement plans.

B. Management Aspect: This includes expenditures related to the implementation of service quality initiatives.

(2) Output Variables:

A. Operating Income: This refers to the operational revenue generated by exhibition manufacturers.

B. Market Revenue: This denotes the market growth rate experienced by exhibition manufacturers.

Research Methods and Objects. The study utilizes the "Duffy method" and "data envelopment analysis" to analyze public data sourced from the statistical annual reports of various exhibition manufacturers. This data serves as the foundation for selecting performance indicators for both input and output variables. The empirical analysis conducted offers insights and reference points for improvement. The research specifically targets Taiwanese convention and exhibition manufacturers, encompassing a total of 12 evaluated DMUs (Decision-Making Units).

4. Finding and Discussion

Efficiency Analysis of Service Quality. The findings from the Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) efficiency assessment shed light on the effectiveness of service quality implementation among exhibition vendors. An efficiency value of 1 indicates relative efficiency for the Decision-Making Unit (DMU). Conversely, a value less than 1 suggests inefficiency. The empirical results are outlined in Table 1. Notably, one convention and exhibition manufacturer demonstrates relatively efficient service quality operations, achieving an efficiency value of 1. This signifies that the service quality of this particular manufacturer has reached an optimal state. In contrast, the remaining convention and exhibition manufacturers exhibit relatively poorer performance in terms of service quality.

Table 1. Efficiency values of relative efficiency of various exhibition manufacturers

Name of exhibition manufacturer	Overall Efficiency	Pure Technical Efficiency	Scale Efficiency
Asia Concentrate Corporation	0.84	0.84	0.84
GIS Group	0.86	0.85	0.86
HAN CAN LTD.	1.00	1.00	1.00
Wise Financial Maketing Co., Ltd.	0.95	0.94	0.95
Tackle Union International Business Co., Ltd.	0.98	0.97	0.98
Enjoy Professional Conference Organizer Corp.	0.88	0.89	0.87
Intercon Convention Management	0.90	0.90	0.90
Tang Yi International Art Curation Co., Ltd.	0.83	0.82	0.83
Elite PCO	0.92	0.91	0.92
Heshi Creative Co., Ltd.	0.80	0.80	0.80
Willy PCO	0.78	0.77	0.78
Lead Group PCO Co. Ltd.	0.86	0.85	0.86

Analysis of Differential Variables. Regarding returns to scale analysis, as depicted in Table 2, one convention and exhibition manufacturer exhibits fixed returns to scale, indicating that its execution of service quality efficiency has reached an optimal level. Conversely, the remaining 11 convention and exhibition manufacturers operate under increasing returns to scale, suggesting that expanding their scale could enhance marginal returns and improve efficiency. In terms of balance variable analysis, Table 2 outlines the directions for addressing excessive and insufficient investment by exhibition manufacturers. It underscores the necessity of reducing investment units for projects with excessive investment while augmenting investment units for projects with inadequate investment. This approach is crucial for the industry to achieve both service quality and efficiency.

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Table 2. Efficiency values of relative efficiency of various exhibition manufacturers

Decision-making Unit (DMU)	Input Variables		Output Variables		Returns to Scale
	Financial Aspect	Management Aspect	Operating Income	Market Revenue	
Asia Concentrate Corporation	0	1	0	2	IRS
GIS Group	1	0	1	0	IRS
HAN CAN LTD.	0	0	0	0	CRS
Wise Financial Maketing Co., Ltd.	1	0	0	1	IRS
Tackle Union International Business Co., Ltd.	0	1	0	0	IRS
Enjoy Professional Conference Organizer Corp.	0	1	1	1	IRS
Intercon Convention Management	1	1	0	1	IRS
Tang Yi International Art Curation Co., Ltd.	0	2	1	1	IRS
Elite PCO	2	0	1	0	IRS
Heshi Creative Co., Ltd.	2	1	2	2	IRS
Willy PCO	3	2	3	1	IRS
Lead Group PCO Co. Ltd.	1	1	2	0	IRS

5. Conclusion

The efficiency values and insights obtained from each variable through DEA are categorized as presented in Table 1. It reveals that one Decision-Making Unit (DMU) exhibits strong efficiency in executing service quality among convention and exhibition vendors, with an efficiency value of 1, representing 8% of all DMUs. This indicates superior service quality efficiency compared to other convention and exhibition vendors. Additionally, 4 DMUs demonstrate marginal efficiency in service quality execution, with efficiency values ranging between 0.9 and 1, constituting 33% of all DMUs. This suggests room for improvement in enhancing the service quality efficiency of these manufacturers. Conversely, for convention and exhibition manufacturers comprising 7 DMUs, if their service quality efficiency falls below 0.9, they are deemed to be in an evidently inefficient state, accounting for 58% of all DMUs. Notably, Willy PCO exhibits the lowest service quality efficiency among these vendors, with an efficiency value of 0.78.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed, aiming to offer clear guidance and direction for exhibition manufacturers to enhance their services: Based on the study findings, it is advisable for organizers to focus on elevating the overall quality of the exhibition itself. This could involve efforts to attract representative and reputable manufacturers to participate in the exhibition, along with inviting buyers from significant scales to attend. Environmental planning and facilities should be adjusted according to the specific needs of different industrial manufacturers. For instance, in the case of the Automotive Electronics Show, organizers can enhance overall space planning of the venue and ensure proper maintenance of lighting equipment. Additionally, addressing essential aspects such as mobile phone signal coverage and transportation convenience to the exhibition venue from various locations is crucial. This may involve collaborating with telecommunication system operators to install indoor boosters or public wave amplifiers, ensuring seamless communication within the exhibition hall. Moreover, providing clear signage and guidance around the exhibition hall or establishing dedicated hotline numbers for directions can facilitate easy access for attendees, enhancing their overall experience. Exhibitors place significant emphasis on the adequacy and enthusiasm of service personnel provided by organizers, as well as their professional handling of crises. Therefore, the exhibition industry should prioritize employee education and training. Apart from enhancing the professionalism of employees, efforts should be made to boost their enthusiasm for work. For instance, utilizing off-season periods to organize employee outings can strengthen employees' loyalty to the organization within the exhibition industry, thereby fostering a more enthusiastic service culture.

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