The dimensionality of trade show performance in an emerging market

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the underlying dimensions of trade show performance in an emerging market context. Firms in industrial and emerging markets typically differ in terms of access to firm level resource endowments. Such differences make attempts to generalize the trade show performance dimensions proposed for industrialized country exhibitors to emerging market exhibitors problematic. This motivates the need for understanding the dimensionality of trade show performance in an emerging market context.

Design/methodology/approach – Data obtained from firms that partake in an emerging market trade show that takes place in an emerging market are used to investigate the dimensionality of trade show performance. By subjecting several trade show performance items into principal component analysis, a multidimensional performance construct, applicable to emerging market exhibitors, is introduced.

Findings – The empirical findings show that trade show performance, in an emerging market context, is multidimensional. The findings suggest that emerging market exhibitors tend to utilize trade shows somewhat differently from their industrialized market counterparts.

Practical implications – The findings imply the need for exhibit managers in emerging markets to set multiple objectives for trade show participations. The findings also suggest that exhibit managers need to staff the trade show booth with individuals possessing different sets of expertise.

Originality/value – The paper clarifies the dimensionality of trade show performance in the context of emerging markets and sheds light on the tactical and the strategic roles that trade show participations play in emerging markets.

Keywords Trade fairs, Emerging markets, Africa

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Trade shows are growing in importance as viable promotional and selling strategies (Smith et al., 2003). The importance of trade shows is evidenced by the substantial amount of budgets earmarked for trade show participations, the increasing frequency with which trade shows takes place and the ever expanding traffic of exhibitors and visitors. For instance, Herbig et al. (1998) report that trade shows account for more than 22 percent of a typical US firm’s promotional budget second only to the personal selling activity and ahead of print advertising. Similarly, Harris (2000) claims that, in 1998 alone, one and half million US companies marketed their products and services through 4,500 trade shows for an estimated 102 million visitors.

Despite the increasing popularity of trade shows, enquiry into the nature of marketing activities that participants carry out during trade shows is generally scares. Moreover, the existing studies narrowly focus on exhibitors from industrialized markets. In one of the few available empirical works, Kerin and Cron (1987) present an empirical evidence of the dimensionality of trade show performance by performing principal component
analysis (PCA) on multiple marketing activities. The reported findings show that
trade show performance comprises selling and non-selling dimensions.

In a recent study, Hansen (2004) expands the trade show performance construct into
five dimensions constituting sales-related, relationship-building, image-building,
information-gathering and motivation-boosting. The performance dimensions
proposed by Hansen (2004) were later validated by Lee and Kim (2008). These studies
have greatly enriched our understanding about the type of marketing activities that
exhibitors carry out during trade shows. However, the aforementioned studies have all
been conducted using exhibitors from industrialized countries.

Clearly, differences exist between industrial and emerging market exhibitors in terms
of firm level resource endowment, management knowledge structure and motives for
trade show participation. These differences imply that trade show performance
dimensions proposed in the literature may not be entirely generalizable to emerging
market exhibitors. This motivates the need to investigate the dimensionality of trade
show performance in an emerging market context.

Further insights about the dimensions of trade show performance allow us to better
understand the sort of roles that trade shows play as marketing and promotional tools in
emerging markets. Such empirical investigation is warranted not least because exhibit
managers need to be knowledgeable about what constitute trade show performance
prior to making show selection, budgeting and staffing decisions (Tanner, 2002). It is
inconceivable that people tasked with managing trade shows can make sound decisions
when an accepted body of knowledge about trade show performance is lacking.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine the dimensionality of trade show
performance in an emerging market milieu. To this end, empirical data are obtained
from participants in an international trade show that takes place in an emerging
economy. By subjecting several marketing activities – that emerging market
exhibitors are purported to pursue during trade shows – to PCA, a multidimensional
trade show performance construct is presented. In doing so, the study contributes to
knowledge by:

- extending the trade show literature to an emerging market context and
  proposing a trade show performance construct which is particularly applicable
to emerging market exhibitors; and
- shedding light on how emerging market exhibitors can take advantage of trade
  shows to market and promote their product and service offers.

**Literature review**

A substantial portion of the trade show performance research is conceptual in nature.
Empirical studies that examine the dimensionality of trade show performance are few
in number and appear to focus on industrial country exhibitors. As a result, there is
little research that acknowledges the multidimensional nature of the trade show
activity and validates this multidimensionality empirically.

In their seminal work, Kerin and Cron (1987) present empirical evidence about the
dimensionality of trade show performance by performing PCA on eight trade show
activities. They identify two broad performance dimensions consisting of selling and
non-selling. The selling dimension consists of marketing activities related to introducing
new products, on site sales and new product testing. The non-selling dimension
is represented by activities including identifying new prospects, servicing customers, enhancing corporate image and gathering competitive information.

Hansen (2004) draws on the marketing literature’s control system taxonomy, related to outcome based and behavioral based, to explicate the dimensionality of the trade show performance. Tapping into a large number of trade show performance items and using factor analysis, the study proposes a five dimensional trade show performance construct composed of sales-related, relationship-building, image-building, information-gathering and motivation-boosting. Hansen’s trade show performance dimensions were validated in a later work by Lee and Kim (2008) which proposes a four dimensional trade show performance construct (i.e. sales-related, relationship-improvement, image-building and information-gathering).

As discussed early on, empirical studies about the dimensionality of the trade show performance is generally scarce. However, several conceptual contributions appear in the literature that attempt to construe exhibitors’ performance expectations for partaking in a trade show. For instance, Bonoma (1983) distinguishes between selling and non-selling performance expectations after discussing with exhibit managers. The selling performance expectations include customer assurance, new market development, access to key decision makers, product information dissemination, on site sales and customer servicing. The non-selling performance expectations constitute maintaining company image, competitive intelligence, market information gathering, boosting employee morale and testing new products.

Similarly, Shoham (1992), following discussions with exhibit managers, proposes trade show performance expectations which conform to the selling non-selling dichotomy. The selling performance expectations were further grouped into activities related to existing customers, new customers and both. The non-selling performance expectations involve activities related to intelligence-gathering, enhancing morale, enhancing image, generating new product ideas, managing relationship with suppliers and forming strategic alliances.

In another conceptual study, Shipley et al. (1993) classify exhibitors performance expectations into three subsets composed of short term sales expectation (taking sales orders) long term sales expectations (meet new customers, promote existing products and launch new products) and non-selling performance expectations (enhance company image, get competitor intelligence and market research).

In a study that examines the success factor of small business exhibitors, Tanner (2002) makes a distinction between promotional and selling performance expectations. The promotional expectations include activities related to introducing new products, entering new markets, informing customers about new products, gaining publicity and gathering competitive intelligence. The selling focused expectations constitute meeting key customers, identifying new customers, generating sales leads and taking sales orders.

In sum, the majority of the studies dealing with the dimensionality of trade show performance are conceptual in nature. On the other hand, the few existing empirical studies about the dimensionality of trade show performance tend to focus on industrialized country exhibitors. This paper intends to help bridge the gap in the literature by empirically investigating the dimensionality of trade show performance using emerging market exhibitors that partake in an emerging market trade show. In the subsequent section, the methodological approaches that are used in the study are elaborated.
Methodology

Sample attributes and data collection

This study drew sample from exhibitors of the Addis Chamber International Trade Fair (ACITF) that has taken place in 2008. The ACITF is an annual event hosted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which regularly attracts hundreds of exhibitors from several countries. The 2008 event managed to attract more than 300 participants. While half of the participant firms came from aboard, the remaining half consisted of domestic firms.

The official directory of the ACITF was used for sampling purpose. Questionnaires were hand delivered to all of the 150 domestic exhibitors. The questionnaire was delivered to the respective exhibit managers and dispatched about eight weeks after the show. This was done to enable the exhibit managers to take into account trade show performance outcomes that accrue after the show (Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995). In total 65 of the 150 exhibit managers responded, resulting in a 43 percent response rate. Six of the 65 questionnaires were incomplete and hence were removed from analysis leaving 59 valid respondents. A detailed profile of the respondents can be found in Table I.

Measures

To measure trade show performance, 13 marketing activities that exhibitors commonly carry out during trade shows were extracted from the literature. See Table II for a summary of the performance items and the literature sources where the items were adapted. Several of the performance items appear in the literature with inconsistent wordings. Thus, the items were re-worded so as to properly capture the trade show activities that they are supposed to measure. The re-worded performance items were reviewed by two marketing academicians. The comments of the academicians were taken into account in the final operationalization of the items. This process helps to establish the face validity of the performance items (Churchill, 1979).

The performance items were randomly placed in the questionnaire instrument to minimize respondents’ propensity to assign uniform evaluation codes to resembling performance items (de Leeuw et al., 2008). The respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of the firm that they represent, on each item, using a seven-point scale anchored by 1 – very poor and 7 – excellent. Similar measurement scales were used by Kerin and Cron (1987) and Hansen (2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry domain</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>International orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>Domestic-only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchandising</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>Importers-only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>Exporters-importers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business experience (in no. of years)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Annual sales (in millions US$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 15</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>&lt; 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>1.6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>&gt; 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 59

Table I. Profile of respondents
Data analysis technique

PCA was used to define the underlying structure of the trade show performance construct in an emerging market context. PCA is a multivariate technique, which determines the structure of measured variables by specifying condensed sets of dimensions with minimal loss of information (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Hair et al., 2010). PCA is, therefore, an appropriate technique to define the structure of correlations among measured variables. The use of PCA instead of confirmatory factor analysis is deemed more appropriate, in the present study, mainly because there is lack of adequate theoretical basis to specify plausible factor structure apriori (Fabrigar et al., 1999).

Before we ran the PCA, the factorability of the performance items were tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The KMO statistic was 0.72 indicating that there is adequate sample size relative to the number of performance items (Hair et al., 2010). The Bartlett’s test of sphericity was also significant ($\chi^2 = 232.2$, df = 78, $p < 0.001$) implying the presence of satisfactory level of correlation among the performance items (Hair et al., 2010). Both the KMO and Bartlett’s test of sphericity provide adequate ground to run the PCA.

Results and discussion

Structure and reliability of the trade show performance construct

The PCA, with varimax rotation, neatly clustered the 13 performance items into four components. Table III reports the factor loadings and the communality estimates of the performance items. The eigenvalue of each extracted performance component together with the percentage of variance explained by each component are also contained in Table I. The four factor solution explains 63 percent of the total variance in the data. The reliability of the components was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. Each component attained Cronbach’s alpha greater than 0.7 indicating satisfactory level of reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Construct validity

The convergent and the discriminant validity of the proposed trade show performance construct was evaluated by assessing the pattern of the factor loadings of each performance item. The factor loadings show that each item loads, in a statistically
significant way, on its respective component. An inspection of the cross loadings indicates that no item loads higher on other components than it does on the component that it conceptually belongs. In fact, all the cross loadings, with the exception of one cross loading, are below 0.35. As such, the factor loadings provide reasonable ground to claim that the proposed performance construct exhibits convergent and discriminate validity.

The predictive validity of a construct is commonly established by assessing the strength of the bivariate correlation between a predictor and a criterion (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007). To test the predictive validity of the proposed construct, we correlated the proposed performance components (the predictors) with exhibitors’ annual trade show participation frequency (the criterion). The justification for doing so stems from the contention that trade show performance can predict exhibitors’ trade show

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Component 2</th>
<th>Component 3</th>
<th>Component 4</th>
<th>Communality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collect information about competitors products</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange information with competitors</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate displayed products by competitors</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark competitive position</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather information on new product ideas</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore market opportunities in new regions/segments</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce new products at the show</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore export opportunities</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get publicity in the media</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet key decision makers</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate company capability to customers</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate sales at the show</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and maintain relationship with customers</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance explained (%)</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Summary statistics of the PCA

Notes: Component 1, competitive-intelligence; Component 2, market-scanning; Component 3, image-building; Component 4, relational-sales
participation frequency. In support of our contention, Smith et al. (2003) demonstrate that successful trade show performance leads to higher level of future trade show participation interest. As shown in the correlation matrix (Table IV), three of the four trade show performance components are significantly correlated with the trade show participation frequency variable. Although the correlation between Component 1 and the trade show participation frequency variable is not significant, it is still in the predicted direction. On balance, the proposed trade show performance construct exhibits acceptable predictive validity.

Interpreting the components
Components extracted through PCA are assumed to represent distinct dimensions within the data (Hair et al., 2010). If there is a conceptual basis for understanding the relationship between the variables, then the components may actually have meanings for what they represent (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Hair et al., 2010). Since our primary intention in deploying PCA is to define the dimensionality of the trade show performance, we expect each extracted component to represent a specific aspect of the trade show performance. Drawing on a wider body of literature, the contents of the items within each performance component are collectively analyzed to specify the trade show performance dimension that they represent. Afterwards, the components are labeled.

The competitive-intelligence dimension
Component 1 consists of four items collect information about competitors’ products, exchange information with competitors, evaluate displayed products by competitors and benchmark competitive position. The conceptual communality evident in the four items is competitive intelligence, suggesting that Component 1 may represent the competitive intelligence domain of the trade show performance. Each of the four performance items captures a specific aspect of the competitive intelligence activity.

Competitive intelligence is a systematic, targeted, timely and ethical effort to analyze competitors in order to produce actionable insights for decision making (Fliesher, 2007). There are some subtle evidences in the literature which support our contention that Component 1 may represent the competitive intelligence dimension. Notwithstanding at the conceptual level, Sharland and Balogh (1996), Shipley et al. (1993) and Tanner (2002) identify competitive intelligence as part of the non-selling aspect of trade show performance.

Particularly, Sharland and Balogh (1996) note that by drawing together competing firms at one place for a short time, trade shows present participants a potential gold mine of low cost access to competitive information. This suggests that exhibitors utilize

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Competitive-intelligence</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Market-scanning</td>
<td>0.39 ***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Image-building</td>
<td>0.20 **</td>
<td>0.24 **</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Relational-sales</td>
<td>0.45 ***</td>
<td>0.35 **</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Trade show participation frequency</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.18 *</td>
<td>0.26 **</td>
<td>0.24 **</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV.
Correlation matrix

Note: *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01 (one-tailed)
trade shows as a means to collect competitive information. Because all of the four items that load on Component 1 aim to accomplish a certain aspect of the competitive intelligence activity and because competitive intelligence has been identified, in previous works, as part of the non-selling activities of exhibitors, Component 1 is labeled competitive-intelligence.

The market-scanning dimension
Component 2 consists of four items gather information on new product ideas, explore market opportunities in new regions/segments, introduce new products at the show and explore export opportunities. These items are possibly associated with the concept of market-scanning. Fahey and King (1977) view market scanning, within the context of environmental scanning, as the process of seeking and collecting information about suppliers, buyers, competitors and technological trends. For Olsen and Sallis (2006), market scanning involves generating tactical market information pertinent to short term customer needs and strategic market information related to potential markets and products pertinent to the long term strategic focus of the firm.

Examination of the four performance items illuminates the relationship between Component 2 and the market scanning activity. For instance, the item gather information on new product ideas is intended to collect information about new product technologies which subsequently underpins research and development efforts (Bello and Barczak, 1990). Hence, this activity can be considered as representative of the product technology scanning effort (Fahey and King, 1977; Miles and Snow, 1978). The items explore market opportunities in new regions/segments, and explore export opportunities are activities related to searching prospective market opportunities that the firm can exploit in the future. These two items can, therefore, be associated with the market scanning activity since their purpose is to spot market opportunities (Miles and Snow, 1978; Olsen and Sallis, 2006).

The last item, introduce new products at the show, is primarily intended to learn about customers reaction to new products and to gauge the commercial potency of new products (Bello and Barczak, 1990). This activity addresses an aspect of the market scanning effort related to assessing market potentials for newly launched products (Miles and Snow, 1978). In essence, these four items represent different aspects of the market scanning activity. As a result, Component 2 is labeled market-scanning.

The image-building dimension
Component 3 consists of three performance items: get publicity in the media, meet key decision makers and demonstrate company capability to customers. These items are associated with what is known in the literature as the image building dimension (Bonoma, 1983; Hansen, 2004; Lee and Kim, 2008). This is indicative of possible construct equivalence between image building dimension and Component 3.

Hansen (2004) and Lee and Kim (2008) grouped the items get publicity in the media and demonstrate company capability to customers with the image building dimension – similar to the factor structure that we found in Component 3. The same studies found that the item, meet key decision makers, is part of the relationship building dimension – contrary to the factor structure that we found in Component 3. Therefore, our findings depart from previous studies in that the item, meet key decision makers, is associated with the image building dimension rather than the relationship building dimension.
This can be explained by the tendency among emerging market exhibitors to consider establishing contacts with decision makers (often government officials and policy makers) as more of an image building rather than a selling activity. Since the government bureaucracy in many emerging markets tends to be lethargic (Luo and Junkunc, 2008), exhibitors strive to project positive company image during the trade show as projecting positive image at the show can help them to overcome the bureaucratic hurdle that they may face in the future. It is, therefore, conceivable to associate the three performance items with the image building dimension of the trade show activity. Consequently, Component 3 is labeled image-building.

The relational-sales dimension
Component 4 consists of two items: generate sales at the show and develop and maintain relationship with customers. The first item, generate sales at the show, represents exhibitors’ efforts to generate revenue using the trade show as a selling occasion (Bonoma, 1983; Tanner, 2002). The second item, develop and maintain relationship with customers, is aimed at building new relationship with prospects and strengthening existing relationship with current customers (Lee and Kim, 2008; Shipley et al., 1993; Tanner, 2002).

A possible explanation for the alignment of these seemingly distinct trade show activities within the same component may have to do with exhibitors’ perception that building relationships with customers strongly influences sales outcome. Exhibitors may consider the activities related to customer relationship as a selling activity rather than a relationship activity or vice versa. Interestingly, Lee and Kim (2008) also found a factor structure similar to Component 4 in that the item “relationship-building with new clients” was associated with the “sales-related” dimension.

Although from a statistical point of view Component 4 represents a single construct, from a theoretical point of view it captures two closely related marketing activities, i.e. customer relationship and selling. Therefore, Component 4 is labeled relational-sales to reflect that Component 4 simultaneously represents the customer relationship and the selling activity.

Conclusion and implications
The purpose of this paper is to uncover the underlying dimensions of trade show performance in an emerging market context. To this end, the trade show literature is extensively reviewed to generate representative trade show performance items. These items were factor analyzed to define the dimensions of trade show performance applicable to emerging market exhibitors. The findings suggest that emerging market exhibitors utilize trade shows as multidimensional marketing and promotional tools. More precisely, we find four main dimensions representing the competitive-intelligence, the market-scanning, the image-building and the relational-sales aspects of the trade show performance.

Although the image-building and the selling dimensions are well known in the literature, this paper brings to the fore two previously overlooked trade show performance aspects namely competitive-intelligence and market-scanning. Apparent differences between emerging and industrialized country exhibitors – with respect to access to resources, management sophistication and the like – may explain why the competitive-intelligence and the market-scanning dimensions boldly appear in the proposed trade show performance construct.
Unlike industrialized country exhibitors, exhibitors from emerging markets often lack the internal mechanisms instrumental in fetching competitive and market information from the market place. This is particularly true when we consider that a large portion of the sampled exhibitors are modest sized and hence are unlikely to bear the cost of running autonomous market research and intelligence units. Consequently, emerging market exhibitors tend to utilize trade shows as platforms to collect competitive information and to scan market opportunities.

Managerial implications
The proposed trade show performance dimensions have far reaching implications for individuals tasked with managing trade show activities. First, the findings accentuate the fact that trade show is a multidimensional marketing tool. Accordingly, managers should set multiple objectives for participating in trade shows including intelligence gathering, market scanning, projecting positive firm image and developing relationship with existing and new customers. This is particularly important as many senior managers tilt towards viewing trade shows as mere selling opportunities (Sharland and Balogh, 1996).

Second, trade shows can supplement the strategic information needs of senior management if properly managed. The information obtained through competitive intelligence, market scanning and customer relationship activities are often vital inputs to the strategic decision making process. This implies that marketing managers should view trade shows as strategic marketing tools where competitive and market information can be acquired. This extends the popular notion in the literature that trade shows are short-term selling events (Gopalakrishna and Williams, 1992; Sharland and Balogh, 1996). Senior managers are, therefore, advised to take advantage of the strategic values of trade shows.

Third, the result has some implication for trade show staffing practices. The fact that trade shows are multidimensional marketing tools means that specialized experts are required to staff the exhibit booth to carry out the different activities. For instance, it may be possible that senior managers can be more effective in image building activities, whereas operational managers can be better in product and technology intelligence. On the other hand, marketing people can excel in generating sales leads and building relationship with customers. The bottom line is that, by staffing their exhibit booth with specialized expertise, exhibitors stand a better chance of attaining optimal trade show performance.

Limitations and future research
To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the dimensionality of the trade show performance in an emerging market. In doing so, the study sheds light on the strategic and the tactical roles of trade shows in emerging markets. However, the results should be interpreted carefully and considered tentative until cross validated in other emerging markets. Given the small sample size used and the one-off nature of the study, the four component performance construct may be considered of limited generalizability.

Another factor that potentially limits the generalizability of the result is that trade show practices tend to vary across different market environments (Dekimpe et al., 1997). Therefore, future research should attempt to cross validate the suggested performance
construct in other emerging markets. In this regard, refinement of the trade show performance construct is possible. Such refinements may include the addition and deletion of performance items and dimensions. Although a concerted effort is made to cover broader aspects of trade show activities, it is possible that some aspects of trade show activities may have been overlooked. Therefore, future research may need to consider such unobserved trade show performance aspects. A further area of future research is to investigate antecedents of exhibitors' performance effectiveness in emerging market contexts.

References


Further reading

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