

EXPLORING INTENTIONS TO ATTEND A CONVENTION: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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The number of people attending conventions is growing worldwide, yet little is still known about convention attendees, particularly from a gender perspective. Scholars have recognized that gender is fundamental to travel decisions, yet there is still an absence of gender-specific research in the convention attendee travel context. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of gender on the convention attendance travel decision. It involved interviewing attendees at an international medical convention about their intentions to attend the next convention. The exploratory findings reveal that some women consider certain factors to be more influential on their convention attendance decision than men, such as the networking opportunities. The results provide some preliminary insights into the potential role gender plays in the convention attendance decision. The implications of these findings for convention marketing are discussed.

Key words: Convention attendance; Intention; Gender; Decision making

Introduction

Conventions are a forum to exchange knowledge and expertise, disseminate the latest research, listen to keynote speakers, learn new skills, advance education in the field of interest, and network with peers (McCabe, Poole, Weeks, & Leiper, 2000; Rogers, 2003). The convention industry today is unquestionably global in nature and is an important component of the tourism sector. More and more destinations are building world-class convention and exhibition centers, improving infrastructure, and increasing

financial contributions towards securing large conventions, as the value in hosting conventions has become widely recognized (McCabe et al., 2000). From an international perspective, the industry has grown considerably, especially over the last decade with regard to the number of events held and the number of people attending events (Jago & Deery, 2010). Despite the fragile world economic situation in recent years, the Asia Pacific and Middle Eastern region's international association meetings industry experienced a 1.7% increase in market share in 2010, to the detriment of Europe. According to the

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International Congress and Convention Association's (ICCA) CEO, Martin Sirk, this is "a testament to the underlying strength of the region's economies, and to its increasing influence as a location for innovation, research and development, and all manner of high-tech creativity" (ICCA, 2011).

Convention attendees are arguably vital to the continued existence of the convention industry, as they bring several benefits to a convention destination through their expenditure on accommodation, restaurants, transportation, attractions, souvenirs, and other items (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Benefits can also be felt in surrounding regional areas when attendees undertake a pre or post trip in locations other than the convention destination, which provide flow-on returns for other sectors of the economy. Attracting convention attendees is particularly important for meeting planners and associations, since the success of a convention is often measured by meeting or exceeding attendance forecasts. Meeting planners are therefore having to become more strategic in marketing their convention to potential attendees in an effort to provide maximum benefit to association members and meet attendance projections (Fjelstul, Severt, & Breiter, 2009; Yoo & Zhao, 2010). While attendees are an important component of the sector, they have been one of the most under-researched areas of investigation in scholarly journals and are worthy of examination (Leach, Liu, & Winsor, 2008). Without attendees, it would be difficult for a professional association to continually hold a convention, generate sponsors, attract exhibitors, obtain the commitment from keynote speakers to present, and be financially sustainable.

Not only do planners need to continually attract repeat and potential attendees, they need to adjust their convention marketing strategies to appeal to different kinds of attendees, due to the shift in the types of people attending conventions compared to a decade ago. One of these important attendee segments is female attendees. The changes in the composition of the workplace, including more women at senior levels, suggest that the number of women attending conventions is rising (T. H. Lee & Park, 2002). Women represent a solid and growing percentage of convention travelers. Fjelstul, Severt, and Breiter (2010), for instance, reported that 81% of their respondents from four trade and medical associations were women. Furthermore, Jago and

Deery (2005) contend that "more needs to be done to address the specific needs of women, given that there are now many more female convention attendees" (p. 35). However, only limited research has been conducted to address gender perspectives in tourism, despite the fact that gender appears to be fundamental in the travel decision-making process (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994; Norris & Wall, 1994). Studies that have centered their investigations on gender have largely been in the field of leisure tourism and provide some support for the view that differences exist in relation to gender (e.g., Collins & Tisdell, 2002; Frew & Shaw, 1999; McGehee, Loker-Murphy, & Uysal, 1996; Meng & Uysal, 2008). However, the findings from these studies are typically inconsistent, and many are not generalizable.

A review of the literature reveals that, although gender is fundamental to market segmentation purposes, research on gender and convention travel, in particular, is scarce to date. While data pertaining to gender is generally collected, rarely have researchers investigated gender differences in relation to convention travel behavior. In line with the differences found in some leisure tourism studies, there may be reason to suggest that convention travel attendance decisions differ according to gender. This area of inquiry is yet to be explored. It is vital for the successful future marketing of conventions that a thorough understanding of various groups of attendees, such as comparing males with females, is undertaken. This article therefore aims to explore the influence of gender on the convention attendance decision-making process, based on findings from a qualitative study of attendees, and considers the marketing implications for convention planners and managers. More specifically, the intention is to check for differences between men and women regarding their convention attendance decision, rather than seeking to find actual differences. Since there are few studies that examine differences between groups of attendees and effectively no research to underpin market segmentation based on these differences, this study could provide meeting planners with a better understanding of the male and female attendee segments. Such information would be useful for destination marketers who are also promoting their convention destination through delegate boosting activities. The article begins with a review of the brief literature on gender and travel behavior and a discussion on convention

attendees and gender, followed by an examination of the drivers of convention attendance.

Literature Review

A substantial body of research exists relating to gender and consumer behavior, whereby researchers have sought to measure the impact of demographics, such as gender, on purchasing behavior (Ryu & Han, 2010). The most salient explanation for gender differences in certain behaviors has been attributed to biological factors such as different brain structures and the way in which men and women process information (Kim, Lehtob, & Morrison, 2007; Sun & Qu, 2011). Alternatively, others argue that biological factors only account for some of the behavioral differences, as psychological and experiential factors could also assist in explaining variations between genders (Barber, Taylor, & Deale, 2010). Nonetheless, there is both theoretical and empirical support for arguing that gender plays a role in forming behavioral intentions (Ryu & Han, 2010).

While the study of gender and travel behavior has gained some interest among tourism researchers, rarely has the specific role of gender in the tourist decision-making process been examined (Ryu & Han, 2010). Although there are exceptions, tourism researchers usually gather data pertaining to gender to profile their sample characteristics, but such data are seldom analyzed within the context of their study (Mair, 2010a). Moreover, “despite the recognition of gender differences and the fact that most studies of tourist behavior ask the respondent’s gender . . . researchers have generally failed to analyse and present gendered data in a meaningful way” (Carr, 1999, p. 223). Oh, Parks, and Demicco (2002) highlight that “few studies within the tourism literature have simultaneously examined males and females” (p. 4). The importance of exploring how gender can influence travel behavior cannot be ignored. Such information is vital to tourism marketing activities for segmentation and product development purposes and is crucial to ensure that the needs of both men and women are met in service encounters (Collins & Tisdell, 2002; Oh et al., 2002).

Part of the research in the area of gender and travel behavior has focused on the types of activities men and women participate in when visiting a destination and evaluations of destination attributes

(Meng & Uysal, 2008; Xie, Costa, & Morais, 2008). Gender differences have become apparent in some investigations. Specifically, women appear to be more inclined to visit destinations that offer natural scenery, heritage and cultural experiences, opportunities for family bonding, and places to revive themselves (Frew & Shaw, 1999; McGehee et al., 1996; Meng & Uysal, 2008; Xie et al., 2008). In contrast, when deciding on holiday travel destinations, men generally prefer places where they can participate in recreational activities such as canoeing, hunting, fishing, visiting sporting museums, and attending sporting events (Frew & Shaw, 1999; McGehee et al., 1996; Meng & Uysal, 2008). These findings imply that men and women may have different travel preferences, which are likely to influence their holiday destination decisions. Conversely, some studies show that men and women share similar values and attitudes in a travel behavior context. For instance, Meng and Uysal (2008) revealed that quality and convenience are the most important destination attributes among both men and women American travelers to a particular nature-based resort. This suggests that, while men and women can act differently with regard to their travel behavior, this is not necessarily the case.

The event tourism literature includes a few studies concerning event attendance and gender (e.g. Chen, 2010; Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2008; Yolal, Çetinela, & Uysal, 2009). One study, in particular, looked at gender and sport event tourist behavior. The findings show that men and women have different values about being a sporting fan with regard to loyalty, socialization, volunteering, self-actualization, and equality. In fact, female participants valued the social interactions with their sporting club members more than the male participants (Chen, 2010). Factors that were most important to males included the actual competition and the success of the team. This study supports the view that socializing and event attendance are likely to be inextricably linked from a women’s perspective, while male attendees can be more focused on achieving goals. It may be that the reasons for attending certain events differ according to gender for other types of events, such as conventions.

Previous researchers have drawn parallels between the leisure traveler and convention attendee decision-making process (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). It is

argued that association attendees generally have volitional control over the decision to attend and they often pay for their travel costs (Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2007). Based on this notion, Mair and Thompson (2008) sought to adapt existing leisure tourism decision-making frameworks to the conference context and produced a model based on UK association conference attendees. This study provides some evidence to support that, while convention travel decisions are arguably similar to leisure travel decisions, there are some differences between the two decision-making processes. For example, the motivation to attend a convention is often triggered by a call for papers announcement or from an association newsletter, which does not occur in the leisure travel decision. Additionally, leisure tourists are more likely to assess the destination when planning a holiday, whereas convention travelers may select a convention to attend based on the perceived benefits of attending, such as the educational component or the networking opportunities, in addition to evaluating the convention destination. Since some of the stages in the leisure and convention travel decision-making process appear to be different, it may seem plausible that the findings from previous gender travel behavior studies that are based on leisure travelers may not apply to the convention context. There is therefore a need to investigate convention travelers and the factors that influence their attendance intentions from a gender perspective. The following discussion explores the small amount of literature that exists on convention attendees where gender references have been made, in order to show the gaps that exist in our current knowledge, which have informed the study on which this article is based.

Convention Attendees and Gender

Gender is one of the most fundamental variables used by marketers for segmentation purposes (Kim et al., 2007), and a review of the literature shows that there is a lack of convention tourism research profiling attendees according to gender. Exploring the role of gender in the convention attendance decision is therefore the focus of this study. Other demographic characteristics such as family life cycle stage, involvement with the association, or employment status may have a strong influence on the convention

attendance decision; however, examining those factors is beyond the scope of this exploratory study.

Traditionally, men have represented the majority of convention attendees, particularly in the scientific industries; however, the number of women attending conventions is rising (T. H. Lee & Park, 2002; Mottiar & Quinn, 2004). Earlier research from the early 1990s indicates that one in four business travelers (including convention attendees) are female, which may suggest that this percentage is even higher nowadays (Owen, 1992). In response to this increase, scholars are beginning to investigate how the needs of women differ from men with regard to convention travel.

Research has shown that traveling overseas for the purpose of attending a convention peaks for Australian women aged between 35 and 44 years compared to Australian men aged between 45 and 54 (Collins & Tisdell, 2002). An early study by Grant and Weaver (1996) profiled attendees based on their convention selection criteria and demographic characteristics. Attendees were placed into three homogeneous groups. The first two groups attend conventions for the networking and educational opportunities and comprise a relatively equal proportion of males and females aged 25–54 years. The third group attend conventions for the leadership opportunities and are predominately males aged 45–54 years. These examples suggest that attendees potentially have different reasons for attending a convention, depending on their age and gender, which could influence the types of conventions they select to attend.

Additionally, Yoo and Zhao (2010) sought to determine whether differences exist between the demographic profiles of convention attendees and the underlying factors in their convention participation decision-making process. They point out that the relative influence of networking, travelability (cost, travel distance), destination, and educational factors on their convention travel decision did not differ between males and females. In contrast, Mair (2010a) profiled UK and Australian convention attendees based on their attendance motivations and demographic characteristics. Her study involved creating clusters of attendees using age, gender, and educational background data. The results reveal a significant difference in the mean scores between men and women with respect to the statement that “my personal safety seemed assured

at the destination.” The study shows that women consider their personal safety to be more important in their convention attendance decision than men do, which lends weight to the suggestion that there may be differences in convention attendance decision-making based on gender.

Drivers of Convention Attendance

In order to deliver a successful convention that caters to the unique needs of both men and women, convention marketers and planners need to understand any differences that exist between the two genders with respect to how they make attendance decisions. A number of studies to date have sought to identify the drivers of convention attendance (e.g., M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Yoo & Chon, 2008, 2010), yet we cannot truly claim to understand convention attendee behavior because the influence of gender on these drivers has not been explored. This gap in the literature initiated the present study, which seeks to contribute to the literature on convention travel decisions from a gender perspective. The most common drivers from existing research can be classified into three categories: the positive outcomes of attending a convention (referred to by many as motivations), the influence of significant others on the decision to attend, and the facilitating and inhibiting factors affecting the decision. These categories are discussed below.

Positive Outcomes of Attending

The main reasons why people attend conventions have been identified by a number of scholars. There is a general consensus that attendees obtain greater value from attending conventions that have a strong educational component, provide networking opportunities, and are held in a desirable location (Deery, Jago, Fredline, & Dwyer, 2005; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Rittichainuwat, Beck, & LaLopa, 2001; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007). In particular, visiting the convention destination is undoubtedly perceived to be a positive outcome of attending a convention for attendees (Bauer, Law, Tse, & Weber, 2008; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Jago & Deery, 2005; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008, 2010;

Zhang et al., 2007). Since convention attendees prefer to visit certain destinations over others, registration numbers tend to be higher in some destinations because of their perceived image (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a).

Influencers

As with most travel decisions, individuals can be influenced by various people when they make travel plans (Sparks & Pan, 2009). Normative pressures from friends, family, travel agents, peers, employers, and other important referents could potentially affect the convention attendance decision. A study of family decision-making in the convention tourism context shows that family members, especially spouses, play an integral role in the decision to attend a convention (Oh, Roel, & Shock, 1993). The work of Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) and Ngamson and Beck (2000) also support the view that convention attendance can be influenced by an individual's family. Additionally, findings from M. J. Lee and Back's (2007b) study reveal that, while the convention attendance decision can be influenced by family members, an individual's manager/advisors and colleagues also have a strong voice.

Facilitators and Inhibitors

Facilitating and inhibiting factors affecting the convention attendance decision have also been examined in previous studies (Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). The main facilitators identified include the involvement of the attendee with the association, the opportunity to present or disseminate knowledge, the ability to receive funding to cover the costs of attending, accessibility, and travel distance to the convention location and the attendee's time availability (Jarumaneerat, Al-Sabbahy, & Jones, 2007; Oppermann, 1998; Yoo & Chon, 2008). The factors that could inhibit future convention attendance comprise the health of the attendee, concerns with the safety and security at the convention location, the distance of the trip, time conflicts with work or personal commitments, and the monetary costs associated with convention travel, such as registration accommodation and transport expenses (Jarumaneerat, Jones, & Al-Sabbahy, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Zhang et al., 2007).

Despite the growing body of literature related to the factors affecting convention attendee participation, little research to date has focused on whether the drivers of convention attendance vary for different groups of attendees. Mair (2010a) recommends that future convention research examine demographic differences in order to provide a deeper understanding of convention attendees. Since different attendees have various needs and wants, identification of their needs is a prerequisite for effectively developing successful conventions. Research into understanding how attendance decisions might vary for men and women, in particular, is still lacking.

While the present study is qualitative in nature and thus developing specific hypotheses regarding gender differences is not the purpose, a review of the literature shows that men can be driven by career advancement, accomplishments, and eminence more so than women (Venkatesh, Morris, & Ackerman, 2000). It is thought that men may form intentions to attend a convention based on the likelihood that a particular convention contains the content to help them progress professionally. Alternatively, the literature reveals that women are more likely to be conscious of the opinions of others and feel the social pressure of referent groups compared to their male counterparts (Harris & Ateljevic, 2003; Sparks & Pan, 2009). There is therefore reason to suggest that employers, colleagues, and or family members may have a stronger influence on women than men with regard to their intentions to attend a future convention. Previous research provides plausible support for the notion that the drivers of convention attendance could be different according to gender. In order to develop a more complete understanding of event attendees, gender-based investigations thus merit attention.

Method

Previous reviews of convention tourism literature show that quantitative techniques dominate research designs (Mair, 2010b), leading to “an almost exclusive use of quantitative methods for studying the MICE industry” (Comas & Moscardo, 2005, p. 121). It appears that the industry’s dependence on quantitative data, to guide better practice, and develop marketing strategies and other initiatives has overshadowed the contribution of qualitative research.

Where qualitative methods have been used, they are usually followed by an in-depth quantitative phase (e.g., Jarumaneerat et al., 2007; Severt et al., 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008). There is merit in conducting further qualitative convention tourism studies to produce meaningful interpretations and provide the story behind the statistics from the data collected. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide a deeper exploration into convention attendance from a gender perspective (Jennings, 2010). This meant that the researchers were able to clarify responses and illuminate otherwise unidentified issues that may have been overlooked with other types of research designs (Creswell, 2009). Data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with convention attendees.

Recruitment and Sample

In response to the call for future research to examine convention attendees in sectors other than tourism and hospitality, such as the medical and scientific fields (Ngamson & Beck, 2000), the researchers sought the support from organizers of an international medical convention to participate in the study. A list of possible conventions to be held in Melbourne was obtained from the Melbourne Convention + Visitors Bureau (MCVB) in addition to some online searching. Based on the type of convention (i.e., international association), industry segment (medical/scientific), number of expected attendees, timing of the convention and the cooperation of the organising committee, one convention was shortlisted. A letter was sent to the Chair of the Organising Committee for the biennial 30th World Congress in Internal Medicine (WCIM). The WCIM attracts attendees comprising of physicians, paediatricians, clinicians, health professionals, educators, and medical students who have an interest in both general internal medicine and specialized internal medicine from around the world (World Congress in Internal Medicine 2010). The recruitment letter provided an overview of the study and sought the cooperation from the organizers to conduct interviews at WCIM, which was held at the Melbourne Convention Centre, Melbourne, Australia, in March 2010. Permission was granted from the organizers, and the study received strong support from the MCVB.

Data Collection

Following a review of the literature, the interview questions were developed, and a pilot test was carried out with five professional association members employed in the business events industry. The aim of the pilot test was to assess the question wording and the interview length and to evaluate how participants responded to the questions (Veal, 2006). Respondents were asked to consider a convention that they regularly attend. With this convention in mind, they were asked a series of open-ended questions to elicit the possible outcomes of attending and information about the people who would influence their decision to attend, as well as the potential facilitators and inhibitors affecting their attendance decision. The interviews were timed to determine the average length. After each interview, respondents were debriefed, which allowed the interviewer to seek clarity with respect to some of the responses and improve the comprehensibility of some of the questions.

A stand was set up by one of the researchers in the WCIM exhibition area where there was a high level of attendee traffic. Data were collected from a sample of registered attendees who were informed about the purpose of the study and gave their consent to participate. The interview instrument contained questions about the possibility of attending the next convention to be held in Santiago, November 11–15, 2012. Semistructured interviews were undertaken with attendees, which enabled the researcher to probe beyond a set of standardized questions in order to obtain further clarification about respondent's intentions to attend the next convention (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003).

A total of 23 semistructured interviews were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and were subjected to a content analysis to identify common themes with regard to future attendance intentions (Jennings, 2010). This type of analysis is commonly used in qualitative research designs for "systematically describing and analysing written, spoken, or visual material" (Tharenou, Donohue, & Cooper, 2007, p. 269). Each transcript was analyzed by categorizing the responses into key themes, also known as the summation technique (Jennings, 2010). The process involved organizing and reducing particular words, sentences, or paragraphs that were mentioned

in the interviews into codes (Saunders et al., 2003). The codes were then grouped, compared, and contrasted to produce themes that emerged, which brought meaning to the data collected (Biber-Hesse, 2010). Three coders were involved in the content analysis of the transcribed responses for the purpose of quantifying the frequency of the coded themes and to establish intercoder agreement (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In an effort to uncover gender-based differences, the key themes that were most frequently mentioned by male and female respondents were compared. For instance, the responses were reviewed to explore whether females mentioned a certain factor more often than males and vice versa.

As with all qualitative studies, researchers need to demonstrate that the findings and interpretations may be viewed as trustworthy (Jennings, 2010). In this study, trustworthiness was enhanced using some of the following strategies: conducting a peer debriefing to discuss the accuracy of the interpretations made, examining previous research findings to assess the degree to which the study's results were congruent with those of past studies, documenting the methods and procedures used to convey how the fieldwork was carried out, and justifying the study's methodological decisions, such as the adoption of a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003).

Results, Analysis, and Discussion

The attendees interviewed comprised 65% men and 35% women, generally aged between 35 and 64 years old. Respondents came from seven different countries, predominately from Australia and New Zealand. Almost all of the respondents had children either living at home or who had left home. For the majority of respondents it was their first time attending the convention and most were members of the association holding the convention.

The results of the content analysis uncovered a number of positive outcomes or advantages of attending the next convention to be held in Santiago Chile November 11–15, 2012. The outcomes that appeared to be dominant were the perceived educational benefits, networking opportunities, opportunity to present papers, and the convention location. Opinions of others, funding resources, time availability, and existing commitments were also raised by respondents as possible facilitators

and/or inhibitors in relation to their attendance decision. These themes are discussed, and comparisons are drawn between genders.

Educational Benefits

The educational component emerged as a key outcome of attending WCIM2012 for interviewees. Some respondents commented that the next convention would provide them with an opportunity to “keep abreast of what’s new in internal medicine,” “gain professional experience,” “update my scientific knowledge,” and to “exchange information and news about medicine.” Consistent with the themes and/or motivators identified in previous empirical studies, respondents expressed the desire to learn and gain professional development in the area of internal medicine (Bauer et al., 2008; Deery et al., 2005; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Severt et al., 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008, 2010). This perceived outcome of attending the next convention was cited by both the men and women respondents fairly frequently in this study. It would seem that educational benefits appear to be a main motivator for attendees, irrespective of their gender. This is an important finding for the marketing of conventions, given that potential attendees appear to evaluate a convention based on its ability to provide educational benefits. Preconvention promotional campaigns could build awareness and engage prospective attendees some months before the convention about the theme, educational sessions, and keynote speakers in order to attract more people.

Networking Opportunities

Participants considered the opportunity to socialize with colleagues to be another positive outcome of attending the future convention. Typical comments about the networking aspect of the convention were as follows: it would be a “good opportunity to get in contact with people in the industry—in clinical research work that I do,” traveling to Santiago would allow me “to meet colleagues from other countries,” and “meet new faces and make new friends.” Again this finding is not surprising, given that the social elements both within and outside the convention program are important drivers of convention attendance decisions according to previous studies (Grant

& Weaver, 1996; Jago & Deery, 2005; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichai-nuwat et al., 2001; Severt et al., 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008, 2010; Yoo & Zhao, 2010; Zhang et al., 2007).

When analyzing the findings from a gender perspective, it appeared that the women who were interviewed, in particular, saw networking as a key advantage of attending the next convention. Since research has shown that women tend to be more relationship-oriented than men (Van Hoof, Born, Taris, & Van der Flier, 2006), this could mean that they place a greater importance on evaluating a convention based on the opportunity to socialize with colleagues and develop contacts. It may be that the women in this study have fewer opportunities to network with industry colleagues outside attending a convention or that they value social connections more highly than other components of the convention. When promoting an upcoming convention, marketers could highlight that sufficient time will be allocated to facilitate networking between attendees, invited speakers, and possibly exhibitors, given that networking opportunities are significant predictors of future convention intentions according to Mair and Thompson (2009).

Presenting Papers

For some attendees, the next convention could provide them with the opportunity to share their research with peers by submitting and presenting a paper(s). Common responses about the advantage of attending WCIM2012 were as follows: “being able to do a paper presentation” and “paper presentation—for me to present.” This finding is not dissimilar to previous convention research where presenting papers is a key driver of attendance, particularly in academic conventions, and has been associated with career enhancement or professional development (Jarumanerat et al., 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008). Presenting papers is possibly seen as a way of advancing professionally, which in some cases is a high priority for attendees in the medical research field. As Oppermann and Chon (1997) note, unsurprisingly an individual might be more likely to choose to attend a convention that they consider to be more valuable to their career where they can present a paper in front of leading experts in their field, rather

than a lower status convention attended by less-qualified colleagues.

Four of the 15 male participants compared to one of eight female participants saw presenting papers to be a key advantage of traveling to Santiago for the next convention. This finding supports existing research, which indicates that men might be more likely to be driven by a desire for career advancement, accomplishments, and eminence than women (Venkatesh et al., 2000). More men than women might perhaps attend conventions for the purpose of presenting their work, thereby selecting conventions that would provide them with this opportunity. Convention marketers could accentuate the opportunities for potential attendees to present or submit a poster presentation and participate in advancing knowledge in their field of interest to attract more attendees to their convention. This could possibly assist in boosting male attendee numbers, particularly if the association is interested in obtaining more presenters to their convention.

Convention Location

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents cited visiting Santiago to be an advantage of attending the next convention. Typical comments included: "Santiago would be a nice place to visit," "I always wanted to go to that part of the world," and "I have never been to Chile and would love to go." Most scholars agree that the location or destination of the convention is a main factor affecting association convention attendance and these findings also support this view (Bauer et al., 2008; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Jago & Deery, 2005; Lee & Back, 2007a; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008, 2010; Yoo & Zhao, 2010). In line with existing literature, the evaluation of the convention location appears to be central to future attendance decisions for both men and women in this study.

Three specific components of the convention location became evident in the interviews, of which gender appears to play a role in two components. The first relates to travel distance. One international interviewee said that attending the next convention is ideal because "it's close by, it's near my country," while others considered Santiago to be a long-haul

destination and the time taken to travel would be a key consideration in their decision whether or not to attend WCIM2012. Travel distance was raised by both men and women interviewees fairly evenly as an impediment to their attendance, rather than a factor that would facilitate their visit to Santiago. This finding is consistent with previous investigations where attendees consider travel distance in their decision to attend a convention (Ngamson & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). It is important to note that in some cases, international association conventions are held only in countries within a certain region, for example, Europe. This means that if a convention was to be held in another region, such as the Asia Pacific, attendance numbers could be lower compared to previous years due to travel distance perceptions held by regular attendees. Alternatively, it might facilitate attendance from emerging destinations and gain representation from people who would not normally attend. The convention marketing plan should therefore take into account how attendees view a destination from a travel distance perspective. Travel distance information could be provided to attendees in the preconvention marketing campaign to show how accessible the convention destination is to major cities.

A further factor relevant to convention attendance that emerged in the interviews when the convention location was discussed was safety and security. One respondent mentioned "I'm concerned with my safety" and another stated that having "security in Santiago" is important to them. Safety and security appear to be a primary concern for some attendees as other studies have also found (Jago & Deery, 2005; Yoo & Chon, 2008). Notably, some of the females interviewed in this exploratory study indicated that issues with safety and security at the destination would make it difficult for them to attend the next convention, which is also consistent with previous studies (Jago & Deery, 2005; Mair, 2010a). It is therefore important for convention organizers to distribute information about how safe and secure the destination selected for the convention is when communicating to potential attendees. This would be particularly important if the international association had mainly female members or regular female attendee representation. It must be noted, however, that the data were collected during a time of world economic recovery and after

a natural disaster in Chile. The earthquake that occurred in Chile a month prior to the interviews may explain at least some of the safety concerns amongst respondents.

The third aspect uncovered in the interviews when respondents were asked about the positive outcomes of attending the next convention related to how the host destination contributes to their field of study. Comments included: "it would be beneficial to see Chile's approach to the medical field," "to see . . . how they are managing medicine," and "to be aware of a different country's medicine." Three of the eight female and two of the fifteen male participants raised this factor in the interviews, suggesting that perhaps females are particularly interested in learning about how the host country and/or city is specializing in their field. Based on the literature to date, this is a new addition to our understanding about the reasons why people attend conventions. Subsequently, this finding is worthy of further investigation to explore whether attendees belonging to other medical or scientific professional associations consider finding out about developments in the host convention destination to be particularly important in their convention travel decisions.

Opinions of Others

Although association convention attendance is generally voluntary, the attendees interviewed mentioned that it was important to receive approval from three groups of influencers: their employer/supervisor, colleagues, and family members (i.e., spouse/partner and children) when making convention attendance decisions. These results are in line with the work of M. J. Lee and Back (2007b), who maintain that convention attendance is reliant on the cooperation of the association attendee's boss/advisors and their colleagues. They highlight that, on several occasions, convention attendance is "associated with business, and participation is in part influenced by organisational business decisions and cooperation with colleagues in the same organisation" (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b, p. 29).

From a comparative perspective, these three influencers identified seemed to be important to both men and women interviewed in this study. However, the presence of professional colleagues/peers appeared to be more influential on men while

the employer/supervisor was more of an influence on women. It is thus suggested that convention marketers allow sufficient time for people to obtain permission to attend, provide information about why the convention would be valuable, and perhaps use testimonials from managers who have sent their employees to the convention and as a result their business has benefited in some way. This could potentially help women who may feel a need to "seek permission" to attend a convention. In the same way, preconvention marketing material aimed at male attendees could contain testimonials from colleagues/peers who have previously attended the convention to convey what they would miss out on by not attending the convention.

Financial Resources

Funding and budget considerations were another component in the convention attendance decision according to respondents. This was mainly due to the fact that attendees sometimes rely on their employer to cover the travel costs. For example, one respondent expressed interest in attending the next convention "if attendance was subsidised." Other respondents said "gaining financial support from my department and having money myself" and "sponsorship from company" would make it possible to attend. Not receiving funding or not being able to meet the expenses for the convention travel has also been pointed out by other authors as an impediment to attendance (Mair & Thompson, 2009; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Zhao, 2010). Further analysis with regard to gender showed that having the financial resources would facilitate the attendance decision for both men and women in this exploratory study, suggesting that gender differences were not apparent with respect to this convention attendance factor. This shows that convention marketers need to ensure that attendees have sufficient time to prepare their budget in order to benefit from registering for the convention at an early stage. Additionally, there could be a "register now, pay later" option or if timing permits, registration payments could be made in instalments. Perhaps subsidies for attendees who come from countries that have been underrepresented in previous conventions could be made available to boost international registrations.

Time Availability

The timing of the convention was another important element to the convention attendance decision for respondents, which was considered to be more of a potential barrier than facilitator. Typical comments were “depends on my research activity” and “my availability of leave.” The issue of having time availability is not dissimilar to previous convention tourism research where time has been considered to be an impediment to attendance (Mair & Thompson, 2009; Zhang et al., 2007). Again, this finding was consistent for both male and female interviewees who noted that having the time to attend would have a positive impact upon their intentions to attend the next convention. Considering that attendees have many conventions to choose from and they regard schedule conflicts as a main cause for not attending a convention, it is important for convention marketers to consult with potential attendees about their timing preferences when deciding on the convention dates (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Oppermann, 1996). It might also be worthwhile to send a “save the date” e-mail to past and prospective attendees, asking them to mark their calendars for the convention. This way, they will have advanced notice about the timing and could start making plans to attend the next convention.

Work and Family Responsibilities

The final inhibiting factor that was raised by the participants in this study was having work and/or family responsibilities. Some of the comments relating to this issue included, “I would attend if I had another doctor to relieve me to cover my workload” and “a factor that would inhibit me from attending is my practice commitment.” Moreover, family responsibilities appeared to be an attendance barrier, with interviewees saying that “time away from family” and “leaving my family” would make it difficult to attend. For some of the female interviewees, family responsibilities were considered to be one of the main barriers to attendance, as was found in a study about women and business travel by Harris and Ateljevic (2003). Some of the male respondents mentioned that having their family accompany them would make it easier for them to attend the next convention, yet this did not appear to be a key factor for

women. Organizing an accompanying persons program, providing on-site childcare activities/facilities to accommodate attendees with infants and conveying pre and post touring opportunities available that attendees could undertake around the convention might be a way of increasing attendance numbers for the male attendee segment Jago and Deery (2005). Additionally, offering registration subsidies to attendees who bring their children could entice them to attend and potentially extend their stay, which benefits both the association and the destination.

Conclusions and Implications

This article contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerning convention attendees and their behavioral intentions using a qualitative research approach. An examination of the available literature in this field has highlighted the need to develop a more complete understanding of attendees, in order to discover how attendance decisions might vary for different groups of attendees. In particular, despite the fact that gender appears to be fundamental to travel behavior, there has been a limited amount of research conducted to date to address gender perspectives in a convention travel context. A possible reason for this might be that convention tourism literature is still in its incipient stages and scholars are only starting to identify the need for gender-specific research to help inform the planning and marketing of conventions. This noticeable paucity of gender analysis weakens our understanding of convention travel behavior and therefore merits attention. To help fill some of this gap, the aim of this article was to explore the possible advantages or disadvantages, key influences, and the facilitating and inhibiting factors that would affect the decision to attend the next WCIM in Santiago. The role that gender plays with respect to this decision is also examined.

In line with the existing literature, the exploratory data analysis reveals that attendees expressed interest in attending the next convention based on the opportunity to visit an attractive destination, to make new professional contacts and acquire information specific to their field. Intentions to attend depended on receiving approval from employers, colleagues, and/or family members as well as having the financial resources and time to attend. Some factors appeared to be important to all attendees such as the educational

component and having the time to attend the convention. It is important to note that, although similarities were found, this is still an important contribution to the literature, given its approach and context, which differs from that which had been explored previously. However, some factors appeared to be more pertinent to men than women and vice versa. For example, the opportunity to present a paper(s) was an important component for the male participants interviewed, whereas the networking opportunities was seen to be a more positive outcome of attending the WCIM2012 for women than for men.

The results of this study provide guidance for the convention tourism industry with regard to developing convention marketing strategies that address the needs of male and female attendees. Convention marketers could segment their attendee database according to gender to create personalized and targeted messages in the preconvention marketing material. If the goal of an association is to attract more women to their convention, as may be the case in some medical and scientific industries, the material aimed at attracting female attendees could highlight the social program, safety, and security of the convention location and the opportunity to learn about the host destination's strengths in their field of interest. For male attendees, convention promotional campaigns could draw attention to the prospect of presenting papers and bringing their family on the trip. This would be more effective than sending a generic message to all attendees about the convention, irrespective of their possible reasons for attending. Additionally, this article highlights the importance of notifying attendees in advance about a future convention to ensure they have made an entry in their diaries to attend the event, have started to seek the support from their important referents particularly from a financial perspective, and are looking forward to benefitting from the program content and potential networking opportunities and visiting the convention destination.

The findings of this study could help practitioners provide maximum benefit to association members by better understanding the needs of their attendees. However, more research needs to be conducted in this context to examine the drivers of convention attendance decisions according to gender. The use of a qualitative research approach could provide a more complete picture of international association

convention attendees. Information gleaned through qualitative research techniques could help researchers achieve a deeper understanding into attendee behavior with respect to the similarities and differences between men and women's convention travel decisions.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the authors did not set out to produce generalizable findings beyond the WCIM. Instead, it is hoped that this article assists in shedding some light on convention attendance decisions from a gender perspective to point the way towards future areas for investigation. Accordingly, further research could expand on the current study by building on the factors that emerged from the interviews with a larger sample of attendees. This way, it would be possible to quantitatively test and make generalizations as to whether men's and women's intentions to attend association conventions differ and, if so, in what way. Such information would contribute to our understanding of association convention attendees with regard to the ways in which their travel intentions differ according to gender.

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