The 2nd International Conference on Integrated Information

The contribution of the Scientific Committee in the development of Conferences

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Abstract

As the event industry becomes more and more competitive, conference organizers should find new ways to ensure the success of conferences. The competitive advantage is gain by conferences that manage to add value to participants’ perceptions. The scientific committee of academic conferences plays an important role in the decision making process of potential participants. For this reason, the evaluation criteria of this variable should be appropriate evaluated and determined. The literature review reveals the evaluation criteria that the scientific committee needs to have in order to ensure high levels of quality. It is therefore the conference organizers’ responsibility to find academics that meet these criteria. Co-operations with competent researchers, based on the criteria set, create a competitive advantage and raises new marketing opportunities built on the communication dynamics of the scientific committee. The outcomes of the research examines and reveals four important evaluation criteria and their influence on participants’ perceptions. A dynamic simulation model is further develop in order to provide evidence on the proper allocation of the event company’s resources so as to ensure the highest possible levels of participants’ satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The event industry, one of the most rapidly developing types of tourism [1], encompasses elements that crosses the national borders. Conferences aim at gathering people from all over the world, irrespective of their cultural background. The positive financial evidence [2] and destination’s development [3] of international events
has been extensively researched in previous studies. What is less researched is the contribution of the scientific committee in the development of successful international conferences.

The organization of academic conferences contributes to the long-lasting advancement of knowledge through presentations, speeches and discussion among participants and the development of academic networks [4]. Academics who attend conferences aim at advancing their research with the employment of new methods, as suggested by colleagues during the conference. For this reason, academic conferences are viewed as one of the most crucial academic activities pursued by Academics. Academic conferences provide insights not only to academics and practitioners, but also to PhD and post-graduate students whose main reason for attending them is the constant advancement of knowledge provided by presentations. Furthermore, conferences allow the development of research networks with the intention to create new knowledge based on the co-operation that is gradually being developed among researchers during the Conference.

As conference participation has become a demanding process, not only in terms of the variety to choose from, but also due to the cost that is associated with that activity, more and more Academics reconsider their participation and the benefits accrued. In the arena of competition, the most sought after conferences are the ones that provide multiple competitive advantages. Within the advantages is the configuration of the scientific committee.

2. Conferences’ Scientific Committee

The review of the literature investigates the critical role of scientific committees in international scientific journals. Given the direct link of journals with academic conferences, for the reason that the dominant activity in these two actions is the submission and review of research papers, there is an urgent need to obtain a comprehensive view of the role of scientific committees in conferences.

Brinn and Jones (2007) [5] pose two major criteria for participating in scientific committees: the number of publications and their reputation in the scientific community as emerged by their research activity. The development of the research activity greatly impacts the position of academics in universities, their involvement in editorial boards, the ranking of the University and the availability of doctoral students [6]. Brinn and Jones (2007) [5] research further argues that research ethics and fairness are key characteristics that members of scientific committees should have.

Lowe and Van Fleet (2009) [7] support that research activity is evaluated through publications. They further highlight the factor of citations as an important criterion in the evaluation process of the conference’s scientific committee. The scientific competence of the committee plays an important role for the success of an academic conference. Their presence adds value to the development of the conference [8].

The review reveals that further attention needs to be placed on the impact of ethnocentrism. According to Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft (2006) [9] and Svensson and Wood (2007) [10], the editorial boards need to be characterized by multi-ethnicity, because of its influence on the function and classification of a scientific journal. Given the similarity of actions between the scientific committee of journals and conferences, this fact implies the necessity of a multinational committee in academic conferences.

Table 1 summarizes the evaluation criteria that members of conferences’ scientific committees should have:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Members of Conferences’ Scientific Committees</th>
<th>E Reputation</th>
<th>E Research activity</th>
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Table 1: Evaluation Criteria
It is therefore apparent that members of conferences’ scientific committees should have multiple evaluation criteria in order to exceed participants’ expectations and perform effectively in the development of academic conferences. These criteria give the impetus to conference organizers to invest on academics and develop a communication strategy based on competency. The communication strategy to be developed will improve the performance of academic conferences by promoting the competence of the conference’s scientific committee. The co-operation with skilled researchers, as determined in the literature review, is able to advance the effectiveness of academic conferences and produce a strong brand name. The purpose of the paper is to illustrate participants’ reaction involved in conferences, by thoroughly investigating four of the above mentioned evaluation criteria regarding the contribution of the scientific committee in academic conferences.

3. Methodology

The sample consists of 123 academics and students, a number sufficient enough to meet the needs of the present research. The totality of the sample has participated in more than two international conferences in order to guarantee their experience in the conference system. This condition ensures their knowledge regarding the contribution of the scientific committee in academic conferences. A small percentage of the statistical sample consists of PhD candidates and postgraduate students, in order to reflect the perceptions of potential scientists.

In order to measure the attitude of potential participants, regarding the contribution of conferences’ scientific committee, the research adopts the quantitative research. This technique is employed in an attempt to provide the results on how the contribution of the scientific committee is perceived by experienced delegates. The entire statistical sample was approached with the help of internet. Questionnaires, based on the five-point Likert Scale, were sent to scientists in the English language since this research is focused on international academic conferences.

4. Results

The scientific committee of conferences plays an important role in the decision making process of delegates regarding their participation in academic conferences. 90% of the sample (measurement scale 4 & 5) evaluates high the contribution of the scientific committee.
4.1. Multi-ethnicity

The theoretical framework and the qualitative research reveals that the multinational nature of the scientific committee is an important criterion for evaluating this variable. Conferences, which do not invest in an intercultural style, considered as conferences with a unilateral orientation. In order for the conference to attract scientists from around the globe, a scientific committee with members from different nationalities needs to be developed. This will give a multinational character to the academic scientific conference that will lead to an increasing level of the conference reliability.

65% (measurement scale 4 & 5) of the sample appreciates the evaluation criterion of multi-ethnicity. A scientific conference with an international orientation should not be limited by geographical boundaries. If the
ultimate goal of conferences is the advancement of knowledge, conference organizers should invest on inviting competent members from around the globe. Conferences limited in scope do not have universal acceptance, as they do not take into account the global progress made in a particular research area. This is further evidenced by the low rates of the scales “not at all important” and “not very important” (12% - measurement scale 1 & 2).

4.2. Ability to review

The ability to review papers is considered important by the majority of the sample. The review of the submitted papers passes through the internal evaluation of the scientific committee. It is a science-intensive activity, which takes place during the organization of scientific conferences.

![Figure 3: Review Skills](image)

The existence of excellent review skills is considered important to the vast majority of the sample, with a high percentage of 74.8% (measurement scale 4 & 5). This finding is reasonable due to the fact that one of the predominant actions of the scientific committee is the evaluation of research papers that are submitted in the conference. Only 1/5 of the statistical sample maintains a neutral attitude toward the existence of this evaluation criterion. It is speculated that this figure is linked with the evaluation of research papers by symposium organizers. This estimation is not valid, since in the majority of scientific conferences the review process goes through a double blind peer-review.

4.3. Research activity - Publications

Publication is an evaluation criterion, which receives high acceptance ratings from the sample. This result is justified since it is directly related to the competence of researchers. The number of publications provides great evidence to the scientific activity of researchers and to their knowledge and contribution in the field they serve.
The proportion of the sample that considers publications an insignificant evaluation criterion is limited to 13% (measurement scale 1 & 2). This finding provides support on the belief that publications are considered an excellent opportunity to evaluate the scientific activity of researchers. It is already known to the academic community that publications are an important criterion for the professional development of academics.

4.4. Previous experience

Previous experience is deemed to be particularly important for a large proportion of the sample. This finding is reasonable since it generates benefits that are evident to participants. Previous experience guarantees to participants that the scientific committee has the ability and competence to perform effectively in the development of the conference.

This outcome shows that the evaluation criterion of “Previous experience” has a special impact on the majority of the sample, since over 70% of the respondents considers it a somewhat important or very important evaluation criterion.
5. Dynamic Simulation Model

The present study further attempts to simulate the outcomes of the research and reveal the operation of the system “Scientific Committee” within academic conferences. Numerous studies have been focused on the dynamics of simulation by using computational and theoretical techniques [11-25]. To this end, a dynamic simulation model has been developed in order to manage the event company’s resources. The model has been constructed with the aid of the ad hoc software, iThink. In figure 6, the entire picture of the model is presented.

The research reveals that multiple evaluation criteria strongly influence the decision making process of potential delegates regarding their participation in conferences. The more the criteria a member of the scientific committee has, the higher his/her competence. Based on this statement, the evaluation criteria assess the research recognition of academics. A high satisfaction level of the criteria leads to the formation of participants’ attitude regarding their participation. Therefore, the organizing committee of conferences needs to allocate the resources appropriately in order to invite competent researchers and by extension meet the expectations of participants.

The model starts from the tank “Company Resources”. The event company has a limited number of financial, technological and human resources to place on conferences. For this reason, the event company sends limited resources to the tank “Conference Resources” in order to organize a conference. Part of the resources are placed for the development of the scientific committee. Therefore, the organizing committee spends resources in order to find competent researchers that meet the evaluation criteria. This action is illustrated by the arrow “CR2SC”. The amount of the resources to be transferred from the tank “Conference Resources” to the “Scientific Committee” tank is determined by the average percentage of the sample attitude towards the dynamics of the variable “Scientific Committee”.

The “Scientific Committee” tank receives resources sent by the tank “Conference Resources”. The main aim of the model is to satisfy the “Scientific Committee” tank. When the tank is full, the conference has managed to find the appropriate academics, who qualify the scientific committee of the conference. The amount of the resources that fulfills the tank of “Scientific Committee” is determined by the rating of the sample. The positive evaluation of the sample, regarding the variable of “Scientific Committee” (measurement scale 5), is the appropriate percentage that is needed to fulfill the needs of the tank “Scientific Committee”. In communication terms, when the tank of “Scientific Committee” is full, the organizing committee of the conference is able to release a marketing campaign based on the dynamic of this variable in order to attract more delegates.

An important aspect of the model is the mechanism “Switch CR2SC”. Once the tank of “Scientific Committee” is full, the mechanism turns off in order to prevent the transfer of resources. In other words, this mechanism saves resources that could be used unnecessarily in a tank that is already fulfilled. This is of paramount importance for the conference organizers, since they have the ability to allocate these resources to other activities.

In addition, the entire circuit has a second precautionary mechanism to save unused resources. This is illustrated by the tank “Counterpoise SC”. Even if the tank has received more resources than the necessary ones, then the unused resources are being transferred with the aid of the “SC2CSC” to the tank “Counterpoise SC”. The remaining resources in the tank “Counterpoise SC” are being transferred to the tank “Conference Resources”, from where they can be easily allocated to other conference activities.

The model further forecasts the loss of resources when the negotiation activities of the conference organizers fail. It is expected that a number of resources will be wasted due to unpredicted factors (failure to invite a member that corresponds to the evaluation criteria).

The resources in the tank “Scientific Committee” influence the brand name of the conference. Conference organizers have the ability to work on a scenario, based on the mechanism “Percent BNsc2CoR”. They are able to convert the amount of the remaining resources in the tank “Scientific Committee” into brand name’s resources. For example, if the tank “Scientific Committee” is completely full, then an amount of brand name resources are being transferred from the tank “Brand Name SC” to the tank “Company Resources”. In a way, this is the profit
that the conference generates when it fulfills the need of participants regarding the variable of “Scientific Committee”.

When the entire circuit is successful, the control button becomes green. On the contrary, if the circuit fails to adequately fulfill the evaluation criteria of the variable “Scientific Committee” the button becomes red.

Figure 6: Dynamic Simulation Model
6. Conclusion

The research has effectively demonstrated the significance of the scientific committees in conferences. In order to ensure high levels of participation, one of the activities that the organizing committee should accomplished is to qualify a competent scientific committee. The key to ensure its competence is to be consistent with the evaluation criteria set by the literature review and evaluated by participants. The outcomes of the research reveal that the evaluation criteria are taken into great consideration by participants, some with high levels of expectations, others with low ones. Conference organizers need to find the appropriate mix of the evaluation criteria in order to meet participants expectations regarding the variable of the scientific committee. This mix will enable them to create a communication strategy based on the scientific committee and its communication dynamics. The research further develops a dynamic simulation model, which is provided useful to the management of the resources.

References