

## 4.1. Study 1: Importance-Performance Analysis as Exhibitors Effectiveness Evaluation Tool<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to introduce importance-performance analysis as exhibitors' trade show performance evaluation and benchmarking tool. Importance-performance analysis takes into account exhibitors' prior performance expectation together with perceived performance to evaluate and benchmark trade show performance. When used as trade show performance evaluation and benchmarking tool, importance-performance analysis offers exhibitors appropriate performance improvement strategies on several trade show activities. This study uses empirical data obtained from exhibitors of an international trade show to demonstrate how importance-performance analysis can be used to evaluate and benchmark trade show performance. The study also discusses normative and the theoretical implications of the proposed method.

### Introduction

The issue of exhibitors' performance evaluation has always been an important research area in the trade show literature. This should perhaps come as no surprise as exhibitors need to know whether their investment in trade show is profitable. Researchers employ two approaches to evaluate exhibitors' trade show performance. The first approach measures trade show performance using exhibitors' subjective evaluation of the effectiveness of their efforts on important trade show activities (e.g., Hansen 2004; Kerin and Cron 1987; Lee and Kim 2008).

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The second approach emphasizes exhibitors' selling performance and uses objective indicators including the proportion of visitors attracted to exhibitors' booths (e.g., Dekimpe et al., 1997; Gopalakrishna and Lilien 1995) and number of sales leads generated during the show (e.g., Gopalakrishna and Williams 1992).

Despite their wider application, the prevailing trade show performance evaluation approaches have drawbacks. Kerin and Cron (1987) find out as much as 80 percent of marketing executives voiced their concern regarding trade show performance evaluation approaches which rely solely on the subjective evaluation of perceived performance. A common problem with the prevailing performance evaluation approaches is the exclusion of exhibitors' prior performance expectation.

The performance of an exhibitor who attaches considerable importance, for instance, to the customer relationship activity should be evaluated by taking this prior performance expectation into consideration (Shoham, 1992). However, the literature discounts the implication of this link between exhibitors' prior performance expectation and their perceived performance. As a result, exhibitors' trade show performance gets evaluated without the inclusion performance expectations. The inclusion of exhibitors' performance expectations in evaluating trade show performance is essential as expectations largely govern exhibitors' trade show efforts (Shoham, 1992). If one can establish a link between exhibitors' performance expectation and perceived performance, exhibitors can estimate whether their actual performance lived up to their prior expectation.

In this article, we propose an approach that factor exhibitors' prior performance expectation into the evaluation of trade show performance. This approach is a slightly modified version of the popular importance-performance analysis framework (Martilla and James 1977). The original importance-performance analysis (IPA) framework is devised as a customer satisfaction gauging tool. In this

study, however, we employ IPA as trade show performance evaluation and benchmarking tool. The proposed method allows simultaneous assessment of exhibitors' performance expectation and their perceived performance on several trade show activities. Such comparative assessments enable exhibitors to determine to what extent their performance expectations are met. The method also allows benchmarking one exhibitor's performance against another exhibitor's performance.

The present study addresses two important gaps in the literature. First, the study proposes an approach that factor in exhibitors' prior performance expectation together with their perceived performance to evaluate trade show performance. Thus, the proposed approach adds an extra dimension into the evaluation of exhibitors' performance. Second, the proposed method potentially allows exhibitors to benchmark their performance against other exhibitors' performances. The trade show literature does not yet come up with a mechanism that enables exhibitors to benchmark their performance against other exhibitors. The trade show performance evaluation method described in this study addresses this issue by demonstrating how IPA can be used for such a purpose.

## **Literature Review**

### **Exhibitors' Performance Expectation**

Understanding exhibitors' performance expectations has largely been the pre-occupation of the trade show literature. There are several studies that are devoted for this purpose. An extensive review of the literature produces a recurring premise suggesting that exhibitors have both selling and non selling performance expectations.

Bonama (1983) – in a pioneer empirical research about exhibitors' performance expectations – suggests dichotomous performance expectations consisting of

selling and non-selling dimensions. The selling performance expectations include customer assurance, new market development, access to key decision makers, product information dispersal, on site sales, and providing customer services. Exhibitors' non-selling performance expectations constitute maintaining company image, competitive intelligence, market scanning, boosting employee morale, and testing new products.

Shoham (1992) stresses the need for understanding the performance expectation of exhibitors as performance expectations are essential precedents for subsequent performance measurement efforts. Based on discussions with exhibit managers, Shoham (1992) categorizes exhibitor performance expectations into selling (goals targeting existing customers, new customers and both) and non-selling (intelligence-gathering, enhancing morale, enhancing image, generating new product ideas, managing relationship with suppliers and forming strategic alliances).

Kijewski et al. (1993) discuss exhibitors' performance expectations across different types of trade shows. Their analyses indicate that exhibitors prefer horizontal shows if their primary performance expectation is to develop new customers and recruit new distributors. Vertical shows appear to be appropriate for developing new market or product segments and for countering competitors' presence. In terms of the geographic coverage of trade shows, regional shows are prioritized when the performance expectations are sales and competition driven. On the other hand, international and national shows are favored when exhibitors place more importance to developing new prospects and new product markets.

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 performance expectations include activities related

to introducing new products, entering new markets, informing customers about new products, gaining publicity and gathering competitive intelligence. The selling performance expectations constitute meeting key customers, identifying new customers, generating sales leads and taking sales orders.

Tanner and Chonko (2002) take a product life cycle perspective to study the effectiveness of trade show marketing. They specifically examine exhibitors' perception about the effectiveness of trade shows in accomplishing promotional and selling objectives for products at different stages of the product life cycle. Their findings indicate that, firms that exhibit products at the growth and maturity stage of the product lifecycle perceive trade shows more fruitful in generating sales leads. Firms that exhibit products in the introduction stage of the product life cycle perceive trade shows effective in establishing positive product and firm image. On the other hand, firms, regardless of the lifecycle of exhibited products, perceive trade shows beneficial to generate immediate sales.

In a much recent study, Kozak (2006) considers a comprehensive set of exhibitors' performance expectations focusing on the hospitality and travel industry. Factor analysis carried out on 23 trade show activities produces four dimensions of performance expectations representing selling, promotion, research and strategy. Kozak (2006) also reports that exhibitors attach disparate level of performance expectations depending on their industry domain. For instance, exhibitors in the hospitality industry perceive enhancing employee morale, introducing new services and competitive information gathering as the three most important trade show performance aspects. Whereas, exhibitors in the travel industry rate competitive benchmarking, sharing marketing experience and competitive information gathering as the top three performance expectations respectively.

## **Exhibitors' Performance Evaluation**

The question of how to evaluate firms' trade show performance has always been an important research agenda in the trade show literature. One can identify two distinct trade show performance evaluation approaches. The first approach relies on perceptual data; the second approach relies on activity based data.

The most common performance evaluation approach uses exhibit managers' perception of performance effectiveness on various trade show activities (e.g., Kerin & Cron, 1987; Hansen, 2004; Lee & Kim, 2008). Benefits of this approach include multidimensionality (i.e., allows researchers to capture exhibitors' performance effectiveness on several trade show activities) and relative ease of accessing performance data. Its drawbacks include 1) the subjective nature of the approach can lessen the reliability of the data, 2) if appropriate respondents are not carefully selected the ensuing performance ratings can misrepresent exhibitors' performance and 3) discounts exhibitors prior performance expectations.

The activity based performance evaluation approach rely on direct measures of exhibitors volume of activity such as proportion of visitors attracted to exhibitors' booths (Dekimpe et al., 1997; Gopalakrishna and Lilien 1995), proportion of visitors contacted by booth representatives (Gopalakrishna and Lilien 1995), number of sales literature distributed to visitors (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984) and volume of sales leads and real time sales generated as a direct result of show participation (Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992). A notable advantage of this approach is the use of objective performance indicators which allows making reliable performance comparisons among exhibitors. It's narrow focus on the selling activity of exhibitors' and failure to consider exhibitors' prior performance expectations can be mentioned as shortcomings of this approach.

In sum, exhibitors' performance expectation and performance effectiveness are thoroughly investigated under diverse trade show and exhibitor contexts; albeit unilaterally. As a result, we could not locate a study that examines the relationship between exhibitors' performance expectations and perceived performances in a unified framework. The IPA is such a framework that could yield a deeper understanding of this relationship. The framework is outlined in the next section.

### **Importance-performance Analysis**

IPA was introduced to the marketing literature by Martilla and James (1977) as an analytical tool to capture drivers of customer satisfaction. The principal premise of IPA is that customer satisfaction is affected by their expectations about salient attributes of a particular product and post-purchase judgements of delivered performances on those attributes. Since then, IPA has been applied as a measure of customer satisfaction across a wide spectrum of fields including service quality (Ennew, Reed and Binks 1992; Ford, Joseph and Joseph 1999; Matzler, Bailom, Hinterhuber, Renzl and Pichler 2004), information system (Skok, Kophamel and Richardson 2001), e-business strategies (Levenburg and Magal 2005), hospitality (Deng 2007; Hammitt, Bixler and Noe 1996; Keyt, Yavas and Riecken 1994) and health care (Abalo, Varela and Manzano 2007).

In its traditional form (Martilla and James, 1977), IPA is depicted as a two dimensional matrix with the horizontal axis representing the perceived performance of product or service attributes from low to high and the vertical axis showing the perceived importance of product attributes from low to high (see Figure 1.1). A vertical line which passes through the cut-off point (commonly the scale mean of the attributes is used as the cut-off point) for perceived performance and a horizontal line which passes through the cut-off point for perceived importance partition the importance performance map (I-P map) into four

quadrants (see Figure 1.1). In effect, the I-P map generates four quadrants with different performance improvement implications.

Quadrant I constitutes high importance-high performance attributes. This quadrant is labelled *“keep up the good work”* to suggest that the firm should keep on performing well on those attributes that customers ascribe higher importance. Quadrant II also known as *“possible overkill”* constitutes low importance-high performance attributes. The firm may in fact deliver too much on attributes that are located on quadrant II, hence the recommendation to diverge resources away to other under-performing attributes. Quadrant III also known as *“low priority”* constitutes low importance-low performance attributes suggesting that improvements on these attributes are unnecessary.

Attributes with high importance and low performance are located in quadrant IV. This quadrant is labelled *“concentrate here”* to suggest that the firm needs to improve its performances on attributes that fall on this quadrant. By placing individual attributes into four quadrants, IPA offers a pragmatic evaluation of how well the firm performs on each attribute along with appropriate strategies for performance improvements.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection and Sample Selection**

This study drew sample from exhibitors of the Addis Chamber International Trade Fair (ACITF) held in 2008. The ACITF is an annual event hosted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia which regularly attracts about three hundred exhibitors from several countries. The official directory of the ACITF was used for sampling purpose. Questionnaires were sent out, using personal delivery method, to all of the 150 domestic exhibitors. The questionnaire was addressed directly to the 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. 65 of the 150 exhibit managers responded, resulting in a 43% response rate. Six of the 65 questionnaires were incomplete and hence were removed from analysis, resulting in 59 valid respondents. Table 1.1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1.1. Respondents’ Profile (N = 59)

		Percent
Industry	Agriculture	8.50
	Manufacturing	42.40
	Service	10.20
	Trading	39.00
	Total	100.00
Annual sales (in millions USD)	< 15	20.30
	1.6-5	32.20
	5.1-10	17.00
	10.1-50	20.30
	> 50	10.20
	Total	100.00
Business orientation	Home-based	45.80
	Importers	27.10
	Exporters-importers	27.10
	Total	100.00

## Measures

In order to measure exhibitors trade show performance expectation and perceived performance, 9 trade show activities, deemed most appropriate for the trade show context under investigation, were extracted from the literature (see Table 1.2). These trade show activities represent exhibitors' efforts in areas including competitive intelligence, market scanning, customer relationship and selling. The selection of the trade show activities is mainly guided by previous research and judgement on the relevance or applicability of the activities for the exhibitors being investigated.

To measure exhibitors' performance expectations, the respondents were asked to determine how important it was for their firm to deliver high performance on the nine trade show activities in terms of their contribution to the accomplishment of the firm's overall marketing strategy. Thus, exhibitors' performance expectations of the nine activities were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by "*not at all important*" (1) and "*very important*" (7). The performance expectation scale demonstrate adequate level of reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.71). Exhibitors' perceived performance was measured on the same nine trade show activities. A seven-point performance scale (1 = poor, 7 = excellent) is used to enable the exhibit managers to evaluate their firm's performance on each trade show activity. Similar performance scale is used by Hansen (2004), Kerin and Cron (1987) and Lee and Kim (2008). The perceived performance scale has good level of reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.74).

Placing the trade show activities into the four quadrants of the I-P map requires calculating cut-off points (cross hair points) for the performance expectation and the perceived performance variables. We used the scale-means of these two variables to determine the cut-off points which is a standard procedure in the literature (Aigbedo and Parameswaran 2004; Bacon 2003; Yavas and Shemwell

2001). The cut-off point for performance expectation is calculated by summing the performance expectation mean scores for all the nine activities and dividing it by nine which gives 5.2. Likewise, the cut-off point for perceived performance is calculated by summing the perceived performance mean scores for the nine trade show activities and dividing it by nine which gives 4.6.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Mean Scores of the Trade Show Activities**

Table 1.2 presents the performance expectation and the perceived performance mean scores of the nine trade show activities. Paired sample t-test tests the statistical significance of mean score differences between performance expectation and perceived performance. Seven of the nine trade show activities have statistically significant differences.

The result shows that exhibitors attach higher performance expectations to trade show activities related to developing customer relationship (M = 6.4), generating sales at the show (M = 5.9), exchanging information with competitors (M = 5.9) and introducing new products at the show (M = 5.8). On the other hand, activities related to exploring export market opportunities (M = 3.4) and meeting key decision makers (M = 4.1) received lower performance expectations. Exhibitors perceive highly effective performance on such activities as developing customer relationship (M = 5.9), collecting information about competitors (M = 5.2) and introducing new products at the show (M = 5.2). Lower performance effectiveness is reported on such activities as exploring export market opportunities (M = 2.7), meeting key decision makers (M = 3.8) and exploring domestic market opportunities (M = 4.1).

Table 1.2. Performance Expectation and Perceived Performance Mean Scores

No	Trade show activities	Mean (St. deviation)		Mean difference	T-value
		Performance expectation	Perceived performance		
1	Generating sales at the show	5.9 (1.7)	4.4 (2.1)	-1.5	4.7***
2	Introducing new products at the show	5.8 (1.8)	5.2 (1.9)	-0.6	2.0**
3	Exploring domestic market opportunities	4.7 (2.0)	4.1 (2.2)	-0.6	1.8*
4	Exploring export market opportunities	3.4 (2.4)	2.7 (2.1)	-0.6	2.4**
5	Evaluating competitors products	5.1 (2.0)	5.0 (1.9)	-0.1	0.3 <sup>ns</sup>
6	Exchanging information with competitors	5.9 (1.6)	4.8 (2.2)	-1.1	3.9***
7	Collecting information about competitors	5.8 (1.6)	5.2 (2.1)	-0.6	2.0**
8	Developing customer relationship	6.4 (0.9)	5.9 (1.0)	-0.5	2.8***
9	Meeting key decision makers	4.1 (2.2)	3.8 (2.3)	-0.3	0.8 <sup>ns</sup>
	Scale mean	5.2 (1.0)	4.7 (1.2)	-0.6	4.3***

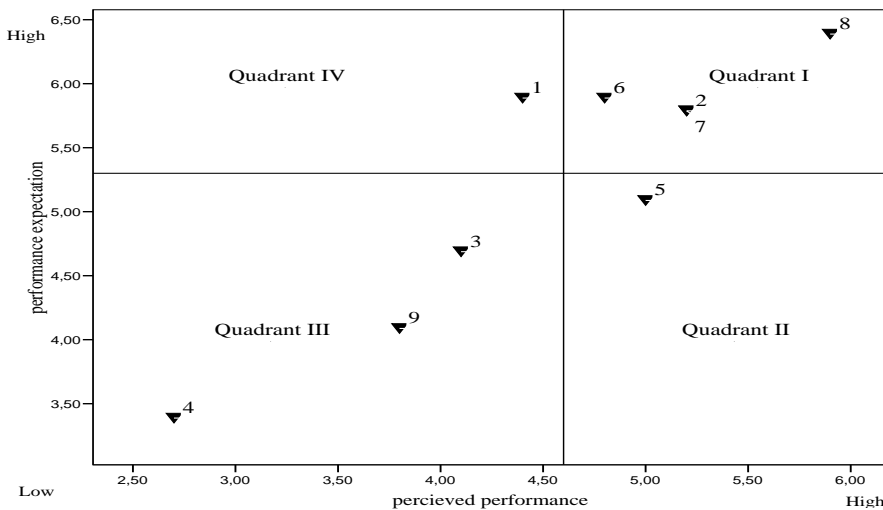
Notes: ns = not significant, \*P < 0.1, \*\*P < 0.05, \*\*\*P < 0.01.

### Importance-performance Analysis as Exhibitors' Performance Evaluation Tool

The mean scores reported in Table 1.2 are used to construct the I-P map. Since the I-P map is utilized as performance evaluation tool, as opposed to its traditional application of customer satisfaction measurement tool, its construction is slightly modified to fit this purpose. The modification is done by converting the “importance” dimension to performance expectation and the “performance” dimension to perceived performance. Apart from this slight difference, the modified IPA model is similar to the traditional model. Each trade show activity is placed on the I-P map based on its performance expectation – perceived performance mean

coordinate. In the subsequent section the I-P map which is displayed in Figure 1.1 is applied to evaluate exhibitors' performance.

Figure 1.1. Performance Expectation – Perceived Performance Map (Total Exhibitors)



**Quadrant I**

Quadrant I consists of attributes with high performance expectations and high perceived performances. This quadrant constitutes activity 2 (introducing new products), activity 6 (exchanging information with competitors), activity 7 (collecting information about competitors) and activity 8 (developing customer relationship). Exhibitors' perceived performance meets their high expectation for activities related to customer relationship (activity 8), competitive intelligence (activity 6 and 7) and product promotion (activity 2). Because high performance is delivered on important activities, exhibitors need to maintain the current performance level for quadrant I activities.

### ***Quadrant II***

Quadrant II constitutes activities on which exhibitors deliver performance which exceed their prior expectation. The only activity that is placed in quadrant II is activity 5 (evaluating competitors products) implying that exhibitors are possibly using up more resources than is necessary. It appears that activity 5 can lend itself to overkill since it requires booth personnel to collect commercial and technical information on rival companies' products. It is possible for booth personnel to spend excess time and resources gathering perhaps not so relevant product information. Exhibitors should pay attention to the level of resources used for activity 5.

### ***Quadrant III***

Quadrant III constitutes activities with lower performance expectations and lower performances making performance improvement efforts needless (Abalo et al. 2007; Matzler et al. 2004). Quadrant III consists of activity 3 (exploring domestic market opportunities), activity 4 (exploring export market opportunities) and activity 9 (meeting key decision makers). The activities that are perceived as less important by exhibitors are related to market scanning (activity 3 and 4) and image enhancing (activity 9). Although other exhibitors perceive similar activities important (e.g., Kijewski et al., 1993; Kozak, 2006), the present ones view market scanning and image enhancing as low priority performance aspects.

### ***Quadrant IV***

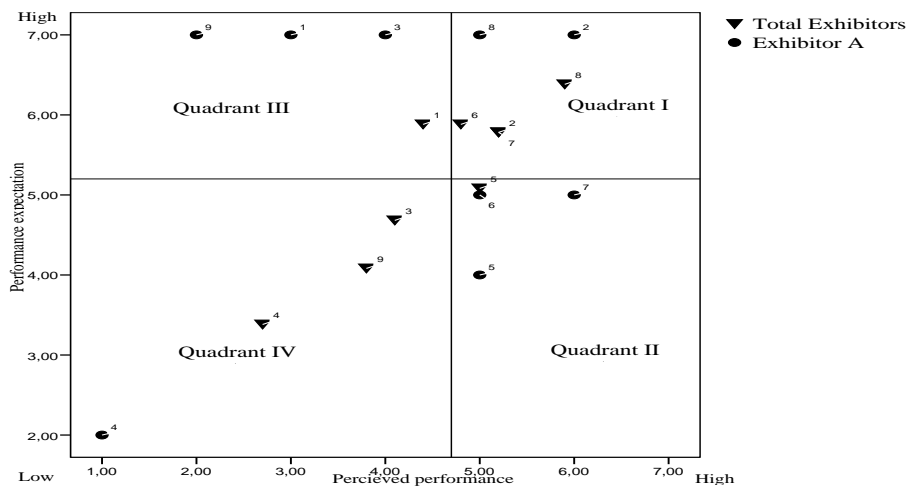
Quadrant IV constitutes attributes on which exhibitors underperformed relative to their prior expectations. Consequently attributes that are located in this quadrant are considered the most candid for performance improvements (Abalo et al. 2007; Martilla and James 1977; Skok et al. 2001). Hence, Activity 1 (generating sales at the show), the only activity placed in quadrant IV, calls for the immediate attention

of exhibitors. Consequently, exhibitors need to devise improvement strategies to enhance their performance on the selling activity.

### Importance-performance Analysis as Exhibitors' Performance Benchmarking Tool

This section demonstrates how IPA can be used to benchmark exhibitors' trade show performance. To do so, we randomly select one exhibitor (which we call exhibitor A) out of the respondents and compare exhibitor A's performance against the remaining exhibitors' performance. We insert the performance expectation-perceived performance mean scores of exhibitor A to the existing I-P map in Figure 1. The new I-P map is shown in Figure 1.2. The benchmarking is undertaken by simultaneously examining the position of each trade show activity in the I-P map for both exhibitor A and the other exhibitors.

Figure 1.2. Performance Expectation – Perceived Performance Map (Total Exhibitors versus Exhibitor A)



It can be observed, from Figure 1.2, that exhibitor A has a clear competitive advantage on activity 2 (introducing new products) and activity 7 (collecting

information about competitors) over the remaining exhibitors. However, this result have to be interpreted carefully as exhibitor A's competitive advantage on activity 7 partly stems from possible overuse of resources. On the contrary, exhibitor A suffers serious competitive disadvantages on activity 1 (generating sales at the show), activity 8 (developing customer relationship) and activity 9 (meeting key decision makers), compared with the other exhibitors. The performance of exhibitor A is roughly the same as with the other exhibitors on activity 3 (exploring domestic market opportunities), activity 5 (evaluating competitors products) and activity 6 (exchanging information with competitors).

The outcome of the benchmark analysis implies that exhibitor A may need to initiate performance improvement actions on the underperformed trade show activities so that it can match or surpass other exhibitors' performance. With this in mind, activity 1, activity 8 and activity 9 need to be acted upon. Similarly, exhibitor A may seek to introduce improvement actions to create new competitive advantages on the activities where similar levels of performances are reported (i.e., activity 3, 5, and 6). Exhibitor A may also need to further strengthen the competitive advantage that it presently has over the remaining exhibitors on activity 2 and activity 7.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The primary purpose of this study is to demonstrate how IPA can be used to evaluate and benchmark exhibitors' trade show performance on multiple activities. Based on the IPA analysis carried out, we draw the following general observations. First, the surveyed exhibitors clearly recognise the role that trade show can play as an integrated marketing platform where multiple marketing activities can be pursued. Second, the surveyed exhibitors ascribe lower importance to market scanning and image enhancing activities. Finally, and somewhat surprisingly,



exhibitors performed less than their own expectations on the selling activity, while over delivering on the competitive intelligence activity.

The findings suggest three implications pertinent to the management of trade shows. First, IPA, when used as a performance evaluation tool, yields useful strategic insights for managers about the performance of several trade show activities. Depending on the position of each trade show activity in the I-P map, the outcome offers appropriate performance improvement strategies to decision makers. Second, managers can employ IPA to benchmark their firms' trade show performance against other exhibitors' performance. However, the difficulty of accessing data on other exhibitors' performances can impede exhibitors' efforts to benchmark performance. Yet, trade show organisers can collect such data from individual exhibitors and distribute the aggregate data back to the exhibitors. This arrangement can be advantageous for the organisers as well as the exhibitors. While the organisers can add value to their service ranges by offering crucial performance data to customers, the exhibitors can also benefit from accessing data about other exhibitor performances which can be used to benchmark performance.

Third, exhibit managers can apply IPA to prioritise performance improvement actions for under-performed trade show activities. Prioritising performance improvement action is particularly essential when an exhibitor faces several trade show activities in Quadrant IV (the high expectation-low performance quadrant) or when it under performs, relative to other exhibitors, on several important activities. The combined effect of limited resources and diminishing returns to scale suggests that exhibitors would better position themselves by focusing performance improvements on activities that are perceived important.

IPA is also a theoretically sound trade show performance evaluation method as it factors in exhibitors' performance expectation together with their perceived

performance to evaluate trade show performance. Thus, IPA can be used as an alternative to the existing trade show performance measurement approaches which rely on exhibitors perceived performance ratings unilaterally. Using IPA, trade show activities can be assigned performance scores based on their position in each exhibitor's I-P map. Such performance scores take into account not only perceived performance but also prior performance expectation. The resulting performance scores can then be used, for instance, as dependent variables in regression models.

On a closing note, this study is limited to examining exhibitors drawn from single trade show which is held in a developing country. Thus, the relevance of the proposed framework should be cross-validated in future research in other market and trade show contexts. This will help to assess the extent to which the IPA framework can be generalised as an effective trade show performance evaluation tool.

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