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### **Exploring industry priorities regarding customer satisfaction and implications for event evaluation**

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Abstract:

This paper explores the priorities of event organisers and venue managers in terms of evaluation criteria and avenues for advancing the development and implementation of banks of questions regarding customer satisfaction evaluation. The results presented are based on a questionnaire distributed to a sample of event organisers and venue managers which sought to identify their priorities with regards to customer satisfaction feedback. Findings show that a significant proportion of respondents had never undertaken formal evaluation, citing time and resources as the key barriers. In addition, a wide range of satisfaction related criteria were rated as important, with the most valued criteria often related to generalised areas, but failing to consider the motivations of individuals for event attendance, which also appears as a gap within evaluation literature. The research findings indicate that developing banks of evaluation questions is a complex task, due to the number of potential variables in terms of events and audiences. In linking the priority areas identified by the respondents with evaluation literature and event attendee motivations this paper proposes alternative ways of structuring and utilising banks of evaluation questions linked to attendee profiles and motivations. Its central premise is that evaluation of consumer satisfaction should be led by consumer motivations and expectations if it is to be viable, meaningful and aid future event development and enhancement. This raises many questions and avenues for future research, to progress the area of logistically feasible evaluation, which generates rich and meaningful data.

Keywords: Event evaluation, attendee motivations, customer satisfaction, event organisers, questionnaires, surveys

Article Classification: Research paper

## **Introduction**

Event evaluation is a difficult activity for event organisers balancing the needs and interests of different stakeholder groups, within the constraints of time and other resources. However, it is vital to reflect upon event processes and outcomes, engage in continuous improvements and provide feedback for stakeholders. The complexity of evaluation is directly linked to event scope, size and scale, aims and objectives, and the range of stakeholders involved. However, whilst it is easy to broadly outline what is required, event evaluation is complex with a multitude of barriers including skills, time, access and resources (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the challenges surrounding practical evaluation means it is often a neglected area of events management.

The research presented in this paper emerged from a wider project which sought to identify the priorities of a sample of event organisers and venue managers regarding customer feedback and satisfaction. The intention of the initial research project was to develop a bank of questions to be fed into an online evaluation platform, for use by event organisers and venue managers. The key benefits being to overcome barriers, such as lack of time to create questionnaires, organiser research skills, capacity to implement evaluation and enable parity between events, by providing a standard approach for internal evaluation (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Several issues emerged from this initial research to develop a bank of questions. First, the lack of regard for attendee motivations and the event experience within the event evaluation literature and industry questionnaires analysed. Second, the significant proportion of the industry representatives surveyed who had never conducted satisfaction evaluation. Third, the number of factors respondents perceived as important to event evaluation, could be a barrier, i.e. with so many possible areas to evaluate, meaningful evaluation was unviable from a resource perspective. Fourth, both event organisers and venue managers valued many of the same criteria, demonstrating the potential for collaborative research between event organisers and venue managers. Fifth, whilst developing banks of evaluation

questions has the potential to enhance the outcomes and efficiency of data collection, one survey is insufficient to complete the task. There is still a need for much more research in this area.

Given the significance of experiential consumption (Pine and Gilmore, 2009) and the links between motivation and satisfaction, the narrow emphasis on motivation and experiential dimensions within consumer satisfaction evaluation practices seems limiting. This paper discusses the satisfaction priorities reported by the industry and proposes a range of measures to facilitate and focus evaluation of attendee satisfaction, which incorporates motivational theories and industry priorities. Secondly, it considers how understanding and awareness of attendee motivations can assist the development of tailored question banks to assist event organisers in selecting appropriate evaluation criteria, when there are so many potential areas to explore. Depth versus efficiency being a key constraint of survey research approaches. It highlights how the number of areas organisers consider important to customer satisfaction evaluation can potentially act as a barrier and proposes thematic areas of questioning, which account for attendee motivations. With 24% of venue managers and 59% of event organisers in the sample having never conducted customer satisfaction surveys, this is obviously something that the industry must address. Finally, it highlights a number of areas for future research in progressing the area of motivation linked satisfaction evaluation.

This paper explores how linking attendee motivations with satisfaction criteria can make event evaluation more meaningful, feasible and effective. A key contribution is exploring industry priorities and drawing the link between evaluation priorities and the motivations of event audiences, bridging the gap between motivations and operational practices. It also opens the debate surrounding the role of attendee motivations in steering the evaluation of consumer satisfaction through tailored question banks. Through tailoring surveys based upon attendee motivations, organisers can shape their evaluation, maximising relevance to the expectations and motivations of their attendees, whilst also minimising the length of questionnaires which is a

significant constraint to gaining a representative sample and subsequent analysis and reporting.

## **Literature review**

### **Event Evaluation**

Evaluating event quality and event outcomes are vital to long-term sustainability (Brown *et al.*, 2015). Implicitly, evaluation requires a balance between organiser and stakeholder interests, their power, saliency and legitimacy and resources available. The range of evaluation models and approaches have recently been well documented by Brown, *et al.*, (2015) who highlight it is vital organisers select the most appropriate evaluation model and method to suit individual events and their wider socio-political context. However, barriers must be addressed and overcome, including resources (staff, staff expertise, money, time, software), event objectives (research questions, stakeholder influence, evaluator bias) and respondents (recollection/memory, access, sampling strategy) (Schlenker *et al.*, 2010; Goldblatt, 2011). As resources are a common issue, questions of scope versus depth of evaluation present considerable challenges. This highlights the value of surveys using banks of evaluation questions, based on event areas, processes and outcomes, saving time for organisers through grouping criteria around different elements of event performance such as customer satisfaction.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Satisfaction is defined as understanding the quality of people's experience through their perceptions and expectations of event criteria (Wysong *et al.*, 2011). Where perceptions of experience and performance exceed preconceived expectations and customer motives are accomplished, satisfaction occurs. Thus, given the complexity of customer motives, expectations and the number of event variables, a wide range of factors influence customer satisfaction (Wysong *et al.*, 2011). Bowdin *et al.*, (2011, p 387) consider consumer perceptions "are based on technical (performance

outcomes) and functional (process-related) qualities of the experience”, suggesting satisfaction of service quality should focus on functional aspects such as those covered by SERVQUAL. SERVQUAL identifies five dimensions relating to satisfaction and service quality; “tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy” (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, p 23). Tangibles are physical aspects of the product including equipment, facilities, décor and uniforms. Reliability concerns the consistency of service delivery and coherence with the brand and product image. Responsiveness considers the way the service responds to individual needs and promptness of delivery. Assurance relates to the knowledge of staff and “their ability to inspire trust and confidence” (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, p 23). Empathy then considers how staff relate to individual customers and understand their needs.

Although developed for the wider service industries, SERVQUAL provides useful domains for the evaluation of event satisfaction. Indeed, we can see evidence of some of these dimensions in other models such as that developed by Wysong *et al.*, (2011) who identified individual, venue and event variables as contributing to fan satisfaction. Similarly, Cole and Chancellor (2009) explored the relationship between visitor experience, satisfaction and re-visit intention using the categories of programme, amenities and entertainment, concluding that all were significant to visitor satisfaction and revisit intention. “Program-related features included signage, business booths, free gifts, children activities, arts and craft exhibit and printed programme and schedules. Amenity features consisted of food and beverages, places to sit, restrooms, accessibility and overall cleanliness...Live entertainment, bands, and visual appearance...were entertainment features” and those with the greatest impact on satisfaction (Cole and Chancellor, 2009, p 331). Authors such as Tsuji *et al.* (2007) have also explored how ‘core and peripheral service quality’ generate satisfaction and repeat visitation. Customer behavior and motivations seem to be central to understanding satisfaction and, although not always explicit in many of the models, the match between expectations and delivery, motives and experience are critical to satisfaction.

## **Consumer behavior and motivations**

In terms of understanding consumer behaviour, a range of 'antecedents' "shape interest in, demand for, choices, and actual events attendance and participation", leading to specific behaviours and patterns (Getz, 2012 p 248). Individuals' attraction to events can be viewed in terms of needs and motives, whereby consumers seek to satisfy deficit needs arising from their personal and interpersonal circumstances, individual personality, values, attitudes and lifestyles, to achieve a sense of personal and social equilibrium or an optimal state of arousal (Iso-Ahola, 1989). Needs may be considered hierarchically, for example people have 'deficit needs' to fulfil, starting with physiological needs, followed by safety and security needs, then love and belonging and self-esteem and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954). Whilst the sequential ordering and progression of this hierarchy has criticisms, events as a means of satisfying various needs possesses validity. Herzberg's two-factor theory can also be linked to events in terms of hygiene factors relating to basic needs, for example food, facilities and security, and if the quality of these attributes is below a given threshold, event satisfaction is unlikely to occur (Crompton, 2003). However, motivational factors which, according to Herzberg, relate to socialisation, esteem and personal development are critical to satisfaction and it is argued "satisfaction only results from visitor interaction with the motivator attributes that are distinctive features of the event" (Crompton, 2003 p 305). This emphasises the need for greater consideration of attendee motivations within evaluation processes.

One approach to audience motivations is in terms of seeking and escaping, or push and pull factors. Escaping is "the desire to leave the everyday environment behind", with seeking "the desire to obtain psychological (intrinsic) rewards through travel in a contrasting (new or old) environment" (Iso-Ahola 1982 p 261). These are similar to push and pull factors (Dann, 1981). However, seeking factors relate to intrinsic social-psychological needs, whereas pull factors relate to attractions within a destination and there are personal and interpersonal aspects of seeking and escaping (Crompton and McKay, 1997). All of the above theories share two things in common,

consumers are driven by a range of extrinsic motivations such as social pressures and peers and intrinsic motivations such as personal goals and interests. For satisfaction to occur there are also basic needs to be met, but these alone are not sufficient and motives must be fulfilled. There is consensus that the main motivational dimensions which stimulate event attendance can be classified under the headings of socialisation, family togetherness, event novelty, escape and relaxation, excitement and enjoyment, cultural exploration and event specific characteristics, along with other motivators which are explored below (Schlenker *et al.*, 2010; Hixson *et al.*, 2011; Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013).

Socialisation is one of the most important motivations for attendance (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013; Dos Santos and Montoro Rios, 2016). Linked to the human need for interaction, known group socialisation is a greater influence when attending leisure events, whilst external socialisation motivates attendance at many other events (Schlenker *et al.*, 2010). Family togetherness, a sub-category of known group socialisation, relates to spending leisure time with family, building and reinforcing bonds (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Research indicates it is a strong dimension in events with cultural components, i.e. those events that are attractive to families, but not as important in music and sports events which tend to be frequented by young singles, couples and groups.

Event novelty relates to the desire to do and experience new and different things and is related to aspects such as discovery, adventure, excitement, curiosity and uniqueness (Hixson *et al.*, 2011; Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Novelty is highly subjective and dependent on the personality and lived experience of the attendee, i.e. someone who prefers familiarity and goes to the same event/s annually or someone who goes to different events, sectors and locations. Organisers may therefore seek out unique settings and venues to increase attendee satisfaction by providing novel, one-of-a-kind experiences (Lee *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, the range of entertainment, audience size and composition and event production technology can create and enhance the sense of novelty (Jaimangal-Jones, 2010). First-time



visitors value event novelty more than repeat visitors, Mohr *et al.*, (1993) discovered that repeat visitors to a festival who never went to other festivals showed a unique motivation structure as they were most motivated by 'excitement' and least motivated by 'event novelty'. Therefore, it should be recognised that many consumers prefer familiarity, attend the same events annually and may even consciously avoid 'event novelty' or react negatively to actions to increase it. Furthermore, as re-visit intention is such an important evaluation measure, it is important to understand the relationship between revisit intention and satisfaction, i.e. those seeking event novelty maybe very satisfied, but have no intent of repeat visitation.

Escape and relaxation relates to the desire to escape from everyday routine and others (Hixson *et al.*, 2011; Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Escapism and relaxation are drivers for many leisure events (Jaimangal-Jones *et al.*, 2010). However, individuals may also seek to escape the routine of the workplace by attending conferences and exhibitions. Therefore, although grouped together, escapism and relaxation may not be sought simultaneously. Interestingly and perhaps not surprisingly, it is argued that younger age groups of visitors (18-25) place more importance than others on escaping from their day-to-day environment (Van Zyl and Botha, 2004).

Excitement and enjoyment relates to event experiences and the anticipation in the build-up to events encompassing such aspects as entertainment, attractions and overall atmosphere, which also links to other motivational areas, such as novelty and escapism (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). For example, motivations to attend music events include the atmosphere, potential for unexpected outcomes, visual spectacle and performance of alternative roles and identities (Jaimangal-Jones *et al.*, 2015). As with aspects linked to escapism, studies have found that younger audiences have a higher propensity to be motivated by excitement and enjoyment (Backman, *et al.* 1995).

Cultural exploration relates to a desire to engage with cultural and historical activities (Crompton and McKay, 1997), which may entail experiencing new and different cultures, learning about customs, experiencing different realities

and appreciating different cultural perspectives to expand and enhance cultural knowledge. This motivation is prominent in audiences at cultural festivals or events (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013), but is also applicable in various other areas such as conferences, exhibitions and theatrical performances. Cultural exploration as a motivator must be carefully considered in the context of event content, design and programming in the context of learning about new cultures and enhancing existing cultural knowledge.

Event-specific motivations relate to event characteristics and attributes distinguishing them from others (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). These may include food, music, sporting performance, exhibitors, speakers and performers or values, e.g. environmental ethos or other ethical practices. Likewise, it may be the theme which creates a sense of uniqueness and pulls audiences, especially in the context of niche events, e.g. car shows, dog shows, historic re-enactments. Although it is possible to identify common factors and influences, motivations for attending events are heterogeneous and are often event-specific (Nicholson and Pearce, 2001). However, even examples of event-specific motivations regarding festivals relate to a range of other events (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013).

To experience an event or a particular act first-hand, to participate in activities or workshops can all motivate attendance. Furthermore, travel duration linked to venue location can be a motivating factor, where distance from normal area of residence is appealing to those seeking a sense of escapism (Jaimangal-Jones *et al.*, 2010). Finally, a specific venue or venue attributes can act as a motivator in terms of the age (historic or modern), location (city, town centre or rural) and size (large, medium or small) (Hassanien and Dale, 2011). In considering the factors affecting satisfaction with theatrical performances, venue environment and stage facilities have been ranked very highly (Song and Cheung, 2010).

Combined with the factors outlined above, the decision to attend specific events is also influenced by the concept of value for money i.e. ticket price/affordability in relation to perceived event quality (Getz and Page, 2016).

Whilst there are numerous pricing strategies to position products, the relationship between price and quality and price and value are both highly subjective. Organisers also need to consider the link between consumer motivation, ticket pricing, quality and value for money if they are to achieve satisfaction.

Having explored the literature surrounding event evaluation, customer satisfaction and motivations, it is evident that evaluation of customer satisfaction is complex, with a diverse range of considerations. However, if events are to be sustainable they must achieve high levels of repeat visitation and positive word of mouth promotion, which necessitates high levels of customer satisfaction and an understanding of the motivational factors driving attendance.

## **Method**

The methodology used in this research was an online questionnaire, which although has its limitations, was deemed an appropriate way of gaining the views of managers, on the priority areas required for internal evaluation purposes. Using an online approach, a large number of respondents were targeted, with a view to facilitating completion through an electronic format. The questions were generated from event evaluation literature surrounding consumer satisfaction and a content analysis of twelve evaluation questionnaires, drawn from a range of event types including sport, music, festivals, arts and theatre. Thematic analysis of the data was undertaken and, using customer feedback and satisfaction as the theme, common criteria were identified and compiled into the questionnaire.

Feedback dimensions were divided into event criteria and venue criteria. Under Event Criteria the themes identified were; Information; The Event; Sound Quality and Technical; Merchandise and Promotion. Under Venue Criteria the themes identified were; Information; The Venue; Booking and Box Office and Service. In total 73 evaluation criteria were identified as potential customer feedback dimensions which respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10, (1 'not important' 10 'very important') to assess the value placed on different criteria. A ten-point scale was chosen as it provided greater

scope for respondents to express their opinions with the intended outcome being a greater spread of opinion. However, the actual outcome was a clustering of responses around higher ratings. Other survey questions established industry respondent demographics, engagement with event evaluation, adopted survey methods, frequency of evaluation and perceived barriers to event evaluation.

The purposive sample included respondents from the 'Top 100 UK Music Venues' list compiled by the Performing Rights Society for Music and 148 Chortle Best Comedy Venue nominees. In addition to keyword searches via search engines, event organisers within the UK and Ireland were invited to participate through event sector and industry association websites, event industry forums and relevant LinkedIn groups where the survey link was provided. Snowball sampling was used as respondents were asked to forward the survey to their contacts. Twitter was also used as users 're-tweeted' the survey link and specific event industry accounts were targeted.

The questionnaire was emailed to 566 UK event organisers and venue managers and generated a 13% response rate (63 responses). Within this sample 29 participants identified themselves as event organisers (EO's) and 34 as venue managers and event organisers (VM/EO's). Although this sample is a limitation in terms of capturing the entire industry, the respondents were representative. Respondents were asked about the events they have organised and were able to select multiple answers. The most common type was corporate (80%), followed by music and private in equal second place (38%), closely followed by festivals (37%) and arts, theatre and comedy (22%). Ideally, a much larger sample would have been sought, however with event managers being a difficult group to gain responses from, the decision was taken to close the survey after sending several follow up invitations.

The survey was distributed using Checkbox survey software and the results analysed using percentages, means, differentials and standard deviations due to the small sample size precluding other forms of analysis, such as Factor Analysis. The analysis of each evaluation criteria was based on the mean rating (rounded to two decimal places), standard deviation, to determine

differences of opinion within the sample and a differential to measure the difference between the two groups of respondents. Due to the large number of criteria within the questionnaire and the viability of compiling this information into a logical table and discussion we reduced the number of areas to a thematic level, for example, instead of having individual questions about catering i.e. price, range and accessibility, we reduced these to single categories as illustrated in the table below.

## **Results and Discussion**

The questionnaire findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2 with criteria in table 1 ordered by theme and table 2 listing the criteria by descending mean value. The data is presented with overall ratings i.e. the mean value of both groups combined and also in separate columns with mean ratings of the Event Organiser group (EO) and the Venue Manager/Event Organiser group (VM/EO). Table 1 also has a calculation for the difference between the averages between the EO and the VM/EM groups (VE/EO mean - EO mean), as a measure of agreement and disagreement. What was most immediately apparent was the range of criteria ranked as very important i.e. above 7, in terms of overall ratings (with both groups combined) 48 criteria, 45 for the EO's and 49 for the VM/EO's. This finding immediately raises issues surrounding the logistics of evaluating all of these criteria given the time it would take to complete an all-encompassing survey and the data it would generate. We asked our survey respondents about the greatest barrier to effective event evaluation, time was most significant (65%), followed by cost/money (16%), staff expertise (5%) and software (3%). With so many criteria ranked as important by the respondents, and time being the greatest barrier, the next section considers the results in more detail and how themes surrounding satisfaction and motivations can assist developing banks of evaluation questions.

**Table 1 – Ranking of evaluation criteria by theme**

<b>Service Criteria</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Staff helpfulness	9.15	8.82	9.41	0.59
Staff communication	9.05	8.64	9.38	0.74
Bar / Catering Staff	8.66	8.29	8.97	0.68
Service received at box office	8.32	7.56	8.94	1.38
Reception Staff	8.25	7.25	9.09	1.84
Security staff	7.87	7.71	8	0.29
Merchandise Staff	7.08	6.25	7.76	1.51
<b>The Venue Criteria</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Overall Venue Rating	9.1	8.89	9.26	0.37
Repeat Venue Visitation	9.06	8.89	9.21	0.32
Venue Appearance	8.92	8.61	9.18	0.57
General Facilities	8.74	8.3	9.09	0.79
General Accessibility	8.56	8.21	8.85	0.64
Food and Drink / Catering	8.52	8.04	8.94	0.9
Toilets	8.47	8.07	8.79	0.72
Disabled access	8.47	7.93	8.91	0.98
Location	8.06	8.5	7.71	-0.79
Security	7.71	7.86	7.59	-0.27
Seating View	7.61	6.43	8.8	2.37
Seating Comfort	7.53	6.43	8.63	2.2
<b>Event Criteria</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Value for Money (Ticket Price)	8.82	8.86	8.87	0.01
Overall Event Rating	8.82	8.64	8.94	0.3
Atmosphere	8.43	8.54	8.47	-0.07
Performance	8.38	8.32	8.5	0.18
How likely are you to attend a future event to see this event/artist again?	8.37	8.21	8.45	0.24
Wow Factor	7.85	7.93	7.97	0.04
<b>Sound Quality and Technical</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Sound	8.44	8.68	8.41	-0.27
Lighting	8.03	8.11	8.13	0.02
Special Effects	7	6.82	7.29	0.47
<b>Booking</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Box Office / Ticketing Facilities	8.03	7.19	8.75	1.56
Ticket Distribution	7.55	7.04	7.97	0.93
<b>Information Criteria - Venue and event</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Event Information	8.79	8.96	8.76	-0.2
Venue Website	8.52	7.89	9.03	1.14
Venue Information	8.45	7.96	8.85	0.89
Event Website	8.32	8.46	8.21	-0.25
Event Facebook Page	7.79	7.96	7.61	-0.35
Event Twitter Page	7.66	7.75	7.55	-0.2
Venue Facebook Page	7.2	7.07	7.31	0.24

Venue Twitter Page	7.18	6.93	7.38	0.45
<b>Merchandise</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Programme	5.47	5.5	5.6	0.1
Event Merchandise	5.25	5.07	5.57	0.5
<b>Promotion</b>	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Event org</b>	<b>VM/VMEO</b>	<b>Differential</b>
Event Promotion	8.33	8.54	8.16	-0.38
Online Promotion	8.33	8.32	8.35	0.03
Social Media Promotion	8.27	8.46	8.1	-0.36
Event Flyers	7.66	7.57	7.75	0.18
Event Poster	7.56	7.36	7.75	0.39

**Table 2 – Ranking of evaluation criteria top 30**

Combined results			Event Organisers results			Venue manager/event organiser results		
Rank	Rating Criteria	Mean	Rank	Rating Criteria	Mean	Rank	Rating Criteria	Mean
1	Staff Helpfulness	9.15	1	Event Information	8.96	1	Staff Helpfulness	9.41
2	Overall Venue Rating	9.1	2	Repeat Venue Visitation	8.89	2	Staff Communication	9.38
3	Repeat Venue Visitation	9.06	3	Overall Venue Rating	8.89	3	Overall Venue Rating	9.26
4	Staff Communication	9.05	4	Value for Money (Ticket Price)	8.86	4	Repeat Venue Visitation	9.21
5	Venue Appearance	8.92	5	Staff Helpfulness	8.82	5	Venue Appearance	9.18
6	Overall Event Rating	8.82	6	Sound	8.68	6	General facilities	9.09
7	Value for Money (Ticket Price)	8.82	7	Staff Communication	8.64	7	Reception Staff	9.09
8	Event Information	8.79	8	Overall Event Rating	8.64	8	Venue Website	9.03
9	General Facilities	8.74	9	Venue Appearance	8.61	9	Bar / Catering Staff	8.97
10	Bar / Catering Staff	8.66	10	Event Promotion	8.54	10	Food and Drink / Catering	8.94
11	General Accessibility	8.56	11	Atmosphere	8.54	11	Service received at box office	8.94
12	Food and Drink / Catering	8.52	12	Location	8.5	12	Overall Event Rating	8.94
13	Venue Website	8.52	13	Event Website	8.46	13	Disabled access	8.91
14	Toilets	8.47	14	Social Media Promotion	8.46	14	Value for Money (Ticket Price)	8.87
15	Disabled access	8.47	15	Online Promotion	8.32	15	General accessibility	8.85
16	Venue Information	8.45	16	Performance	8.32	16	Venue Information	8.85
17	Sound	8.44	17	General facilities	8.3	17	Seating View	8.8
18	Atmosphere	8.43	18	Bar / Catering	8.29	18	Toilets	8.79

				Staff				
19	Performance	8.38	19	General accessibility	8.21	19	Event Information	8.76
20	How likely are you to attend a future event to see this event/artist again?	8.37	20	How likely are you to return to a future event to see this event/artist again?	8.21	20	Box Office / Ticketing Facilities	8.75
21	Event Promotion	8.33	21	Lighting	8.11	21	Seating Comfort	8.63
22	Online Promotion	8.33	22	Toilets	8.07	22	Performance	8.5
23	Service received at box office	8.32	23	Food and Drink / Catering	8.04	23	Atmosphere	8.47
24	Event Website	8.32	24	Venue Information	7.96	24	How likely are you to attend a future event to see this event/artist again?	8.45
25	Social Media Promotion	8.27	25	Event Facebook Page	7.96	25	Sound	8.41
26	Reception Staff	8.25	26	Disabled access	7.93	26	Online Promotion	8.35
27	Location	8.06	27	Wow Factor	7.93	27	Event Website	8.21
28	Box Office / Ticketing Facilities	8.03	28	Venue Website	7.89	28	Event Promotion	8.16
29	Lighting	8.03	29	Security	7.86	29	Lighting	8.13
30	Security Staff	7.87	30	Public Transport links to the venue	7.75	30	Social Media Promotion	8.1

### Initial observations between the 2 groups

As illustrated by the proportion of each group who had never completed event evaluation, VM/EO's place greater importance on evaluation than EO's. This is further reinforced by higher rankings attributed to the evaluation criteria by VM/EO's than EO's – see top 20 criteria for both groups – EO ranges from 8.96 – 8.21, whilst VM/EO ranges from 9.41 – 8.75. It was also apparent that VM/EO's placed more importance on venue factors whilst EO's displayed greater concern for event factors, however there was also a level of consensus amongst both groups about the importance of many criteria. This demonstrates the potential for collaboration between event organisers and venue managers as they share many common interests concerning evaluation.



## **Service factors**

Service Criteria was an area ranked highly by both groups, for example 'Staff Helpfulness' was ranked highest overall (9.15) with only a 0.59 differential between the two groups. Likewise, 'Staff Communication' came fourth overall (9.05) with a 0.74 differential and 'Bar/Catering Staff' came tenth overall with a 0.68 differential. The other area of service where there was a strong level of agreement was in 'Security Staff' (only ranked thirtieth overall with an average score of 7.87) but with a small (0.29) difference between groups. These staff dimensions all share a common attribute in that they are customer facing and integral to the event experience. Other categories identified such as box office, reception and merchandise staff were all much more important to the VM/EO group, due to them being integral to the functioning of venues, but not necessarily to events. These rankings confirm the significance of service delivery to consumer satisfaction and the interactive role of staff in the event experience (Getz and Page, 2016). However such generic questions on helpfulness and communication will do little to identify problem areas which cause dissatisfaction.

Staff constitute a key element of the service-scape as actors, performers and directors, therefore, performance parameters such as staff appearance, knowledge, skills, interaction and communication with guests, in addition to their role in audience animation and enforcement of 'rules' contribute to satisfaction. However, what is permissible, acceptable and desirable varies significantly depending on the event environment and consumer expectations. Consequently, it is essential to consider staff roles within the event experience linked to event typology and audience motivations for attending the event (excitement, escapism, cultural knowledge, etc.) (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). For example, if people are motivated by cultural knowledge, then the knowledge and understanding of customer facing staff is important to consider. However, if people are more motivated by escapism and excitement, staff congruence with the event theme is more relevant. An alternative way to approach this area is to consider motivations first and then have banks of service questions linked to the event typology and audience motivations. Furthermore, by ascertaining the categories of staff which

customers encountered, specific questions (where relevant) can be implemented on staff appearance, knowledge, skills, interaction and communication, geared towards the motivations of and experience sought by consumers.

### **Venue Criteria**

Venues constitute a major element of the event offering and within the sample 'Overall Venue Rating' (9.1 overall, differential 0.37), 'Repeat Venue Visitation' (9.06 overall and differential 0.32) and 'Venue Appearance' (8.92 overall, differential 0.57) achieved positions of second, third and fifth respectively (Table 2) showing low differentials between the two groups. Most venue criteria were ranked in the same order of importance although EO's ranked 'Toilets' above 'Food and Drink / Catering' and 'Disabled Access to the Venue', whilst VM/EO's placed 'Catering' and 'Disabled Access' above 'Toilets'. Most criteria were relatively equally valued by both groups with a differential of less than 1, apart from those concerning 'Seating View' and 'Seating Comfort', which EO's rated significantly lower than VM/EO's. Within this section most criteria were rated higher by the VM/EO group, apart from 'Location and Security', which were rated higher by EO's this is probably because VM/EO's cannot change the venue location; whilst EO's can and, given the current climate, customer perceptions of venue security are also important.

Venue Criteria relates to tangibles as identified by Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988) and variables (Wysong *et al.*, 2011) which also relate to basic needs and hygiene factors (Crompton, 2003). Venues also link to a range of motivational dimensions including novelty, prestige and escapism, where uniqueness or special attributes of the venue create a sense of being removed from everyday life. Venues can also contribute to cultural awareness and understanding, community cohesion and socialisation. Venue appearance also links with the theme, which forms part of the 'event-specific characteristics', where a venue reflects a specific theme or is decorated creating a themed environment (Berridge, 2007). When selecting venue evaluation criteria, it is essential to consider audience expectations and the

role of the venue in satisfying motivations. Therefore, those seeking meaningful customer feedback surrounding venue factors must account for diverse motivations and construct questions accordingly. It should also be noted that whilst the potential for repeat visitation is generally an excellent indicator of satisfaction, caution is required. For example, people may attend an event seeking event novelty, escapism, excitement and cultural exploration, but may never plan to repeat the experience (Abreu-Novais and Ardocia, 2013).

The 'Location' (twenty seventh overall and rated 8.5 by EO's and 7.71 by VM/EO's) can also contribute to motivations both in the sense of escapism, whereby routine detachment facilitates a sense of escapism (Jaimangal-Jones, *et al.*, 2010). Alternatively, venue proximity to area of residence increases the potential for 'known group socialisation' and 'family togetherness' (Abreu-Novais and Arcodia, 2013). Thus, questions around venue location should consider these dimensions depending on the audience profile and type of event. Another consideration is 'General Accessibility' (eleventh), if family togetherness is a motivation, accessibility for a more diverse audience becomes important. If the audience is national or international, then transport is a priority. When evaluating venue location questions must be aligned to audience profiles and motivational dimensions to meaningfully evaluate satisfaction.

Other Venue aspects ranked highly include 'Toilets' (fourteenth) and 'Food and Drink/Catering' (twelfth). Given industry-wide standards for toilet facilities, it is surprising how highly these feature in the priorities of respondents. This is certainly an area which many organisers could forgo (by internal monitoring) to enable examination of more meaningful dimensions of the event experience. An under-explored area, which would benefit from further research, is the interpretation of food and culture at events, especially when considering the cultural role of food and drink (Getz and Robinson, 2014). The suggested focus and direction of evaluation surrounding this area is dependent on a range of issues, e.g. the centrality of catering within the event, the range of provision, the potential for consumer choice and the event

audience themselves. However, questions should not focus simply on the degree of satisfaction with event catering but probe into dimensions including presentation, coherence with event theme, choice and diversity, quality and value for money.

### **Event Criteria**

Within this area 'Overall Event Rating' (sixth position, average rating 8.82) was the highest scoring overall, with a small differential of 0.3, indicating the desirability of measures which provide a broad indication of performance and customer sentiment. Similar to value for money, 'Overall Event Rating' helps in identifying the gap between service provision and consumer expectations. However overall ratings are reductionist when used in isolation. Reflecting on the overall experience gives an indication of satisfaction, but no insight into the performance of individual elements of the event and venue offering. Likewise, repeat visitation scored highly, however it is essential to understand the link between visitor experience, satisfaction and re-visit intention from an individual perspective as discussed above (Cole and Chancellor, 2009). Similarly, 'Value for Money (ticket price)' achieved the same overall position and ranking, but was valued more by EO's than 'Overall Event Rating', whilst VM/EO's displayed a marginal preference towards 'Overall Event Rating' over 'Value for Money'. Such measures are adequate when performance is positive, but do little to identify negative issues. Value for money relates to perceptions of price and quality, but is not necessarily an accurate indicator of satisfaction (Getz and Page, 2016) as perceptions of 'value for money' indicate the effectiveness of the pricing strategy relative to service delivery. Questions regarding value for money must be contextualised with other aspects of performance and motivation. Also given the industry issues surrounding secondary ticketing it must be acknowledged that attendees may not have paid face value for their ticket.

'Atmosphere' was ranked in nineteenth position overall, below sound and many other aspects, yet ranked third on 'Event Criteria' and achieved a mean score of 8.43 with a 0.07 differential. However, this differential hides the fact that 'Atmosphere' was ranked eleventh by EO's and twenty fifth by VM/EO's,

indicating a preference amongst VM/EO's for feedback on more tangible elements of events. Atmosphere is the culmination of a range of areas such as entertainment/performance, sound, lighting, set design, performers, audience composition and attendance (Berridge, 2007, Cole and Chancellor, 2009). This highlights its' challenging nature and the importance of understanding the atmosphere participants seek, e.g. friendly, energetic, competitive, relaxing, (Iso-Ahola, 1989). Similar to other generalised event ratings, if the response to the atmosphere is negative, it is important, but difficult to determine why, without additional follow-up questions.

Technical event elements include sound, lighting and special effects. The lower ranking of some of these factors indicates these criteria were not applicable to all respondents. Like the venue itself, creative lighting and special effects can enhance the novelty, excitement and escapism associated with specific events (Berridge, 2007; Jaimangal-Jones, 2010). Therefore, where these factors are motivators and intrinsic to the atmosphere and event experience, they should be incorporated into evaluation question banks (Cole and Chancellor, 2009).

### **Event information, communication and promotion**

'Event Information' was the criteria ranked highest by EO's overall (8.96), although it came in twentieth in the VM/EO group (8.76). Within the information section 'Venue Information' came second and 'Venue Website' third, followed by 'Event Website' and various dimensions of social media. Linked to information, 'Event Promotion' and its various subsections were mostly rated highly by both groups. It is through information that we construct our expectations and understanding of event experiences (Masterman and Wood, 2006) and promotion not only sells the event but positions events within the social and cultural landscape. Information is critical to the consumption of event experiences, informing attendees and helping them get the most out of their experiences. This highlights the need for a clear understanding of attendees' motivations, to ensure the information they require is provided throughout their event journey, from initial contact with promotional material to exiting the event. Evaluation question banks should

consider informational needs of audiences throughout the event journey and touch points to facilitate evaluation. Additionally, through understanding audience motivations e.g. escapism and relaxation, seeking new experiences, cultural exploration and event-specific motivators (Abreu-Novais and Ardocia, 2013), these can be incorporated into event information and its evaluation (Mackellar, 2014). The images, language and cultural references are all consciously and subconsciously used by consumers to evaluate the extent to which events will fulfil their needs and desires, motivating them to attend events, or not, based on their preconceptions. Fundamentally, if events do not match the impression created then dissatisfaction will occur, therefore event organisers must evaluate the congruence between information consumer impressions and actual event experience.

### **Event retailing**

'Merchandise' was the lowest ranked criteria, scoring 5.25, preceded by Programmes (5.47). It was anticipated that event merchandise would have been rated higher as it partly addresses the intangibility of events by providing tangible mementos (Bowdin *et al.*, 2011). This may well be due to the sample surveyed where event retailing was less common or outsourced. However, given the popularity of shopping, it is a fundamental secondary attraction of many major events such as festivals and exhibitions. This demonstrates the importance of linking evaluation practices with consumer motivations and event typology.

### **Conclusions**

This paper highlights how event organisers value a wide range of factors relating to customer satisfaction, yet a significant proportion of our respondents had never undertaken satisfaction research. Our survey verifies that time, money, resources and expertise are the key barriers to evaluation, which, combined with the wide range of criteria makes evaluation unviable for many Event organisers. This highlights the need for question banks to reduce the time required to plan and implement evaluation. However, in the light of the literature on consumer behaviour and motivations, it is evident that a generic approach is unviable and generalised questions will yield limited

results. Essentially, all events are different and so are their customers, so how can we develop banks of questions, to enable meaningful evaluation without being overly-complicated and time-consuming on the part of event organisers and consumers? There are certainly benefits to software-based approaches to evaluation with banks of questions available for evaluators to tailor surveys. Having evaluation tools in electronic format also facilitates data collection, analysis and subsequent evaluation (Goldblatt, 2011).

One way to develop banks of questions, proposed by this paper, is to consider the motivations of attendees for attending different types of events and use these as a basis for developing different sets of question banks. For example, event staff and service levels emerged as highest priority, but using classifications like staff helpfulness is unlikely to generate insights. Likewise having banks of questions on all elements and areas of staff are not viable. However, if we consider and establish the motivations e.g. cultural exploration, family togetherness, and type of environment sought by attendees, then questions can be developed based on the role of staff and the event environment in meeting these needs. This may be through focusing on staff appearance, knowledge and interaction with guests, sub-divided into different categories of staff and attendees depending on the event in question.

In a sense, this generates more questions and avenues for future research, as it highlights that we need to better understand how different motivations link with tangible and intangible aspects of event experiences. Venue dimensions were highly rated, illustrating their centrality to satisfaction (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Cole and Chancellor, 2009, Wysong *et al.*, 2011); yet to rate venues overall, on appearance, or indeed other venue variables, will yield limited insights if not contextualised with motivations. Consumers motivated by novelty and escapism may seek new and unfamiliar appearances and exciting dynamic environments, whilst those seeking relaxation will be satisfied by a different range of aesthetics. Likewise, the atmosphere sought by individuals will differ, therefore organisers should compare that sought with that experienced and ascertain if the atmosphere generated through the different areas and phases of their event aligned with

consumer expectations, thereby enabling identification of areas for improvement and development. However, without additional research into this area it is impossible to accurately gauge all the required and relevant questions applicable to different audiences.

Another area requiring alignment to audience motivations and profiles is event information. The intangibility of events means pre-event information is essential to their social construction and consumer decision-making, overcoming uncertainty about the experience. Consumers, use a variety of indicators when assessing whether events will meet their desires and expectations. Likewise, information plays a key role in the consumption of event experiences through informing, guiding and animating audiences. Further research is required into the media and consumer discourses surrounding different types of events and how this can assist in development of evaluation criteria surrounding information relative to the event typology and audience. In this area, it is probably more appropriate to develop banks of questions relative to event type as well as motivation. For example, pre-event information needs will be similar for most types of festivals, likewise conferences and concerts which have generic pre-event information sets. However, information distributed within the event must be evaluated in the context of motivations, e.g. if people are motivated by cultural exploration or personal development, banks of questions should address these areas.

This paper contributes to the debates surrounding event evaluation through identifying industry consumer satisfaction priorities and considering their value in the context of event satisfaction and motivation literature. Its significant contribution is to provide an insight into the interests and priorities of event organisers and venue managers, revealing the wide range of criteria they consider important. Combining these with existing satisfaction frameworks will allow more thorough and relevant data collection from the venue, to the servicescape, event environment, atmosphere and production.

It is acknowledged that the primary research utilised has limitations in terms of the size of the industry sample and that further research could seek a wider industry response and differentiate between industry sectors, e.g. music,



sports and theatre to identify sector differences. However, it is not intended to be conclusive, but rather to initiate further debates and research into the links between consumer motivations and evaluation criteria. Another limitation is that this research does not feature the attendee perspective. In progressing the development of evaluation question banks future research must consider audience perspectives on motivation and event satisfaction criteria. This would allow greater comparison between industry sectors and their consumers, leading to the development of bespoke question banks specific to event typologies.

There are other areas which could also be explored in the context of customised question banks such as the significance of audience profile and characteristics on relevant criteria. For example groups, families, couples, colleagues, first time and repeat visitors, casual attendees and dedicated fans, locals and long-distance travellers will all have different priorities when it comes to certain elements of the event experience which are not fully understood. Also, given the increasing emphasis on co-creation within event literature, there is another debate as to whether customers should be able to choose the areas they provide feedback on. This has potential issues in terms of bias, as respondents could opt to give feedback on areas they feel stronger about, whether this is positive or negative; yet it could also generate more meaningful results if people are not forced to respond to every question and comment on every category. This is another area which requires further research, but given the complexity of event experiences and plethora of potential feedback dimensions, it could be a viable option.

Moving away from satisfaction, other areas of evaluation could also benefit from question banks such as social and economic impacts. Customer questionnaires could also contain banks to capture such information when desired by other stakeholders. There is no doubt that event and venue managers operate in an increasingly competitive environment where information is a key to competitive advantage. Identifying and understanding customer needs and issues is more critical than ever. Simultaneously, managers are accountable to an increasing array of stakeholders, each with

different needs and competing agendas which require data collection and analysis. This again highlights the need for more customised models of evaluation applicable to different sectors of industry.

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