Cleisure: Contribution of Leisure Programming to Conference Enjoyment

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Introduction

Festivalization of events has been a recent trend. It refers to the practice of business events and conventions adding an element of carnival like elements to an event so that it will create better connections with the attendees. Festivalization of events draws great attention recently, partially due to the notion that festivalization fits the events in which attendees' habits, preferences, and needs are transformed gradually (Getz and Page, 2016; Jakob, 2013; Roth & Frank, 2000; Sala, Waalwijk, Lillesoe, Sterneck, Maidman & Rosen, 2016; Wynn & Yetis, 2016; Zherdev, 2014). Aligned with the festivalization trend, there is a need to further understand how the leisure element adds to the enjoyment of conferences. Specifically, this research aims at examining how the leisure aspect of an academic conference would contribute to conference attendees' overall trip enjoyment. Seeking for opportunities by travelers to add meaning to their trip experience is one of the megatrends in the tourism industry, based on a recent global report by the World Travel and Tourism Council and Bloomberg Media Group (2019). Existence of common interest among academic conference attendees brings the authors' attention to the opportunities of providing enjoyable activities for attendees when they are attending conferences in places other than where they reside in. This further inspires the authors to propose a concept termed "Cleisure" — a blend of (academic) conference and leisure.

The researchers resorted to a combination of sources to understand what may be the leisurely elements and activities that academic conference attendees may enjoy participate in. These include examinations of existing academic literature on conferences, professional institutes' reports on conferences (e.g. Economist (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018) and Meetings and Conventions (Peterson, 2017) and conference organizers' offerings (e.g. Global Conference Organizers, 2019; International Anti-Corruption Conference, 2019; International Association of Professional Congress Organizers, 2019).

In a nutshell, the purpose of this study was to detect the enjoyable activities that could lead the attendees of academic conferences to feel the festivity, not only based on what is already happening in such events but also based on what could be enjoyable. It is important to create event experiences that can lead to better engagement and resonation on the part of the attendees. In this regard, the outcomes of this research can potentially contribute to the literature of conferences and help practitioners to organize more enjoyable conference experiences.

Literature Review

Festivalization is typically referred to as the process through which institutions orient their plans around a defined theme and then expand their offers (Négrier, 2017). It is generally based on increasing productivity, building synergy, and resource management, in order to further satisfy different stakeholders. Festivalization was first defined by two urban sociologists in early 90s to describe the short and long -term effect of events on the political, economic, and social environment of the location of events (Häußermann & Siebel, 1993). Many studies suggest that festivalization can assist with the place branding in the sense that festivals (or events) become part of the identity and in some cases the symbol of specific destinations (Booth, 2015; Jakob, 2012; Mackley-Crump, 2013; Wynn & Yetis-Bayrakta, 2016). Festivalization has a dynamic nature, and reflects how society is transforming (Sala, Waalwijk, Lillesoe, Sterneck, Maidman & Rosen, 2016). Norms of festivals and events have been changing as a result of several megatrends in tourism (Peterson, 2017). Adapted from Haussermann and Seibel's term, Festivalization is seen more as a social phenomenon where attendees seek engagement, contacts with others, identification and real participation (Sala et al., 2016). Some previous studies have focused on festivalization of events, in which they have largely focused on analyzing positive and negative effects brought by festivalization, such as city image and branding, culture communications, the loss of cultural authenticity, the conflicts between local community and governments that employ the strategy of festivalization (Booth, 2015; Luca, Mizar, Gorrini, Andrea, Manenti, Lorenza, Sartori & Fabio, 2012; Mackley, 2013; Przybylska, 2015; Wynn & Yetis, 2016).

Academic conferences are special events in which highly-educated attendees with common interests gather to pursue professional, personal and social goals. Unlike typical events, attendees appeal of an academic conference is being provided the opportunity for a mutual revelation in order to exchange ideas (McCarthy, McDonald, Soroczak, Nguyen & Rashid, 2004). The existing literature has attempted to reveal what may be important successful factors for such conferences. One study shows the three most important factors for participants are "the theme of the conference" and "networking opportunities," as well as "facilitation of research publication" (Dimitrios, Sakas, & Vlachos, 2014). In another study, Lewis and Kerr (2012) focused their research on attendee retention rate by evaluating attendee satisfaction based five attributes: (1) facilitation of generating new ideas, (2) providing opportunities for further studies and future publications, (3) socializing with influential individuals in one's area, (4) knowledge acquisition, and (5) learning new teaching methods. The research in this area however tends to ignore the enjoyment aspect of such experiences.

Research on multi-purpose and multi-destination trips goes back to late 1970's—mainly focusing on financial aspects, regarding cost management and value of time (e.g. Loomis, Yorizane, & Larson, 2000; Wilman, 1980). Recently, there is more focus on business traveler satisfaction. Soo, Ettema and Ottens (2008) investigated the preferred and satisfying trip experience when travelers deal with interactivity trade-off of time and money while adding other activities to their trips. Jeffrey (2016) indicated employees are more satisfied with an extended business trip in which they assign some time to themselves

for leisure purposes. This is referred to as bleisure- a blend of business and leisure. In the same vein, Lichy and McLeay (2018) suggested business travelers tend to extend their business trips in order to enjoy leisure travel while meeting the expectations of the organizations.

Based on previous literature review, the current research proposed that Cleisure could be considered a subcategory of bleisure; and that the important success factors in bleisure tourism could be considered in Cleisure; and that academic conference organizers can create better conferences if they employ festivalization strategies in their offerings.

Methodology and Results

In order to predict the behavior of potential tourists based on their attitudes/opinions about how enjoyable certain activivites could be, a questionnaire is constructed to solicit respondents opinion as to the enjoyability of a list of 35 conference activities. For this purpose, "action," "target," "context," and "time" aspects are considered to increases the reliability and validity of the gathered information (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974). These activity items are the result of examining related literature, referencing the websites of reputable conferences in different industries, in conjunction with consulting conference-related reports provided by professional institutions e.g. Economist (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018), Successful Meetings (Alderton, 2016), Meetings and Conventions (Peterson, 2017), BizBash (Sorrells, 2016), and Guardian (Lucey, 2014). Offerings of academic conferences and several professional event management institutes were also considered to expand the ideas that the researcher have about the activities that could potentially be added to academic conference offerings as enjoyable activities and ambiences. Examples of the organizations that were explored include AssetWorks (2019), Global Conference Organizers (2019), International Anti-Corruption Conference (2019), International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (2019), and Team Building (2019).

An exploratory study was conducted and a questionnaire, including 35 leisure activities, was distributed through Qualtrics in April 2019 and 73 valid responses were acquired in four months. It contained variables related to both demographic and leisure activities compatible with academic conference. Respondents were asked to express their enjoyment level via a 5-point Likert scale with regard to the activities. Based on descriptive statistics, the characteristics of the respondents in the sample were profiled and their perceived enjoyment of the leisure activities were ranked in terms of the mean score. Profile of the respondents and the perceived enjoyment degree of Cleisure are provided in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

	Total	Percentage		Total	Percentage
Gender	73	100.00%	No.of conferences	73	100.00%
Male	36	49.32%	None	3	4.11%
Female	37	50.68%	1-3	40	54.79%
			4-10	22	30.14%
Age	73	100.00%	More than 10	8	10.96%
20-29	18	24.66%			
30-39	21	28.77%	Working Industry	73	100.00%
40-49	20	27.40%	Technology & Advanced Electronics	7	9.59%
50-59	9	12.33%	Social Sector	1	1.37%
60 and over	5	6.85%	Public Sector	15	20.55%
			Information Technology	1	1.37%
Household Income	73	100.00%	Hospitality & Tourism	25	34.25%
Under $29,999	23	31.51%	Financial Services	4	5.48%
$30,000 - $59,999	10	13.70%	Chemicals	6	8.22%
$60,000 - $89,999	13	17.81%	Art	4	5.48%
$90,000- $119,999	11	15.07%	Others	10	13.70%
Above $120,000	16	21.92%			
Ethnicity	73	100.00%	Academia Status	73	100.00%
White	33	45.21%	Faculty Member	27	36.99%
Asian	30	41.10%	Graduate Student	30	41.10%
Black	1	1.37%	Undergraduate Student	1	1.37%
Hispanic	3	4.11%	Other	15	20.55%
Other	6	8.22%			

Table 2. Perceived Enjoyment Degree of Cleisure Activities

Cleisure Activity	n	Mean	Std Dev
13. Have food at authentic restaurants.	73	4.67	0.65
9. Have special experiences unique to the location of the conference (not expected in other places).	73	4.62	0.68
1. Attend a conference in a location I have never been to.	73	4.47	0.75
10. Go to local markets or handicrafts auctions.	73	4.45	0.88
3. Attend a conference in a location known as a major tourist destination.	73	4.26	0.91
4. Have access to easy public transportation.	73	4.22	0.71
11. Visit historical places (e.g. museums, monuments, etc.).	73	4.19	0.89
15. Attend local art performances.	73	4.14	0.99
32. Stay in a hotel where socializing with others is convenient (e.g. several dining options in the neighborhood).	73	4.10	0.96
27. Participate in a special event after getting to know conference attendees (e.g. dancing).	73	4.08	0.80
34. Be involved in an eco-friendly activity (e.g. wearing t-shirts made of organic cotton during part of the conference).	73	4.05	1.08
21. Feel the authenticity of the place.	73	4.04	0.98
5. Be provided with organized information about the location.	73	4.01	0.79
24. Attend a conference during certain time, so that I can manage my costs better (e.g. Las Vegas in Summer).	73	3.99	1.10
19. Extend my trip on my own cost and see more.	73	3.96	1.10
7. Take city tours of where the conference is held.	73	3.93	0.93
25. Go to a local event before the conference, so that I can plan for my trip more efficiently.	73	3.92	0.97
22. Attend a conference around the same time special local events are taking place in the area (e.g. Pride Day in San Francisco).	73	3.90	1.08
6. Be provided with discount offers for tours, theater, galleries, museums, etc.	73	3.86	0.92
26. Participate in a casual event planned for the attendees before the conference (e.g. casual dining).	73	3.86	1.00
35. Rally for a social responsibility-related mission during the conference (e.g. social equality).	73	3.86	1.29
30. Experience special activities related to the location (e.g. Samba dancing).	73	3.81	1.17
8. Take city tours of other close cities.	73	3.68	1.09
23. Attend a conference in summer to have more time management flexibility.	73	3.66	1.08
12.Go to art galleries.	73	3.56	1.14
18. Have some time to be by myself during the conference.	73	3.48	1.28
14. Attend a cooking class to experience cooking local food.	73	3.37	1.36
2.Attend a conference in a location I am familiar with.	73	3.29	1.14
29. Attend meditation sessions to relax and refresh.	73	3.29	1.37
17. Assign some time to leisure activities related to my hobbies (e.g. cycling).	73	3.21	1.05
16. Go shopping.	73	3.11	1.37
31. Have access to gym facilities.	73	3.08	1.42
20. Attend a conference during high season (of the location).	73	3.05	1.30
28. Have a special party consuming cannabis with others.	73	2.99	1.49
33. Stay in a hotel where I can have privacy for some time.	73	2.63	1.39

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The results in Table 2 showed that more than a quarter of the respondents are faculty members (36.99%) and near half of respondents (41.10%) are graduate students. There is gender balance among the respondents—there are 50.68% female and 49.32% male respondents. Worthy to mention, 34.25% of the respondents are from the hospitality and tourism industry and 65.75% are from other industries. Meanwhile, 53.43% of them are within 20-39 age range and almost all respondents have attended at least one conference within the last three years. The top four enjoyable conference activities included "Have food at authentic restaurants (M = 4.67)," "Have special experiences unique to the location of the conference (not expected in other places) (M = 4.62)," "Attend a conference in a location I have never been to (M = 4.47)," "Go to local markets or handicrafts auctions (M = 4.45)."

T-tests were conducted in order to identify the differences of the respondents' perceived enjoyment of the leisure activities, conditioned by gender. Two significant differences between female and male emerged from the *t*-tests. Females showed a significantly higher preference for "attending meditation sessions to relax and refresh" (with the mean score of 3.7) compared to their male counterparts (with mean score of 2.8). Females also seem more eager for private time (with mean of 3.0) compared with male respondents (2.3). These gendered differences appear to suggest that they are female specific needs that can be further understood.

Our initial data provides a depiction of what constitute an enjoyable academic conference experience. The limited sample size prevented researchers from utilizing analytical methods to further understand the Cleisure phenomenon. For example, when additional data are gathered, we intended to conduct an exploratory factor analysis to further understand what the dimensionalities are underlying these Cleisure activities, and how do these different areas of Cleisure contribute to the overall enjoyment of attending academic conferences.

Discussions and Conclusion

Attending a conference is part of being an academia. Cleisure is based on stimulating academic conference attendees to add more joy to their conference and travel experience. This study explores possible activities that could supplement and complement travel experiences of potential academic conference attendees. The findings of this research can contribute to the various leisure programming considerations for professional especially academic conferences. When conference attendees' professional goals are complemented with fuller sense of enjoyment, academic conferences will be able to organize more fulfilling and more distinguishable conference events, and therefore enhanced loyalty.

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