Effect of Convention Bureau Experience on Destination Attributes

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Abstract

Convention host cities are competing to attract profitable exhibition because of economic ripple impact. According to Japan Tourism Agency, economic ripple impact which convention industry in 2015 produces is 590.5 billion. Among the stakeholders, convention bureaus play an important role to attract convention business in Japan. This study focuses on convention bureaus' perception about destination attributes and discusses how the convention bureaus' experience affect the evaluation. The questionnaire was conducted at the 26th International Meetings Expo (IME 2016). In method, each respondents' evaluation was analyzed in descriptive statistics and then respondents are classified into 2 groups; non-experienced group who have not attracted international convention and experienced group who have attracted international convention one or more. In descriptive statistics, the findings indicate that it is important to promote collabora-tion among stakeholders. In logistic regression, the experienced convention bureaus tend to have higher awareness of having foreign-affiliated hotels in host cities than the non-experienced.

Keywords: MICE; Convention Bureau; Convention Industry, Questionnaire Survey

1   Introduction

In 2016, the total number of foreign visitors in Japan reached over 24.04 million, which is the highest growth rate recorded since 1964. In the tourism industry convention is rapidly emerging as one of the most important segments. Convention industry is classified as four categories: the acronym, 'MICE' (Meetings, Incentives, Convention/Congress, and Exhibition/Event).

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Rogers [1] defines convention as bellows;

"Gathering of delegates, representatives, and members of a members or industry organization convened for a common purpose. Common features include educational sessions, committee meetings, social functions, and meetings to conduct the governance business of the organization. Conventions are typically recurring events with specific, established timing (p.22)."

Japanese government announces the tourism nation promotion basic plan based on the tourism nation promotion basic law in 2007. Promotion of meeting industry is included in one of the aims of the tourism nation promotion basic plan. According to Japan Tourism Agency [2], economic ripple impact which convention industry in 2015 produces is 590.5 billion, which totals 265.5 billion as direct economic impact and 325 billion as indirect economic impact. The reason why the convention industry produces huge economic impact is that delegates tend to stay longer than pleasure travelers, so the convention industry benefits the local economy and act as economic hubs to surrounding areas [3][4]. For example, host cities can benefit from meals, accommodation, sightseeing, shopping, and so on as additional factors. Therefore, convention host cities are competing to attract profitable exhibitions. Asian countries are taking aggressive measures in this field of global marketing. As Japan's position of dominant host city for convention industry in Asia has tended to come down since 2000s, so the competitiveness of convention industry is declining in comparison with other countries [5].

Various stakeholders are concerned in convention industry. Among the stakeholders, convention bureaus play an important role to attract convention business in Japan. Convention bureaus have been regarded as important organizations in the tourism industry [6]. Moreover, convention and visitor bureaus provide official information to the future visitors [7]. They make an effort to collect useful information for presentations to the planners. Thus, convention bureaus play an important role in various aspects. The experiences of convention bureaus hold one of the key components of success in the convention industry. However, researches on convention industry and especially convention bureaus are still limited and just gets started in Japan. Therefore, this study is to clarify what kinds of factors are important to attract international convention for convention bureaus. Moreover, this study discusses the differences between non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus. The findings of this study not only make clear of how the convention bureaus' experience affect the evaluation, but also aims at sharing results with researchers which have similar interests in convention industry.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Previous studies related to destination attributes

Many criteria for destination attributes have been clarified by previous studies. Oppermann [8] carried out a questionnaire survey and concluded 15 decision criteria. The results showed that respondents regard meeting room facilities and hotel service quality as top priority. Crouch and Bitchie [9] analyzed 64 academic journals and categorized 9 factors such as accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities, information, site environment, other criteria as most important.

In addition, Qu, Li, and Chu [10] examined satisfaction levels of Hong Kong as an international conference destination. As results, 20 site selection criteria were evaluated by all respondents. Among these, modern-audio-visual equipment, modern hotel facilities, and

accessibility are ranked in the top three. Chen [11] classified five factors in the process of convention site selections; meeting and accommodation facilities, costs, site environment, local support, and extra conference opportunities and found out that meeting and accommodation facilities and site environment are dominating factors. These researchers point out that accommodation facilities and meetings facilities are crucially important factors to attract international convention. Regarding facilities, Whitfield [12] stated that conference and event organizers tended to choose unique venue in order to make an impression.

On the other hand, Kim, Guo, and Agrusa [13] indicated the importance of tourism facilities to attract international convention and regarded inexpensive travel cost, level of economic development, beautiful scenery, safety, good place for shopping, different cultural and historical resources, good weather, good leisure and recreation facilities, easiness to arrange travel plans, and well-equipped tourism facilities as important factors.

Using important factors cited from the previous studies, this study conducts a questionnaire survey to convention bureaus to analyze what kinds of factors are important to attract international convention in destination attributes.

2.2 Previous studies related to convention bureaus

Convention bureaus can be a critical factor in an environment where competition among destinations for convention intensifies [14]. There have been a small number of studies that focus on convention bureaus in Japan.

In the researches related to convention bureaus in Japan, Iwamoto, Matsuo, Fukushima, and Komoda [15] conducted a questionnaire survey with convention bureaus in order to clarify the current advantages and weak points of the city in which the convention is held. The results showed that major advantages are good public security, rich in historical properties, and unique culture. On the other hand, weak points given by convention bureaus are special food supply, English proficiency of officers, English Web pages, and multilingual display in local areas.

In addition, Iwamoto, Matsuo, Fukushima, and Komoda [16] focused on the evaluation of convention bureaus, taking into account its regional characteristics and convention facilities. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that it is necessary to take sufficient measures against area information such as variety of hotel information on the web, local service such as a variety of multilingual sign, and convention facilities such as available of day care center for kids. Regarding destination characteristics and public relation activities, there are following previous studies that focus on the factors as important decision criteria.

Besides, Iwamoto, Matsuo, Fukushima, Komoda [17] discussed the evaluation between non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus with regards to the regional characteristics that each region has. The results showed that the experienced tended to have high awareness of providing local information, while the non-experienced tended to have high awareness of providing the best service as hospitality in the local area.

Previous studies show that the experiences of convention bureaus have one of the key components of success in convention industry. However, researches which focus on convention bureaus are still limited. Therefore, this study covers which factors are important for

convention bureaus to attract international convention and discusses how the convention bureaus' experience affect the evaluation through a questionnaire survey.

3   Method

3.1 Data Collection

The questionnaire survey was conducted at the 26th international Meetings Expo (IME 2016) held on December 6-7, 2016, at Pacifico Yokohama, Japan and by online from mid-March to mid-April, 2017. IME is known as the only domestic tradeshow dedicated to MICE. There are 1,287 visitors in IME 2016. The target population in this study consist of convention bureaus in Japan. Researchers collected 101 questionnaires, out of which 91 questionnaires were used for the analysis because these questionnaires included partially incomplete answers. The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine importance of destination attribute by convention bureaus.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts. In the first part, the questionnaire includes demographic information regarding respondents' background such as gender, age, educational background, specialty, workplace, and job position. In the second part, respondents are asked 20 questions to rate important items to attract international convention. This part is measured on a 5-point Likert scale of the importance, ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (highly important). The questions of this part are consisted of 5 domains: accommodation & dining, facility, cooperation system, tourism, and access to information.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in three steps. First, each respondent's demographic factors were analyzed in descriptive statistics. Next, each respondent's evaluation was analyzed in descriptive statistics. In this part, respondents are classified into 2 groups; non-experienced group who have not attracted international convention and experienced group who have attracted international convention one or more time. Finally, a binary logistic regression was conducted to clarify whether there would be any variables showing significant differences in non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus. Logistic binary regression is used for a two-value response. This model is utilized in the case of a situation where two possible results are expected. As stated in the previous studies, convention bureaus play a pivotal role in convention industry. By comparison with experienced convention bureaus, non-experienced convention bureaus can share the information and grasp the differences between them. To see the differences between non-experienced and experienced group and tendencies to choose the important items by each group, logistic regression is one of the effective ways. Therefore, this study adopts logistic regression. In this study, dependent variable is non-experienced and experienced group and independent variables are 20 items shown in table 2.

4   Result

4.1 Demographic information of respondents

The demographic profiles of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The gender composition of the respondents was female (29%) and male (71%). Regarding age group, majority of the respondents was between the ages of 40s and 50s. 40s (26%) and 50s (33%)

account for more than half of the respondents. In educational background, more than 70% of the respondents were undergraduate. In the respondents' specialty, law was the highest, economics in the second place, and linguistics in the third place. In the items of the respondents' workplace, 'Hokaido & Tohoku', 'Kanto & Koshinetsu', 'Chubu', 'Kinki', 'Chugoku & Shikoku', and 'Kyushu & Okinawa' were 14%, 17%, 22%, 7%, 21% and 20% respectively.

Concerning job position, more than half of the respondents were manager. Staff was the second highest score. In the duration of service in convention industry, 'less than one year', 'one to three years', 'four to six years', 'seven to nine years', and 'more than ten years' were 7%, 41%, 17%, 8%, and 29% respectively. Regarding number of international convention, you have attracted before, 40% of the respondents answered that they have not attracted the international convention. 'one to two times', 'three to five times', 'six to ten times', 'eleven to twenty times' and 'more than twenty-one times' respectively.

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents (N=91)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	26	29
Male	65	71
Age		
20s	5	6
30s	19	21
40s	24	26
50s	30	33
60s and over	13	14
Educational background		
High school	10	11
Vocational school	6	7
Junior college and undergraduate	69	76
Postgraduate	6	7
Specialty		
Literature	4	4
Science	1	1
Agriculture	1	1
Sociology	8	9
Pedagogy	1	1
Economics	16	18
Business	2	2
Linguistics	10	11
Engineering	4	4
Tourism	5	6
Law	25	28
Politics	3	3
Others	11	12
Workplace		
Hokkaido & Tohoku	13	14
Kanto & Koshinetsu	15	17
Chubu	20	22
Kinki	6	7

Chugoku & Shikoku	19	21
Kyushu & Okinawa	18	20
Job position		
President	1	1
Executive officer	3	3
Manager	50	55
Assistant manager	9	10
Staff	26	29
Other	2	2
Duration of service in convention industry		
Less than one year	6	7
One to three years	37	41
Four to six years	15	17
Seven to nine years	7	8
More than ten years	26	29
Number of international convention you have attracted before		
None	36	40
One to two times	19	21
Three to five times	16	18
Six to ten times	6	7
Eleven to twenty times	7	8
More than twenty-one times	7	8

4.2 Measurements of the respondents' evaluation

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis of 20 items, which consisted of 5 domains; accommodation & dining, facility, cooperation system, tourism, and access to information.

In terms of "accommodation & dining", the highest mean score was 'presence or absence of vegetarian and halal meals in regional hotels or restaurants' (M = 4.23). 'Presence or absence of various four-star or five-star hotel' (M = 4.10) and the third highest mean score, 'various catering companies in the region' (M = 4.09) were almost the same mean score. 'Presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels' (M = 3.58) was the lowest mean score. This item was the highest standard deviation (SD = 1.184).

Regarding "facility", 'flexibility of booking and use' (M = 4.68) was the highest mean score in all items of the questionnaire survey. The second highest mean score, 'cheap rate for convention facility usage' (M = 4.24). 'Presence or absence of an inspection program in which convention bureaus incur the travel costs' received mean score of 3.84.

For "cooperation system", the highest mean score was 'presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, facility, staff and hotel staff to attract international conventions' (M = 4.81). The second highest mean score was 'presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, city or prefectural officials to attract international conventions' (M = 4.63). The third highest mean score was 'sufficient subsidy or grant to hold a convention' (M = 4.54). 'Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions', 'meeting with key persons such as a mayor, vice mayor, prefectural governance or vice governor', 'presence or absence of staff members with the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) qualification' received mean scores of 4.13, 4.09, and 3.24 respectively.

Concerning "tourism", mean scores of 'proud unique culture to foreigners', and 'variability of resources for tourism which can be utilized in excursions after international conventions' were 4.46 and 4.40.

In terms of "access to information", the highest mean score was 'variability of public transportation' (*M* = 4.53). The second and third highest mean scores were 'a lot of information about hotels in English' (*M* = 4.42), and 'a lot of information about the region in English' (*M* = 4.41). The other questionnaire items, 'a lot of information about facilities in English' and 'discretion of PR about the city environment' received mean scores of 4.38 and 3.57 respectively.

Table 2: Measurement of the respondents' evaluation (N=91)

Question items	Mean	SD
Domain 1: Accommodation & Dining		
1. Presence or absence of various four-star or five-star hotels	4.10	1.012
2. Presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels	3.58	1.184
3. Various catering companies in the region	4.09	.890
4. Presence or absence of vegetarian and halal meals in regional hotels or restaurants	4.23	.731
Domain 2: Facility		
5. Cheap rate for convention facility usage	4.24	.835
6. Flexibility of booking and use	4.68	.648
7. Presence or absence of an inspection program in which convention bureaus incur the travel costs	3.84	.834
Domain 3: Cooperation System		
8. Meeting with key persons such as a mayor, vice mayor, prefectural governance or vice governor	4.09	.852
9. Sufficient subsidy or grant to hold a convention	4.54	.655
10. Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, city or prefectural officials to attract international conventions	4.63	.626
11. Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, facility, staff and hotel staff to attract international conventions	4.81	.445
12. Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions	4.13	.846
13. Presence or absence of staff members with the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) qualification	3.24	.874
Domain 4: Tourism		
14. Proud unique culture to foreigners	4.46	.620
15. Variability of resources for tourism which can be utilized in excursions after international conventions	4.40	.665
Domain 5: Access to Information		
16. A lot of information about the region in English	4.41	.683
17. A lot of information about facilities in English	4.38	.711
18. A lot of information about hotels in English	4.42	.716

| 19. | Discretion of PR about the city environment | 3.57 | .805 |
| 20. | Variability of public transportation | 4.53 | .638 |

Note: Professional Congress Organizer (PCO) is a job which specializes in the creation, production, and implementation of conventions and events.

Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) established in 1985 is a program which regarded as international standard of excellence in the meetings, conventions, and exhibitions industry.

In table 3, 20 items are divided into two groups: non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus and are shown in the descriptive analysis.

In terms of "accommodation & dining", 'presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels' showed the biggest differences between non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus in all items. Concerning "facility", all items showed almost the same mean score in non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus. For "cooperation system", mean score of experienced was higher than that of non-experienced convention bureaus in most items. Regarding "tourism", all items showed similar results in non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus. The results of "access to Information" showed similar mean score in some items, but mean score of experienced was slightly higher than that of non-experienced convention bureaus in 'discretion of PR about the city environment'

Table 3: Measurement of non-experienced and experienced   (N=91)

Question items	Mean	SD
Domain 1: Accommodation & Dining		
1. Presence or absence of various four-star or five-star hotels		
Non-experienced	3.58	1.164
Experienced	4.44	0.707
2. Presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels		
Non-experienced	2.97	1.190
Experienced	3.98	0.981
3. Various catering companies in the region		
Non-experienced	3.89	0.965
Experienced	4.22	0.802
4. Presence or absence of vegetarian and halal meals in regional hotels or restaurants		
Non-experienced	4.03	0.866
Experienced	4.36	0.584
Domain 2: Facility		
5. Cheap rate for convention facility usage		
Non-experienced	4.28	0.837
Experienced	4.22	0.824
6. Flexibility of booking and use		
Non-experienced	4.64	0.787

	Experienced	4.71	0.528
7.	Presence or absence of an inspection program in which convention bureaus incur the travel costs		
	Non-experienced	3.83	0.833
	Experienced	3.84	0.826

Domain 3: Cooperation System

8.	Meeting with key persons such as a mayor, vice mayor, prefectural governance or vice governor		
	Non-experienced	4.00	0.850
	Experienced	4.15	0.840
9.	Sufficient subsidy or grant to hold a convention		
	Non-experienced	4.47	0.799
	Experienced	4.58	0.529
10.	Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, city or prefectural officials to attract international conventions		
	Non-experienced	4.58	0.640
	Experienced	4.65	0.610
11.	Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, facility, staff and hotel staff to attract international conventions		
	Non-experienced	4.78	0.478
	Experienced	4.84	0.416
12.	Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions		
	Non-experienced	4.36	0.630
	Experienced	3.98	0.924
13.	Presence or absence of staff members with the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) qualification		
	Non-experienced	3.11	1.021
	Experienced	3.33	0.740

Domain 4: Tourism

14.	Proud unique culture to foreigners		
	Non-experienced	4.39	0.722
	Experienced	4.40	0.535
15.	Variability of resources for tourism which can be utilized in excursions after international conventions		
	Non-experienced	4.42	0.718
	Experienced	4.49	0.621

Domain 5: Access to Information

16.	A lot of information about the region in English		
	Non-experienced	4.22	0.786
	Experienced	4.53	0.567

17.	A lot of information about facilities in English		
	Non-experienced	4.31	0.700
	Experienced	4.44	0.707
18.	A lot of information about hotels in English		
	Non-experienced	4.31	0.700
	Experienced	4.49	0.710
19.	Discretion of PR about the city environment		
	Non-experienced	3.31	0.775
	Experienced	3.75	0.768
20.	Variability of public transportation		
	Non-experienced	4.53	0.726
	Experienced	4.53	0.567

4.3 Multivariate regression

Table 4 presents the results of the logistic regression that the p-values are below .05 in all questionnaire items.

In 'Q12 presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions', the non-experienced convention bureaus had more positive opinions than the experienced convention bureaus. On the other hand, the experienced convention bureaus had more positive opinion than the non-experienced convention bureaus in 'Q2 presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels.

There were no significant differences of the respondents' opinions on the other items between the non-experienced and experienced, indicating similarities in their opinions.

Table 4: Differences between non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus

	B	S.E	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels	.709	.335	4.484	1	.034	2.033
Presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions	-1.639	.577	8.066	1	.005	.194
R^2 = .347 (Cox-Snell), .470 (Nagelkerke)						

Dependent variable: non-experienced = 0, experienced = 1
Independent variables: 20 items (Table 2)

5   Discussion

The findings indicated that 'presence or absence of a structure for cooperation among convention bureaus, facility staff and hotel staff to attract international conventions' showed an exclusively high mean score. Also, in order to attract international convention, the results point out that it is important to have relationships among convention bureaus, facility staff,

city or prefectural officials, and PCO. Moreover, wide-range cooperative structure will be required for attracting international convention.

In addition, 'flexibility of booking and use', 'sufficient subsidy or grant to hold a convention', and 'variability of public transportation' are more than 4.50 mean score. 'flexibility of booking and use' was second highest score in all items. If the bookings of facility or accommodation is flexibility, it will give a host an advantage.

The questionnaire items which are below 4.00 in descriptive analysis were 'presence or absence of various foreign-affiliated hotels', 'presence or absence of staff members with the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) qualification', and 'discretion of PR about the city environment'. Regarding the difference between non-experienced and experienced convention bureaus, experienced emphasis on importance of various foreign-affiliated hotels. Very few people have CMP qualification in Japan, so it seems that the importance of CMP qualification as a profession standard is not universally recognized.

In multivariate regression, the experienced convention bureaus have more positive opinions than the non-experienced, regarding 'presence or absence of various four-star or five-star hotels'. The reason why the experienced convention bureaus have a positive opinion is that to build foreign-affiliated hotels in host city makes the host city better known and as a consequence, name recognition of host cities helps to attract international convention.

On the other hand, non-experienced convention bureaus consider 'presence or absence of a structure for cooperation between convention bureaus and professional congress organizers (PCO) to attract international conventions' as an important factor. This result does not say that the non-experienced convention bureaus are inferior to the experienced convention bureaus in their professional consciousness. However, non-experienced convention bureaus think that to sharing information and collaborate with congress organizers helps to attract international convention.

The present study has some limitations. In order to secure the valid responses, researchers had to eliminate the invalid responses despite the fact that 101 questionnaires were collected. Moreover, it is necessary to discuss how the mutual collaboration among stakeholders can contribute to attract international convention.

Acknowledgement

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