

Service Culture in International Exhibition Management-A Case Study

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Abstract. Service culture (SC), among other factors, plays a critical role in the success of international exhibitions. The SC from organizers to exhibitors and trade visitors in China International Industry Fair (CIIF) and Hannover Messe, Germany (HMG) as case study based on qualitative analysis of their homepages, 2012, service catalog and after-show report was explored to compare and contrast basic services (BS) and value-added services (VAS) of SC from pre-exhibition, during exhibition and post exhibition phases from intercultural communication perspective. The findings revealed that there has been conflicts of service culture between China and Germany, as German exhibition organizers regard service as the most powerful strategic competitive tool in the international exhibition industry. The purpose of this research is to propose suggestions to further arouse and promote the organizers' SC to upgrade its service qualities in international exhibition industry in China.

Introduction

In the past two decades, the modern exhibition industry has shown considerable growth in terms of the number of exhibition halls (centers or museums), exhibitions held annually, exhibition scales, coverage of production lines and so on in China, particularly after major international events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai have driven industry growth, which made significant contributions to the Chinese economy. There were over 7,000 exhibitions held in China in 2012, an increase by 5.3% from 2011. Among them, 58 international exhibitions were approved by UFI, ranking China No.4 in the world.

Conceptual/ Theoretical Background

Exhibition and International exhibition

An exhibition (also referred to as trade fair, trade show, trade exhibition or expo), in the most general sense, is an organized presentation and display of a selection of items.

An international exhibition is a public event staged by participants to showcase the industrial, technological, and artistic achievements of nations, private business interests, and selected nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). According to UFI, these events must meet the criteria below.

Service

Service can be defined in a broader context to include general support, business trade, information service, finance and insurance, teaching service, health care, accommodation and government's administration and so forth. No matter what form it is in the business world, its goal is to generate profit for the service provider. Service typically differs from products as intangible, inseparable, perishable, and heterogeneous. [1]

Service culture

Service culture can be defined as a business that places service as the emphasis of their organizational culture [2]. Service culture implies type of organizational culture that promotes kinds of behavior in its employees that leads to high concern for serving its customers. Service cultures differ from organization to organization. Culture includes values, beliefs, norms, rituals, etc. Any policy, procedure, action or inaction on the part of an organization and its employees contribute to service culture. Employees can play key roles in communicating a company's culture to its customers. Examples include: employee dress code, interactions with customers, service provider's knowledge, skill, and attitude.

Service culture indicates that, for everyone in the provider organization, customer satisfaction is the top priority and that service provider activities demonstrably contribute to the business objectives of the customer.

Service quality

As service industry, among other factors, the most important soft power for an international exhibition to succeed is its service quality, which means the customer's overall judgment of the excellence of the service or the difference between one's expectation and the actual service performed. [3]

The important factors of the service quality form the word SERVICE". That is "S" stands for "satisfaction", "E" stands for "expectation", "R" is "readiness", "V" is "value", "I" is "Interest", "C" is "courtesy" and "E" is "efficiency".[4]

A search in Google Scholar with the key words "exhibition service from 2000 to 2013" in Chinese language found that there are about 557 items including articles and books, mostly focusing on the determinants of attendees' satisfaction, service quality and exhibition activities.

Methodology and Methods

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. HMG and CIIF are both the representative of the international exhibition of the country, popular among the exhibitors and trade visitors at home and abroad. To compare and analyze the differences of culture service in HMG and CIIF, case study research is used to in this paper. The after-show reports 2012 of CIIF and HMG were collected and the service catalogs, handbooks for exhibitors of both HMG and CIIF were also obtained, besides, the homepages of both cases were also compared and studied to have a general and comprehensive picture of the two cases.

Results and Discussions

General Service culture in China and Germany

The exhibition service and its importance in international exhibition

Exhibition service means any service provided or to be provided to an exhibitor, by the organizer of business exhibition, in relation to business exhibition;

A recent study conducted by the Center for Exhibition Industry Research, the most influential factor in driving the decision to exhibit is the perceived quality of attendance of an exhibition.

Comparison of the services provided in exhibitions in China and Germany

Modern exhibition industry in China developed from the last 90s, and is relatively still at its early stage compared to the western exhibition-advanced countries, such as Germany, France, American, Britain and so on.

The service concept of Germany is that service is power and everywhere, whereas the concept of China is to serve the exhibitors. Regarding the service target, Germany targets at more returns, better corporate image, attracting potential customers, collecting valuable information, accepting

new products and the profitability of exhibitors through excellent service, while Chinese exhibition organizers target more at having more exhibitors, professional visitors and orders. The service standard of the German organizers is to provide more overall service, and that of the Chinese is more focused on making more profit. As for the service orientation, the German organizers are more active, while the Chinese organizers are more passive. From this we can see that there is still a gap either in basic items or contents between the services, particularly the VASs provided in Germany and China, with the economy fast developing in China, the exhibition industry is fast growing in terms of the modern facilities, transportation and particularly government support from central to local.

Case study of CIIF and HMG

Why the two cases

Firstly, Shanghai and Hannover are both the convention and exhibition center in their countries, and both exhibitions last 5 days, each has its several theme shows. On December 19, 2007, Expo Shanghai Group signed cooperation agreement with Deutsche Messe Hannover, Germany after 7 round negotiations. Both sides agreed to make comprehensive cooperation from 2008 to upgrade CIIF world first-class international exhibition.[5]

Secondly, China became again the official partner country at HANNOVER MESSE 2012 (the Hannover Fair) in Hannover, Germany after the first time in 1987. As Germany is China's largest European trading partner, German products are in high demand - especially in the mechanical engineering sector, the automotive industry, the chemical industry and the environmental engineering sector. More than 500 Chinese exhibitors participated in the show in 2011 and China numbered the first among the major exhibiting nations at HANNOVER MESSE in 2012.[6]

CIIF

Of all the exhibitions held in China, China International Industry Fair (CIIF), jointly organized by eight Chinese Ministries and Shanghai Municipal People's Government, co-organized by China Machinery Industry Federation and managed by Shanghai East Best International (Group) Co. Ltd., is a leading event on equipment manufacturing in China, which is held on November annually. Since its founding in 1999, CIIF has become one of the most influential international industry brand exhibitions in China, through implementing "professionalization, marketization, internationalization and branding" as its strategies for over 14 years. CIIF, an UFI approved event, is a leading event for manufacturing in China as well as an important window and platform open to the world for international trade, communication and cooperation in industrial field.

The 15th session China International Industry Fair was held from November 5 to 9, 2013 at Shanghai New International Expo Centre, with 9 Theme Shows held (7 in 2012) concurrently under CIIF 2013. CIIF 2013 occupied 150,000 sq. meters as its display area and attracted more than 1,800 exhibitors and 100,000 trade visitors.

HMG

As the world's first exhibition power, exhibition industry in Germany has a history of about 100 years. With the fast development of industrial and commercial civilization, the small investment, high social and commercial returns and benefits, non-polluting, zero emission of green industry, exhibition industry has become a modern industrial and service sector in Germany.

In the 1980s, the growing information and telecommunication industry forced the organizer Deutsche Messe AG to split the fair. The CeBIT is a successful spin-off of the Hannover Messe. Nowadays, the Hannover Fair covers all areas of industrial technology.

Comparison of the services provided between CIIF and HMG

From the homepages of the two cases, we may find that both provide a series of services for exhibitors, visitors and journalists.

Comparison of services provided in HMG and CIIF (2012) are as follows: BS of HMG(2012): Advertising and sponsoring including : Outdoor advertising; Online advertising, Sponsorship, Print

advertising, Press services, General press services, Press info trays and “Hot Topics”, Press contacts, Fittings for your stand Floor coverings

Rental furniture and kitchen equipment, Technical service and logistics, Electric power supply, Communications systems, Antenna connections, Water supply Ceiling suspensions, Logistics/forwarding services, and height access platforms, Propane gas/Technical gases, Compressed air, IT hardware and audiovisual services, Organization of congresses, conferences and other events, Congress management, Renting a conference room, Using music at the show, Stand parties, Driver Safety Training, Managing your leads, Match & Meet, E-mail campaigns Lead management at your stand, Guided tours, Visitor statistics, Forums and Activities, Online Business Service (OBS), Ordering using OBS and Shuttle bus; Compared with the dozens of services provided above, the BS of CIIF (2012), including On-site ads package, Exhibitor’s Preparation Guide and Business reception, Conference support, Translation, Interpretation, Transportation , Train ticket and Air ticket booking , seems there is some improvements to be made.

VAS of HMG(2012) includes Invitation services & admission tickets, Complimentary admission tickets, E-mail invitations Premium Pass, Promotional materials for invitations, Exhibitor passes, Parking permits, Highlighting your company (ACMS), Corporate and product presentation, Exhibitor videos Network placements and network branding, More help and support for start-ups. VAS of CIIF (2012) mainly covers the visit of industrial zones and visit of special industry zone, Events forums, activities and Exhibit Award.

From mentioned above, it can be found that there are about ten BS sectors provided in HMG covering from very general services for exhibitors, trade visitors and journalists, and about 5 parts of VASs.

Tab.1 2009-2012 Concurrent Conferences, Seminars and Activities during HMG

2009	Job and Career Market, Tecto You
2010	Tecto You , WoMen Power
2011	Global Business and Markets, Smart Grids , Tecto You, Career Market, WoMen
2012	Metropolitan Solutions , Global Business and Markets , Job and Career Market, Tecto You

Source: <http://www.ciif-expo.com/article/list.php?catid=41>

Post services in HMG include the after-show report with detailed information about the session, some of the exhibitors’ statements about the exhibition and invitation to take the next one (as below)

Compared with HMG, there are multi foreign languages apart from Chinese, English, Deutch, French, Espanol, Korean, Japanese and Russian, whereas only Deutch and English in HMG homepage, making the CIIF more convenient and accessible for foreign customers. Besides, there were more services provided in recent years such as How to be an exhibitor, Preparation, etc. to help the exhibitors, and also more services for visitors and journalists in CIIF. On the other hand, the services provided in CIIF are mainly still very basic and traditional, like registration, reception, visits and so on. The organizer has come to realize the importance of concurrent events and activities, which are attractive to potential customers and value-added to their investment (see table 2 below)

Tab.2 2009-2011 Concurrent Conferences, Seminars and Activities during CIIF

2009	74 conferences, academic exchange activities and forums
2010	60 conferences, academic exchange activities and forums
2011	61 conferences, academic exchange activities and forums, visits
2012	60 conferences, academic exchange activities and forums, visits

Source: <http://www.ciif-expo.com/article/list.php?catid=41>

Tab.3 No. of Exhibitors and visitors of HMG 2009-2013

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of exhibitors	6,150	4,800	6,500	5,000	6,550
No. of visitors	210,000	150,000	230,000	165,000	225,000

Source: <http://www.hannovermesse.de/home>

Tab.4 No. of Exhibitors and visitors of CIIF 2009-2013

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of exhibitors	1,869	1,653	1,800	1,648	1,979
No. of visitors	118,325	116,786	101,200	102,900	117,000

Source: <http://www.ciif-expo.com/article/list.php?catid=41>

From Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 above, compared with the report in HMG, CIIF after-show report has improved a lot in the format with more tables and graphs rather than literal description in the last few years.

Services provided after the exhibition in CIIF include the after-show report with detailed information of the exhibitors, visitors and analysis of the events to be free downloaded online.

Summary

The importance of quality service in exhibitions is becoming more and more significant. As the most powerful country in exhibition industry, Germany has its mature market economy system and advanced facilities, moreover, the most professional overall services at all the exhibition phases as stated by the exhibitors are its critical “soft power” to have the loyal customers every year. CIIF could learn lessons from HMG in the following aspects:

A strong awareness of service culture is the key to the success of an exhibition. Due to the long-term planned economy and sponsor by the government, there lacks the sense of quality service among the management, which is passive and more profit-targeted, number-oriented.

CIIF has done a lot to improve its service quality, especially with the agreement to cooperate with HMG to enhance its international status and influence since 2008; however, Roman was not built in a day.

Talented professionals are important assets. Modern exhibition industry is relatively short in China, even though there are thousands of undergraduates majoring in Event Management or relevant subjects from some universities and colleges every year, there is still a shortage of professional talents.

Culturally, international exhibition is itself a series of closely-linked projects from pre-show, during the show to post-show embedded in service culture, as exhibition is much more than just a platform to sell products, it is rather a stage to show its corporate culture, including the stand design, logo, style, material, brand, function and the like, which is tangible and has its own cultural connotations, and every step from preparation to the completion of an exhibition, which is intangible and more important.

As a country with long history and rich regional and local cultures, it's more challenging for the Chinese organizers to not only possess the intercultural and cross cultural awareness and knowledge and communicative skills, but to adapt their skills flexibly to customers from both home and abroad, which is at the moment an urgent task to be fulfilled in Chinese exhibition industry, taking the cultural factors influencing customers' experiences such as timing, expressions, taboos, communication channels, etc. into consideration to achieve the targeted maximum effects.

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