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## FACTORS AFFECTING CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION DECISION-MAKING

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**Abstract:** Business travel, as the sector with the fastest growth in the tourism industry globally, has received increased attention from both countries and cities, particularly from emerging destinations. In developing economies, business travel, including attending meetings, conferences, incentives and other business events, often plays a leading role in the growth of the wider travel and tourism sector. Therefore, tourism authorities and convention bureaus at the national and city levels have been struggling to attract international conferences and a larger number of participants to conferences. Understanding factors, which appear to be important in the conference participation decision-making process, can help conference organizers and destinations to attract more participants and thus gain more benefit from this growing sector of the tourism industry. Therefore, this study aims to examine factors affecting the conference participation decision-making from the academics' perspective. Furthermore, it investigates how different socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents influence the extracted factors of the conference participation decision-making process. The data was collected from the academics employed at the University of Novi Sad in Serbia. The findings reveal six dimensions of conference participation decision-making: destination stimuli, costs and destination accessibility, educational and professional opportunities, intervening opportunities, location factors, and conference factors. The results also show that there are statistically significant differences in some extracted factors between respondents of different gender, age, education level, and academic position, while the frequency of participation in international conferences does not influence the factors. The results could be of interest to all stakeholders in the business travel and tourism industry.

**Keywords:** conference participation; decision-making; academic conference; meeting industry; business travel and tourism

### Introduction

As part of a broader tourism sector, business travel is achieving growing recognition around the globe (Han et al., 2019). This industry is experiencing the fastest growth in the tourism sector. In 2016, the industry worldwide was responsible for US\$1.2 trillion of global GDP contribution, nearly a quarter of the travel and tourism sector's overall economic impact. The travel and tourism sector is forecast to grow at 3.9% per year for each of the next ten years in the period 2016–2026, while business travel is forecast to grow at 3.7% per annum (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTTC], 2017).

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As one of the main purposes of travel worldwide, business tourism has received increased attention from both countries and cities, particularly from emerging destinations, which are investing in the development of venues, transportation, and accommodation infrastructures, and facilities to attract business events. With new destinations entering the meetings, congresses, conventions, and incentives (MCCI) market, competition for market share in Europe and worldwide has become vigorous (Beardsley, Jung, Kim, & Kim, 2019; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] & European Travel Commission [ETC], 2015). In developing economies (such as Serbia), business travel, including attending meetings, conferences, incentives and other business events, often plays a leading role in the growth of the wider travel and tourism sector (WTTC, 2017) and contributes to the economic growth of the host community (Han & Hwang, 2017). Also, this component of the tourism industry is the least responsive to price changes and helps reduce shoulder seasonal patterns (Malekmohammadi, Mohamed, & Ekiz, 2011; McCabe, Poole, Weeks, & Leiper, 2000; Oppermann, 1996). Therefore, tourism authorities and convention bureaus at the national and city level have been struggling to attract international conferences and a larger number of attendees to conferences. One important issue for a successful conference is to attract as many attendees as possible (Zhang, 2010). Therefore, it becomes the core for tourism and meeting industry professionals to achieve an in-depth understanding of this growing sector and its segments, as well as the key factors influencing conference attendees' decision whether to attend the conference or not (Huang & Lee, 2017; Jung & Tanford, 2017).

Moreover, the existing body of research on the business travel industry has focused mostly on the supply side, while little attention is being paid to individual conference attendees and their needs and wants (Beardsley et al., 2019; Mair & Thompson, 2009). Although a few recent studies have addressed the research need (Beardsley et al., 2019; Jung & Tanford, 2017; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Malekmohammadi et al., 2011; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2007), still there has been a lack of studies about factors influencing conference participation decision and behavioral intentions. Thus, more research that is empirical is needed. Also, academic scientific conferences represent an important market for business tourism destinations, as they are organized regularly, often with international participants. For the most part, attendance is largely voluntary from the participants' perspective. According to Mair, Lockstone-Binney, and Whitelaw (2018), there are different motives and barriers to academic conference attendance. However, Sá, Ferreira, and Serpa (2019) add that the literature on academic conferences is rather scarce. Therefore, this study aims to examine factors affecting conference participation decision-making from the academics' perspective.

The following research questions are addressed in this study: (1) What are the factors that influence conference attendees' decision to participate or not in an international academic conference? (2) Are there statistically significant differences in these factors between respondents of different gender, age, education, academic position, and the level of frequency of participation in international conferences?

Understanding components, which appear to be important and influential in the decision-making process, help conference organizers and destinations to attract more participants and thus gain more benefit from this important sector of the tourism industry in the future.

## Literature review

The Meetings, Congresses, Conventions, and Incentives (MCCI) industry is part of the greater tourism sector and includes three different segments: association conventions and congresses, corporate meetings, and corporate incentive programs. Although the global environment is continuously changing, trend analyses reveal that attendance will increase soon in all segments and all geographic regions, specifically developing countries (UNWTO & ETC, 2015).

The association market is very large (Crouch, Del Chiappa, & Perdue, 2019) and covers a wide range of meeting types and categories: medical meetings, which represent the largest segment, followed by scientific and other academic fields, trade organizations, professional bodies, and social groupings. In terms of size, budget, duration, and complexity, there are massive variations between and within categories. However, some similarities can be identified: almost every profession or scientific field has an association, which holds one or more meetings that are repeated at regular intervals, mostly at different destinations. They rarely return to the same destination within a very short period. The local stakeholder, e.g., the national association, is often the one who initiates the hosting of the international association meeting. If the national association proves difficult to motivate to organize the international conference and boost attendance, the meeting will probably be scheduled elsewhere (International Congress and Convention Association [ICCA], 2018).

The central characteristic of the association market, including academic conferences, is that participation is voluntary, meaning that an individual, in this case, an academic, has a wide range of choices of different conferences to participate in (Mair & Thompson, 2009; Yoo & Chon, 2008). Oppermann and Chon (1997) believe that this “freedom of choice” is the main distinction between association and corporate meetings (the latter are usually a requirement for the employees). Most of the participants in an association meeting, including academics, have to fund their travel expenses themselves or get funding from a third party (e.g., university, department). Moreover, the association conference segment, including academics, has great similarities to leisure travelers regarding the decision-making process undertaken by conference delegates in choosing to attend a conference (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). In the same way, leisure travelers would choose holiday destinations that satisfy their needs the most; an academic is likely to choose a particular conference that is perceived to provide the most benefits. Mair and Thompson (2009) state that the conference attendees' decision-making process is similar to that of leisure tourists. There are certain steps, which a potential tourist has to identify in the decision-making process of leisure travel. Conference attendees will also go through these steps. At first, they recognize a need to travel—they receive an invitation from an association or conference organizer, a call for papers, or perhaps an invitation by word of mouth. After that, information search starts followed by evaluation of alternatives (other conferences and destinations), product choice (choice of the conference), outcome (participation at the conference), and post-evaluation (after the conference) (Mair & Thompson, 2009).

The common goal of the conference organizer and host destinations is to maximize the number of attendees. International conference participants are precious resources for the tourism industry since their attendance brings benefits to both the conference organizer and the host destination (Crouch et al., 2019). They bring numerous economic benefits to the host location (Jung & Tanford, 2017) through their expenditure on accommodation, food and beverages, local transportation, balancing off-season tourism and spreading positive word of mouth (Davidson & Rogers, 2006; Han & Hwang, 2017; Malekmohammadi et al., 2011; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Because attendees have a large selection of conferences to choose from, it is more critical than ever to have a better

understanding of the decision-making process and the factors affecting the attendance decision (Jung & Tanford, 2017). By determining the factors influencing conference attendance decisions and later satisfaction, organizers can create conferences and provide services and facilities that meet the needs and expectations of the participants (Jung & Tanford, 2017; Severt et al., 2007).

Conference attendees may also have different reasons to travel to a destination and participate in a specific conference. Oppermann and Chon (1997) proposed the first model, which addresses the conference participation decision-making process by potential attendees. They identified influencing variables and categorized them into four factors: personal/business factors, association/conference factors, location (destination) factors, and intervening opportunities (other conferences and holiday time). Zhang et al. (2007) refined a new model of factors affecting conference participation decision-making using Oppermann and Chon's (1997) model as their foundation framework. They found four main dimensions: association/conference factors, personal/business factors, location factors, and total cost factors. They replaced the original intervening opportunities in Oppermann and Chon's (1997) model by the total cost factor, which include monetary cost and time cost. Also, they added attractiveness and accessibility of a conference destination in location factor as important variables, which influence the final decision whether to participate in a conference or not.

Yoo and Chon (2008) developed a measurement scale to examine factors affecting convention participation decision-making. The scale was tested using a sample of members from three international tourism and hospitality-related associations. They found five underlying dimensions of convention participation decision-making: destination stimuli, professional and social networking opportunities, educational opportunities, safety and health situation, and travel ability. Although labeled differently, these factors are composed of items similar to models of Oppermann and Chon (1997) and Zhang et al. (2007).

Mair and Thompson (2009) identified six components, which appeared to be the most important in the UK association conference attendance decision-making process: networking, personal and professional development, cost, location, time and convenience (this factor includes reasons why a person may not be able to attend a conference, such as family holiday or another conference) and health and security. Associations involved in the research were from the field of tourism, medicine, and law.

The findings from the research of Malekmohammadi et al. (2011) revealed that there were four dimensions of conference motivations: professional and prestige, pleasure seeking, destination factors, and conference factors. The pleasure-seeking factor (getting away from home, getting new experiences, and visiting a new destination) and the conference factor (quality and topic of the conference, networking, and well-known speakers) were identified as the most influencing in the conference participation decision-making process.

Jung and Tanford (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of convention and meeting articles in academic journals to explore the factors that influence convention attendees' satisfaction and generate repeat attendance. They conclude that networking opportunities and educational benefits are the top contributors to attendees' convention behavioral intention. Liang and Latip (2018) examined how association/conference, location, total cost, and personal factors affected the convention attendees' participation decision-making in Malaysia. Their findings show that the location and total cost factors significantly influence convention attendees' decision-making process.

The findings from the work of Aktas and Demirel (2019), who examined the conference participation decision-making process among academics in Turkey, support the early studies on the fact that academic development (improving academic knowledge and skills) and networking are the most important factors that influence conference participation. Also, this research shows that academics value free time for leisure and recreation activities within conference programs.

According to Mair et al. (2018), one of the main motives to attend an academic conference is the opportunity for creating and expanding networks, as higher education institutions and funders of scientific activities increasingly value academics that show interest in cooperating with national and international partners in applying to fellowships and submitting projects proposals and joint research. However, they add that academics are facing increasingly constrained budgets for conference attendance and call for further research on factors that influence attending academic conferences. Therefore, the present study is of importance.

## Methodology

To achieve the objective of the study, a two-step procedure was conducted. Firstly, the research instrument was developed based on a literature review on conference attendees' decision-making process. The items from Oppermann and Chon (1997) and Zhang et al. (2007) conceptual models of conference decision-making were adapted to the present study, and 23 items with good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.821$ ) were included in the questionnaire.

The final questionnaire was composed of two sections. The first part included basic demographic and background information of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of 23 questions—items that may affect the respondent's decision to attend or not a specific academic conference. The respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of these items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very important*).

The questionnaire was created using Google Docs. It was distributed electronically to academics employed at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia, using the university e-mail database. The survey was conducted in April and May 2016. Out of 300 sent e-mail invitations to take part in the research, 133 academics accepted to participate in the study, with a response rate of 44 percent. According to MacCallum, Widaman, Preacher, and Hong (1999) and Hair, Money, Samouel, and Page (2007), this figure is acceptable to run both descriptive and factorial analyses with the given number of questions. The data was processed with the statistical package SPSS 20. The following analyses were carried out: exploratory factor analysis, reliability test, t-test, and ANOVA.

## Results

### *Respondents' Profile*

The research sample consists of 65.4% of females and 34.6% of male respondents, while most of them are in the age group up to 40. The majority of respondents have a Ph.D. degree (58.8%). Consequently, regarding their academic position, 30.9% are associates, followed by assistant professors (22.8%), and full professors (22.1%). Most of the respondents participate in conferences once in two years (47.8%) or once a year (35.31%). The respondents' characteristics are shown in detail in Table 1.

### Exploratory factor analysis

To explore dimensions of conference participation decision making, exploratory factor analysis was carried out, using the principal component method and Varimax rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) overall measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.729) and Barlett’s test of sphericity ( $p = .000$ ) suggested that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 1

#### *Socio-demographic profile of respondents*

Demographics	%
Gender	
Male	34.6
Female	65.4
Age	
<30	33.1
31–40	33.8
41–50	15.4
>50	17.6
Academic position	
Associate	30.9
Teaching assistant	8.8
Assistant professor	22.8
Associate professor	8.8
Full professor	22.1
Other	6.6
Education	
Bachelor’s degree	7.4
Master’s degree	33.8
Doctoral degree	58.8
Marital status	
Married	42.6
Unmarried	51.5
Divorced/separated	5.9
Frequency of participation in the conferences	
Once a year	35.31
More times in one year	11.8
Once in two years	47.8
Do not participate	3.7

All items had factor loadings larger than 0.3 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998) and were loaded heavily on one factor. Based on the parallel analysis and scree plot suggestions, six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were extracted, with 59.86% of variance explained. The results produced a clean factor structure with relatively higher loadings on the appropriate factors. Most variables were loaded heavily on one factor, and this reflected that there was minimal overlap among factors and that all factors were independently structured. The factors showed Cronbach’s reliability scores ranging from 0.518 to 0.812, high enough to be acceptable. Cronbach’s Alpha scores depend to a certain extent on the number of items and the sample size, but 0.5 to 0.75 is generally accepted as indicating a moderately reliable scale (Hinton, McMurray, & Brownlow, 2014).

Factor 1 explains 22.053% of the variance and is labeled *Destination stimuli* as in Yoo and Chon’s (2008) study. It is comprised of two *pull* items related to conference destination attractiveness, which can stimulate an individual to attend a conference and one *push* item of wishing to get out of the office. Factor 2, labeled *Costs and destination accessibility*, is self-explanatory. Factor 3 *Educational and professional opportunities* explains 8.405% of the variance; it loads on three variables representing the personal and professional development aspects of conference attendance. Factor 4 is labeled *Intervening opportunities* as it involves reasons why an academic may not be able to attend a given conference. It consists of five items related to family affairs, vacation, health conditions, and previous destination experiences. The fifth factor, named *Location factors* involves three items related to the quality of accommodation services, safety and security, and weather conditions at the conference destination. Factor 6 *Conference factors*, loads on three variables related to conference reputation, presence of well-known speakers, and competing conferences on a similar topic in the same period.

Table 2

*Results of exploratory factor analysis for conference participation decision-making*

Label	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Alpha
<i>F1: Destination stimuli</i>		5.072	22.053	0.774
Attractive destination image	0.817			
Scenery/sightseeing/shopping opportunities at the conference destination	0.792			
Getting away from my routine work	0.728			
<i>F2: Costs and destination accessibility</i>		2.572	11.181	0.812
Conference registration cost	0.849			
Transportation cost	0.845			
Accommodation cost	0.750			
Easy to access to the conference destination (direct flights)	0.588			
The time required to travel to the conference destination	0.406			
<i>F3: Educational and professional opportunities</i>		1.933	8.405	0.729
Desire to learn and gain new knowledge	0.845			
Professional advancement	0.752			
New professional contacts, developing a professional network	0.719			
<i>F4: Intervening opportunities</i>		1.534	6.671	0.636
Family	0.661			
My health conditions for travel	0.621			
At least one accompanying colleague from my university/department	0.593			
Previous destination experiences	0.421			
Overlapping conference dates with vacation	0.417			
<i>F5: Location factors</i>		1.379	5.994	0.648
Quality of accommodation services at the conference destination	0.740			
Safety and security at the conference destination	0.620			
Weather at the conference destination	0.593			
<i>F6: Conference factors</i>		1.278	5.557	0.518
Conference reputation	0.814			
Well-known speakers	0.602			
Other conferences on a similar topic in the same period	0.434			

### *The role of socio-demographic variables*

One of the goals of the study was to analyze how different socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents influenced the extracted factors of conference participation decision-making from the academics' perspective. For this purpose, the authors conducted the independent sample t-test to explore the gender differences, while ANOVA test was performed to check the differences in age, education, academic position, and frequency of participation in international conferences.

According to the t-test of independent samples, it is concluded that there are significant differences in responses based on gender, only in Factor 3, at the level of significance of  $p < .01$ .

The results indicate that female respondents give more importance to educational and professional opportunities ( $MD = 13.7416$ ,  $SD = 1.66875$ ) than males ( $MD = 13.0000$ ,  $SD = 2.09554$ ).

Table 3

*One-way ANOVA. Dependent list: factors of conference participation decision-making. Factor: age of the respondents*

Factors	Age				F-value	p
	<30	31–40	41–50	Over 50		
F1	8.1333	8.7826	6.5238	7.8333	2.965	.03
F3	13.6889	13.82611	13.3333	12.58331	2.742	.04
F4	12.6000	11.9348	9.1429	10.6667	7.418	.00

The results of the ANOVA test for the identified factors indicate that on the level of significance of  $p < .05$ , there are significant differences in the responses concerning the age of the respondents for factors: F1, F3, and F4 (Table 3). The LSD post hoc test shows that respondents aged 31–40 perceived F1 (*destination stimuli*) and F3 (*educational and professional opportunities*) more important than all other age categories. On the other side, respondents under 30, perceived F4 (*intervening opportunities*) more important than other age categories. Similarly, respondents with a Bachelor's diploma perceived intervening opportunities more important than respondents with a higher level of education.

Table 4

*One-way ANOVA. Dependent list: factors of conference participation decision-making. Factor: education level of the respondents*

Factors	Education			F-value	p
	BS	MSc	Ph.D		
F4	13.500	12.065	10.925	4.213	.01

Note. BS = Bachelor's; MSc = Master's; Ph.D = Doctoral degree.

Regarding the frequency of participation in international conferences, there are no statistically significant differences between respondents in the importance of the extracted factors of conference participation decision-making.

The results of the ANOVA test for the identified factors and academic positions show that there are significant differences in the responses for factors F3, F4, and F5 (Table 5). The LSD post hoc test indicates that full professors perceived *educational and professional opportunities* (F3) least important compared to other groups of respondents. On the other side, associate professors perceived

*intervening opportunities* (F4) and *location factors* (F5) more important than other groups of respondents.

Table 5

*One-way ANOVA. Dependent list: factors of conference participation decision-making. Factor: the academic position of the respondents*

Factors	Academic position						F-value	p
	Associate	Teaching assistant	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Other		
F3	13.8095	14.0000	13.5484	13.6667	12.4667	14.2222	2.733	.02
F4	12.1190	12.5833	11.6129	9.1667	10.7667	12.3333	2.473	.03
F5	9.0000	8.9167	9.1935	8.0833	10.2333	10.8889	2.408	.04



## Discussion and conclusion

The primary purpose of this research was to identify important factors which influence academics' decision to participate in an international conference or not, and to examine if socio-demographic variables influence the identified factors. The study was conducted in response to recent calls for further research on the topic of conference participation decision-making. Thus, it contributes to the body of knowledge on this important topic.

The results of exploratory factor analysis revealed the six-factor structure of conference participation decision-making process: *Destination stimuli*, *Costs and destination accessibility*, *Educational and professional opportunities*, *Intervening opportunities*, *Location factors*, and *Conference factors*. These factors confirm the previous related works by other researchers (Aktas & Demirel, 2019; Jung & Tanford, 2017; Liang & Latip, 2018; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Malekmohammadi et al., 2011; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Zhang et al., 2007).

One of the underlying dimensions of conference attendance that appears to be very important is the destination. In this study, three factors relate to the destination: *Destination stimuli*, *Costs and destination accessibility*, and *Location factors*. The first factor, *Destination stimuli* emphasizes the importance of destination attractiveness when an academic chooses a conference to participate in. This finding is specifically in line with the works of Malekmohammadi et al. (2011) and Yoo and Chon (2008). Moreover, the results of Jung and Tanford's (2017) study indicate that the conference environment, including accessibility, security, location, site environment, and the quality of facilities/venues, is a top driver of attendees' return intentions to the conference. They add, "Attendees seem to be motivated to return to conventions because of the physical environment that might evoke positive images of the venue they previously experienced" (p. 13).

Mair and Thompson (2009), as well as Zhang et al. (2007), wrote about the dual nature of a destination factor: attractiveness and accessibility. Crouch et al. (2019) found that accessibility of a destination in terms of flight schedule convenience is a major consideration when choosing a host conference destination. In this study, destination accessibility and costs related to transport, accommodation, and conference fee emerged as an independent factor. Oppermann and Chon (1997) include cost as part of the personal/business dimension and relate this to the financial status of the attendee, while Zhang et al. (2007) state that costs should be observed as time and monetary costs. Similar to our *Costs and destination accessibility* factor, Yoo and Chon (2008) found the travel ability factor, which includes the total costs of attending the conference and time required to travel to the conference destination, as a unique dimension of conference participation decision-making. Although funding is highlighted in previous studies as an important part of the decision to attend a conference (Mair et al., 2018), in the present study, it was not the case; we assume due to financial support, academics mostly have from their universities. The findings from the work of Liang and Latip (2018) show that the location and total cost factors significantly influence conference participation decision-making. Therefore, conference organizers should consider holding their events in less expensive destinations (second-tier cities), which might offer a better value than major destinations at a lower cost (Jung & Tanford, 2017).

In the present study, *Location factors*, including quality of accommodation services, safety and security, and weather at the conference destination, emerged as a factor per se. These items appear in previous studies but not as a factor per se. We do not consider them motivational items but rather facilitators that make it easier for academics to attend a specific conference.

Destination attractiveness and opportunities for personal and professional development are found to be strong motivators for conference participation, while destination accessibility and related costs are considered factors that facilitate attendance (Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001).

The findings of this study support the previous studies on the fact that educational and professional benefits (in the present study these are gaining new knowledge, networking, and professional advancement) are an important motivator for attending the conference (Jung & Tanford, 2017; Mair et al., 2018; Malekmohammadi et al., 2011; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008). The reputation of the conference and the presence of well-known speakers (labeled in the present study as the *Conference factors*) increase the number of participants in the conference.

Factor *Intervening opportunities* is labeled as in the original Opperman and Chon's (1997) convention participation decision-making model. However, items involved in this factor in the present study differ from those in Opperman and Chon's (1997) study. While health conditions and family affairs are grouped in personal/business factors in Opperman and Chon's (1997) study, in the present study, they are identified as intervening opportunities. According to Mair and Thompson (2009), intervening opportunities are anything that might get in the way of conference attendance. Bad previous experiences in conference destination, negative word of mouth, or conference dates clashes with vacation may be the reasons for not attending the conference.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that there are significant differences in some identified factors between respondents of different gender, age, education level, and academic position, while the frequency of participation in international conferences has no influence on the factors. The results show that female respondents perceive educational and professional opportunities more important than male respondents do. This finding is in line with demographic megatrends in the meeting industry as more women participate in conferences, and conference organizers have to design the event to meet the needs and expectations of female participants (German Convention Bureau, 2013).

In addition, it was expected that full professors perceived educational and professional opportunities least important in the conference participation decision-making process compared to other groups of respondents according to their academic position. It is assumed that full professors reached the peak of their career, and thus, have less enthusiasm for work, gaining new knowledge and creating new professional contacts. They are experts in their fields, with an already developed network of contacts, and often invited to participate in a conference as speakers. Therefore, they put less emphasis on educational and professional benefits of attending the conference when compared with respondents of other academic positions. This finding is in line with the work of Aktas and Demirel (2019), who note that there are differences in the needs of academics at different stages of their career.

Similarly, it was not surprising that the respondents aged 31–40 perceived destination attractiveness and educational and professional opportunities more important in the conference participation decision-making process than all other age categories. Academics in this age group are usually Ph.D. candidates, or they have defended doctoral thesis, and they have high expectations from the conferences and desire for ongoing education and professional advancement (Scott, Ogbeide, & Fenich, 2019). This finding is in line with Davidson's (2010) article on the topic of what Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1995) wants from conferences. Academics in the age group of 31–40 are members of Generation Y. According to Davidson (2010), they tend to have high expectations of themselves and are tenacious and questioning, as well as

highly vocal and full of energy and innovative drive. Also, members of Generation Y demonstrate a deep-seated desire for ongoing education, which they regard as the key to success in professional life. Some authors have described them as "lifelong learners", for whom education and training are perceived as the norm rather than the exception. Davidson (2010) adds that the success of the conference industry, as well as conference destinations and related businesses, depend upon achieving a firm understanding of Generation Y's needs and expectations from meetings. All stakeholders involved in the conference industry must understand that future face-to-face business events must be designed and run in such a way that they hold a significant appeal for Generation Y participants, while, at the same time, not isolating any of the members of older generations in the workforce.

This research has provided significant findings to the body of knowledge on the exploration of factors affecting academics' conference participation decision-making process and on the role of socio-demographic variables in this process.

The results could be of interest to all intermediaries and suppliers in the meeting industry, including convention bureaus and other destination marketing organizations, destination management companies, professional conference organizers, meeting planners, and venues, especially in these challenging times when most are struggling to increase attendance.

To make the presented findings more comparable and generalizable, similar studies would need to be carried out in other sectors than one of the academic sectors and other countries, of similar as well as different levels of economy and science development. In some future research, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study on the factors affecting the conference participation decision-making process among participants from developed countries and developing ones. Future research should further examine whether socio-demographic, as well as economic variables (such as financial status of an individual or financial support from an organization) and other background information (such as membership and position in association/s) influence individuals' perceptions of the factors important in conference participation decision-making process.

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