

THE SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE VENUE: PERCEPTIONS OF CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS AND HOTEL MANAGERS

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Within the conference industry there are differences in the needs and requirements of those who organize conferences and those who provide venues for them. Focusing on the situation in Korea, this article investigates the prior attributes required of a venue by conference organizers (CO), the demand side of the industry, and by hotel managers (HM), the supply side. This research is also aimed at identifying the common operational problems in hotels used as conference venues, and investigating if there is any correlation between these problems and the hotel attributes highly valued by the buyers in the conference industry. According to the results of this study, there are significant disparities between the attributes and common problems in the hotel conference industry from the perspectives of CO and HM.

Key words: Attributes; Conference venues; Conference organizers; Hotel managers; Korea

Introduction

Holding conferences is lucrative for the hospitality industry because of the large number of delegates brought to particular destinations. For example, there are about 5,000 national and international associations in the US and about 15,000 state and regional associations, many of which hold annual conferences ensuring an influx of people to the conference destination (Spiller, 2002; Yoo, 2004; Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2007). As one of the most buoyant sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry, the meetings, incentive travel, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) sector is globally recognized for its valuable economic contributions to

tourism destinations (Dwyer, 2002; S. S. Kim, Chon, & Chung, 2003). Dimmock and Tiyce (2001) point to numerous impacts that result from events that can be directly attributed to conferences. They consider economic and tourism factors to be among these, suggesting that conferences provide host destinations with business and personal income, investment and sponsorship, tax revenue, employment and training, increased business opportunities, improved destination image, and increased visitor numbers. The effective development of the MICE sector requires an understanding of how planners choose destinations for their conferences and what facilities or services they seek (Barker, 1999; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; David-

son & Rogers, 2006; W. G. Kim & Kim, 2003; Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

The conference and meetings sector is highly complex, comprising a multiplicity of buyer and supplier organizations and businesses. For conference organizers (“the buyers”), the organization of conferences and similar events is a part of their job and often one for which they have received little formal training but for which they have responsibility. The suppliers include conference venues and destinations, accommodation providers and transport companies, agencies and specialist contractors. Both buyers and suppliers work together and are supported by national bodies and associations, the trade press, and educational institutions, each contributing to the overall structure of this fast developing global industry. Despite the conference industry’s growing significance, the specific needs and wants of the stakeholders, who have different priorities and interests in the industry, are largely unexplored (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rogers, 1998; Yoo, 2004).

A growing number of countries recognize the hosting of conventions as a strategically important segment of their tourism industry, owing to its high economic contribution (W. G. Kim & Kim, 2003; Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007). Therefore, to actively attract convention and meeting planners, many countries develop and offer various types of attractions, facilities, and infrastructure suitable for meetings and conventions.

This is true for Korea where the Korean convention industry has rapidly grown to become one of the most important segments of the tourism industry. Such conventions include the 78th International Lions Club Convention in 1995, the 3rd Asia-Europe Summit Meeting (ASEM) in 2000, the 14th General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in 2001, and the 13th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit talks in 2005 (W. G. Kim & Kim, 2003; Yoo, 2004). Hosting mega events, such as the Asian Games of 1986, the summer Olympic Games of 1988, the Busan Asian Games of 2002, and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) World Cup of 2002 has stimulated the rapid growth of the convention industry, attracting more foreign tourists as well as strength-

ening strategic alliances with foreign countries (S. S. Kim et al., 2003; Yoo, 2004).

According to the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO, 2008), hotels are common venues for conferences in Korea with 151 (51.01%) of the 296 international conferences in 2002 and 216 (47.37%) of the 456 in 2007 in Korea being held in hotels. The relationship between the Korean hotel industry and the conference sector is both more commercial and more institutional than other host-guest relationships. This study is concerned with identifying the significance of the various attributes of the hotels as conference venues. The selection of the venue can be one of the most important and difficult tasks for conference organizers. In this context, the Korean government enacted the Convention Promotion Law of 1997 to support associations from various industries that attract conventions to the country. The Act established guidelines for identifying potential future sources of convention business and designating suitable cities where these events could be held (W. G. Kim & Kim, 2003; Yoo, 2004). Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the current conference industry in Korea.

This study is concerned with the two sides of the conference industry in Korean hotels: the demand and the supply sides. The “demand side” refers to conference organizers (CO), who search for and select suitable venues, while the “supply side” refers to hotel managers (HM), who wish to host conferences at their hotel. A large number of hotels in Korea have hosted conference functions as part of marketing or banqueting activities (Park, 2004). However, there has been a lack of professionalism, expertise, motivation, consistency, and monitoring of hotel convention staff. Hotel managers have largely tried to run conference functions as an ad hoc operation without serious efforts being given to investigating what important attributes and interests are demanded by conference organizers (H. Kim, 2003). This has led to dissatisfaction for both providers and users. The recognition of this dissatisfaction (Kang, 2002; H. Kim, 2003; Park, 2004) provided the starting point for this study. The study developed into a comparative review of the perceptions of the CO and the HM concerning the value of various attributes of hotels as conferences venues. In particular, this study

Table 1
Characteristics of the Conference Industry in Korea

Strength	Weakness
Strengthened administrative support from central government for the industry. Increasing number of international events.	Overseas marketing methodology is lacking in diversity. Seoul area occupies nearly 80% of the total international conference hosting.
Improved infrastructure in accessibility and developed transportation. Advanced technology.	Lack of connected tourism products leads to the delegates' short lengths of stay. Weak cooperation with lack of exchange among the different stakeholders in the industry. Duplicated marketing activities among local governments result in a waste of budget and restrictions in efficiency. Cooperational efforts with foreign organizations are limited. Lack of professionalism creates a poor reputation among foreign delegates. Low proficiency in English.
Opportunity	Threat
Strengthened and improved national image in international society. Increased awareness of the importance of the industry.	Political instability owing to tension with North Korea. Selfish and reckless competition between local governments.
Increased membership of international organizations and international activities of local governments. Hub of the Northeast Asia. Expanding the transportation infrastructure.	Lack of massive conference venues. Increased competition in the region. Oversupply of convention facilities and low return on investments.

Source: Adapted from Korean Tourism Organization (2008).

aims to (a) identify the different prior attributes desired by the CO (demand side) and the HM (supply side) of hotels as conference venues, (b) investigate the differences between the common operational problems as perceived by the CO and the common complaints received by the HM from the CO, and (c) examine the correlation between the attributes highly valued by the CO and the common operational problems, as reported in the form of faults or complaints, both from the CO and the HM.

Methodology

This research consisted of two studies, A and B; each with its own questionnaire and method. This was necessary because of the unique characteristics of the Korean meeting and conference industry. Conference organizers were identified and selected using two sources. The main source was a publication on the Korean conference industry

by the KTO (2008). The second source was a list of conference venue-seeking and booking service companies included in the monthly bulletin of the Korean conference industry published by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT, 2007). These companies provided only venue-seeking services and did not undertake the organization of the meetings. However, being involved with venue selection, these companies were expected to be aware of the particular needs and requirements of such events and, therefore, would be in a position to serve the purposes of this study.

All the conference organizers and venue-seeking companies provided by these sources were included in the sample. In total, 40 questionnaires to 40 companies were sent out addressed to the managers of the companies. The fact that all identified companies were included in the sample, as well as an estimation given by one of the major Korean conference placement agencies that there

were not more than 30 companies, justified the view that the sample size was larger than half of the population. The information concerning population size was given to the researcher in a telephone interview and concerned all of the conference organizing and venue-seeking companies in Korea.

Hotels, including the relatively small ones, claim they offer conference facilities of some kind. However, it was judged that the study would be better served if it focused on those hotels that were more professionally involved in the meeting industry with a history of hosting conferences and larger conference facilities (suitable for more than 1,000 participants). Forty hotels, mainly from Seoul, Busan, and Jeju, were selected and questionnaires sent.

Fifteen questionnaires for both Studies A and B were completed by CO, and 19 by HM, a response rate of 37.5% and 47.5%, respectively. The CO, who responded, were from more women (56.5%), worked for more than 2 years (34.4%), and had been involved with more than five international conferences (27.8%). This means both hotels and conference organizers who participated in the survey are considered as more professional and experienced stakeholders in the conference industry. This figure supports the generalization of the study outcome although the sample size was small.

Study A. Disparity of Attributes Between CO and HM

Study A deals with the question "Are there differences in the perceptions of the relative priorities of the attributes of hotels as venues for conferences between CO and HM?"

A total of 55 attributes were included on the list the respondents were asked to rate. The attributes included ones on the budget (5), conference room (11), other conference facilities (11), geography and location (6), general facilities of the hotel (10), restaurant and bar (8), and staff (4). The respondents were asked to rate the attributes on a scale of 1 to 4 in terms of the importance when selecting a hotel as a conference venue. The significance of each hotel attribute in terms of its ability to serve the particular needs of meetings

was reflected in the rating given to each attribute.

The mean ratings of importance given to each attribute, in addition to the standard deviations from the means, were calculated for both CO and HM samples. This indicated the level of importance each sample placed on each attribute and a comparison between these levels of importance to be made. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to test whether the differences between the mean ratings given to each attribute by each sample were significant. The calculation of the mean ratings presupposed that the gaps between the four points on the scale were of equal size; in other words, the specific weight of importance added as one moved from one point to the next was equal. The "Descriptive Statistics" and "Compare means" from the SPSS were calculated to measure the degree of association between the rankings given by the two samples. The Z test of statistical significance of the differences between the means of the two sample groups was used to show whether the differences between mean ratings were statistically significant.

Study B. Problems of Hotels as Conference Venues

The common operational problems of hotels as successful conference venues were also identified by CO and HM. This resulted from one question, differently worded for each sample, which asked the respondents to report the five most commonly found operational problems according to their experience with conferences. The question to the CO was, "What are the five most commonly found faults in hotels as conference venues?" and to the HM, "What are the five most common complaints received from conference organizers and participants?" Both sets of respondents were asked to list the "faults and complaints" in rank order of importance.

A stamped, addressed envelope and a covering letter identical for both groups accompanied the questionnaires. To enhance the response rate, the comparative purpose of the study was highlighted with an assurance that participants would be sent a report of the findings. This, in combination with a simply laid out and easy-to-complete questionnaire, resulted in the arguably high response rates obtained.

Results

Study A

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of the hotel attributes in rank order as perceived by CO.

To summarize the results in Table 2, the CO valued the following attributes relatively highly:

- Shopping facilities in-house (ranked 7th by the CO and 54th by the HM)
- Hotel located within three miles of a major airport (2nd by the CO and 44th by the HM)
- On premises medical facilities (9th by the CO and 51st by the HM)
- Good parking facilities (3rd by the CO and 34th by the HM)
- Good rail service (5th by the CO and 33rd by the HM).

In comparison, the rankings of the attributes according to HM are shown in Table 3.

The HM valued more highly the following attributes:

- Coffee shop open 24 hours (ranked 7th by the HM and 52nd by the CO)
- Bars/lounges for the exclusive use of delegates (3rd by the HM and 42nd by the CO)
- Availability of restaurants nearby (4th by the HM and 36th by the CO)
- Availability of nightlife entertainment in-house (10th by the HM and 38th by the CO)
- Availability of secretarial staff (2nd by the HM and 24th by the CO).

Among the attributes 16 showed significant difference between their ratings as per the Z test. There were six attributes that were rated by CO higher by a larger than 0.5 mean rating score. They were "Good parking facilities," "On premises medical facilities," "Shopping facilities in-house," "Good rail service," "Good road links," and "Hotel situated within three miles of a major airport." On the other hand, the HM selected nine attributes that showed a higher preference by more than 0.6 mean rating score. They were "Purpose-built conference room," "Cleanliness of hotel," "No other function held at the hotel at the same time," "Availability of nightlife entertainment in-house," "Availability of restaurants nearby," "Bars/lounges for the use of delegates exclusively,"

Table 2

Mean Ratings by Conference Organizers in Rank Order

Attribute	Mean	SD
Good road links	3.60	0.74
Hotel situated within 3 miles of a major airport	3.46	0.51
Good parking facilities	3.46	0.83
Good sound insulation	3.46	0.72
Good rail service	3.33	0.77
Translating facilities	3.20	0.77
Shopping facilities in-house	3.20	0.77
Availability of basic audio-visual equipment	3.20	0.67
On-premises medical facilities	3.20	0.67
Good acoustics in conference room	3.20	0.56
Competitive room rates	3.20	0.74
Conference room with theater-style slope	3.13	0.79
Experienced conference manager	3.06	0.79
Availability of syndicate rooms	3.06	0.79
Availability of adjoining break-out rooms	3.06	0.70
Discount policy on room rates	3.06	0.70
Catering, conference room, etc., included in price	3.06	0.84
Availability of computers for use if required	3.00	0.79
Availability of nightlife entertainment nearby	2.93	0.70
Town/city center nearby	2.93	0.79
Availability of modern facilities	2.93	0.74
Availability of staff speaking all major languages	2.86	0.74
Availability of exhibition space	2.86	0.67
Availability of secretarial staff	2.80	1.14
Standard of carpeting/decoration & furniture	2.80	0.67
Sports and recreation facilities	2.80	1.09
Shopping facilities nearby	2.73	0.79
Security	2.73	0.88
Purpose-built conference room	2.73	0.88
Air-conditioned or heated conference room	2.73	0.96
Discount policy on catering rates	2.73	0.72
Availability of accommodation en-suite	2.66	0.97
"State-of-the-art" communication facilities	2.66	1.05
Hotel able to accommodate all delegates in-house	2.60	0.63
High quality of food	2.60	0.63
Availability of restaurant nearby	2.60	0.63
Conference room bigger than actually needed	2.60	1.06
Availability of nightlife entertainment in-house	2.46	0.99
Hotel experienced and specialized in conferences	2.46	0.83
Helpful staff	2.46	0.99
Complete blackout attainable in conference room	2.46	1.12
Bars/lounges for the exclusive use of delegates	2.40	1.05
Comfortable seating in conference room	2.40	1.05
Efficient check-in/check-out procedures	2.40	0.97
Previous satisfactory experience with hotel	2.33	1.03

(continued)

Table 2
Continued

Attribute	Mean	SD
Flexible menus	2.26	0.88
No other function held at the hotel at the same time	2.26	1.16
Hotel belongs to a chain	2.26	0.86
Competitive catering rates	2.20	0.96
Dining room for the exclusive use of delegates	2.06	0.96
Cleanliness of hotel	2.06	0.84
Coffee shop open 24 hours	2.00	0.84
Countryside location	2.00	0.79
Facilities for handicapped people	1.93	0.74
Natural daylight in conference room	1.86	0.00

“Coffee shop open 24 hours,” “Dining room for the use of delegates exclusively,” and “Flexible menu.”

All six attributes highly preferred by CO were from the “General facilities of hotel” and “Geography and location” categories. With the exception of “Purpose-built conference room,” eight out of the nine attributes valued by HM belonged to the “General facilities of hotel” and the “Restaurant & bar” categories. It is noteworthy that only 33% of CO would prefer to select a hotel with a coffee shop open for 24 hours, opposed to a significantly higher percentage (73%) of HM. Only 47% of CO would expect a hotel with bars and lounges used exclusively for delegates, compared to 89% of HM. Forty percent of CO would prefer a chain hotel to an independent one, compared with 63% of HM. As far as price is concerned, all five attributes in the “Budget” category were emphasized by CO and rated as “Fairly important” or “Extremely important” by 71%, while “Comparative catering rates” was rated as high as 93%. The “Discount policy on room rates” and “Catering, conference room, etc., included in price” were given either a grade 3 or 4 by 80% of CO. This supports the notion that “price is never unimportant.” None of the CO rated “Catering, conference room etc. included in price,” “Comparative room rates” or “Discount policy on room rates” as “Not important at all.”

Attributes rated as “Extremely important” are those that are considered to be crucial in the decision-making process when selecting a venue.

Table 3
Mean Ratings by Hotel Managers in Rank Order

Attribute	Mean	SD
Availability of staff speaking all major languages	3.52	0.69
Availability of secretarial staff	3.42	0.69
Bars/lounges for the exclusive use of delegates	3.42	0.69
Availability of restaurant nearby	3.42	0.76
Purpose-built conference room	3.36	0.76
Security	3.31	0.82
Coffee shop open 24 hours	3.26	0.80
Good sound insulation	3.26	0.65
Experienced conference manager	3.21	0.85
Availability of nightlife entertainment in-house	3.10	0.80
Availability of adjoining break-out rooms	3.10	0.80
Discount policy on room rates	3.10	0.65
No other function held at hotel at the same time	3.05	0.91
Conference room with theater-style slope	3.05	0.70
Competitive room rates	3.05	0.70
Good road links	3.00	0.94
Flexible menus	3.00	0.81
Hotel can accommodate all delegates in-house	3.00	1.00
Cleanliness of hotel	3.00	0.74
Helpful staff	2.94	0.70
High-quality of food	2.89	0.80
Hotel experienced/specialized in conferences	2.89	0.80
Translating facilities	2.89	0.80
Availability of computers for use if required	2.89	0.80
Availability of basic audio-visual equipment	2.89	0.93
Good acoustics in conference room	2.89	0.80
Catering, conference room, etc., included in price	2.89	0.93
Dining room for the exclusive use of delegates	2.84	1.11
Availability of nightlife entertainment nearby	2.84	0.89
Efficient check-in/check-out procedures	2.84	0.68
Natural day-light in conference room	2.78	0.91
Availability of accommodation en-suite	2.78	0.97
Good rail service	2.78	0.97
Good parking facilities	2.78	0.97
Availability of syndicate rooms	2.78	0.97
Availability of modern facilities	2.73	0.65
Hotel belongs to a chain	2.68	0.88
Air-conditioned or heated conference room	2.68	0.94
Competitive catering rates	2.68	0.94
Standard of carpeting/decoration and furniture	2.63	0.83
Discount policy on catering rates	2.63	0.89
Previous satisfactory experience with hotel	2.57	1.12
Availability of exhibition space	2.57	1.12
Hotel situated within 3 miles of a major airport	2.57	1.12
Shopping facilities nearby	2.52	1.07

(continued)

Table 3
Continued

Attribute	Mean	SD
“State-of-the-art” communication facilities	2.47	1.02
Sports and recreation facilities	2.47	1.07
Conference room bigger than actually needed	2.47	0.96
Complete blackout in conference room	0.47	1.02
Town/city center nearby	2.42	0.90
On premises medical facilities	2.42	1.12
Facilities for handicapped people	2.42	1.12
Comfortable seating in conference room	2.36	0.89
Shopping facilities in-house	2.31	1.00
Countryside location	2.15	0.95

Rated as essential by more than 67% of CO were “Good sound insulation in conference room” and “Good road links.” The “Hotel situated within three miles of a major airport” was the third most essential attribute, as indicated by almost 60%. The “Availability of staff speaking all major languages” was considered essential by 63% of HM. Fifty-eight percent considered “Availability of restaurants nearby” as an essential attribute while “Purpose-built conference room,” “Security,” and “Bars/lounges for the use of delegates” were given a grade of 4 by more than 53% of HM. The essential facilities, as indicated by more than 40% of CO, were “Availability of basic audio-visual equipment,” “Good parking facilities,” “Shopping facilities,” and “Translating facilities.”

In contrast, “Cleanliness of hotel” and “Coffee shop open 24 hours” gained a grade 1 (Not important at all) by 33% of CO, and no score from HM. Meanwhile, “On premises medical facilities” and “Shopping facilities in-house” were “Not important at all” for 23% of HM, and for none of the CO. “Facilities for handicapped people,” “Countryside location” and “Previous satisfactory experience with hotel” were poorly valued, with at least 20% of both CO and HM rating them grade 1.

Study B. Common Problems Perceived by CO and HM

Study B was concerned with the operational side of conferences in hotels and was particularly aimed at identifying common problems, as perceived by both CO and HM. The most commonly reported faults and complaints are presented in

rank order, according to the percentages of respondents who mentioned each. The most common faults with hotels as conference venues perceived by CO are:

- Staff untrained/unprofessional/inexperienced in dealing with conferences: 40%
- Lack of systemized/centralized management during the meeting: 40%
- Overcrowded parking space: 33.33%
- Low standard of audio-visual equipment: 33.33%
- Lack of staff constantly available during the meeting: 33.33%.

HM received most complaints from conference delegates about:

- Noise in conference: 52.82%
- Low standard of audio-visual equipment: 41.18%
- Low standard of service in restaurant: 41.18%
- Not enough parking facilities: 35.29%
- Lack of communication between organizer and hotel: 29.41%.

Five attributes were found to be troublesome by both groups out of the 11 commonly found faults from CO and 15 common complaints from HM. It is interesting that of the HM received complaints, at the top of their list was “Noise in conference” (52.82%), which was reported by only 13.33% of CO. Noise was recognized as being either of external origin (caused by traffic or building work nearby) or internal (coming from kitchen, maintenance work, air conditioning systems, or from inconsiderate staff working next to the conference room).

Forty percent of CO found “Staff untrained/unprofessional/inexperienced in dealing with conferences,” whereas only 17.6 % of HM received complaints for “Unprofessional/ unskilled staff.” Of the CO, 33.33% reported that they often found the “Conference room not purpose-built,” whereas only 11.75% of HM mentioned this as a common complaint. The “Lack of systemized/centralized management during the meeting,” “Lack of member of staff constantly available during the meeting,” “Check-in/check-out procedure,” and “Lack of kindness in general service” were common faults reported by at least 20% of CO, while they were not mentioned by any of the HM. Similarly, “Low standard of audio-visual equipment,” “Lack

of communication between organizer and hotel," "High room rates for delegates," "Lack of high-tech communication facilities," "Conference room too small for delegates," "No flexible menu," and "Not enough information for tourism of the site" were common complaints to the HM; however, they were only mentioned by two CO as a common fault. Twenty percent of CO reported "Lack of preparation" as a commonly found fault, while 11.76% of the HM mentioned they received similar complaints.

The most valuable finding from Study B might be that there are two factors that were reported from both CO and HM: "Crowded parking space" and "Low standard of audio-visual equipment" as common faults (CO 33% and HM 41.18% and 35.29%, respectively).

Comparison of Valued Attributes and Faults and Complaints

Most complaints/faults were found to be directly linked, the remainder indirectly, to the highly valued attributes of the CO. Problems deriving from lack of experience and specialization were reported by relatively high percentages of respondents in both groups. Unprofessional and untrained staff, inexperienced and untrained management, and a lack of understanding of the needs of meetings can be considered as such problems, although such deficiencies would not be expected in hotels experienced and specializing in conferences.

The availability of experienced conference managers to deal with CO was among the significant attributes, rated as "Fairly important" or "Extremely important" by 73.33% of CO. The availability of such personnel could significantly diminish problems of communication between the CO and the hotel. It would also eliminate complaints such as "Lack of a specific member of the management to deal with the organizer" and "Inexperienced/untrained management." The "Good parking facilities," which was given grades of 3 or 4 by a 100% of CO, was a major source of the complaints reported. More than one third of the HM reported insufficiency of parking facilities in the conference site as a common complaint. The unreliability, inadequacy, and poor working order

of audio-visual equipment were major faults/complaints. The importance of the provision of more reliable audio-visual equipment was reflected in the high values attributed to "Availability of basic audio-visual equipment" and "Availability of 'state of the art' communication facilities," which were rated as "Fairly important" or "Extremely important" by 80% of the HM and 60% of the CO.

"Purpose-built conference room" was also among the significant attributes, because it was considered "Fairly important" or "Extremely important" by 60% of CO. Non-purpose-built conference rooms were identified as a common fault by 33.33% of CO, while "Low ceiling in conference room" was a common fault for 6.67% of them—something not expected to be found in purpose-built conference rooms. The "Good sound insulation" in the conference room was also among the significant attributes identified by CO, rated as "Fairly important" or "Extremely important" by 80%. Moreover, it was one to which more importance was attributed by CO than by HM; the difference between the ratings was indicated by the Z test as being significant. Effective sound insulation could be expected to diminish problems derived from noise, which were reported as common by 52.82% of HM and by 13.33% of CO. Finally, "High quality of food," "helpful staff," and "efficient check-in/check-out procedures" were among the significant attributes identified by CO; all were rated as "Fairly important" or "Extremely important" by more than 50%, while low standard of food, uninterested/unhelpful staff, and inefficient check-in/check-out procedures were among the common faults or complaints reported.

Conclusion

The study led to the conclusion that a great degree of difference exists between the perceptions of CO and HM on important attributes listed in the questionnaires. Significant differences between the ratings existed, but only in the case of 15 out of 55 attributes. It is interesting that only one of the 10 most important attributes as seen by CO, "Good sound insulation," was perceived as one of the 10 highest valued attributes by HM. All the rest were not strongly influential attributes as seen by both CO and HM. Attributes regarding the

characteristics of the location were, surprisingly, the most highly valued. The average value of the six attributes of the "Geography and location" category was more than 70. The "Good road accessibility" was recently recognized as a major consideration in Korea; this was indicated as essential by as many as 70% of the respondents. An additional interesting point is whether there was a relationship between the attributes valued significantly higher by the conference organizers and the common operational problems, as reported by both groups. There is only one such case—"Good sound insulation in conference room" that can be related to problems caused by noise—reported as common by both CO and HM. The "Crowded parking space" and "Low standard of audio-visual equipment" mentioned by both groups were the only similarities between the faults and complaints reported.

The plan for this study was to examine the disparities between conference provision and consumer expectations by examining whether an agreement existed between the providers and the purchasers concerning the perceptions of the valued attributes of the product. However, the main conclusion drawn is that this disparity cannot be attributed to a disagreement between these perceptions. The study has indicated a strong correlation between the common operational problems and the hotel attributes highly valued by CO. As far as the perceptions of the CO were concerned, the findings can be of great value to hotel management for the development of marketing strategies. These findings reveal the great value placed on the conference rooms themselves. The facilities of the rooms were highly rated attributes. Furthermore, the great significance attributed to purpose-built conference rooms as well as a considerable proportion of the problems reported resulting from non-purposefully designed rooms, can be interpreted as indicating a preference for rooms purposely built rather than those converted or multipurpose.

Highly valued service-oriented attributes were defined by standards rather than range of services. In particular, great significance was placed on the quality of the food, the availability of secretarial staff, and staff speaking all the major languages. As far as pricing was concerned, the competitiveness of room rates was the main consideration.

More than 90% of the conference organizers indicated they would prefer hotels offering competitive room rates. The availability and newness of the facilities, while not reported as notably essential, seem to be attributes that play an important role in selection. It was indicated as unimportant by less than 15% of the respondents. For the chain hotels, the fact that they belong to a group, and also the well-advertised standardized service they claim to offer, did not seem to differentiate them to any major extent from the independents in an organizer's decision to select a venue—only 40% preferred chain hotels.

Limitations and Further Research

This research depended heavily on quantitative data without an investigation using a qualitative analysis approach. The level of significance of single attributes may change with subjective factors. Further research could develop this type of study by examining CO's purchasing decision factors, implementing more diverse data collection methodologies, conducting a comparative survey with cases from other Asian countries, or devising a similar study in a specific region inside Korea.

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