

Impact of Trade Show Marketing Activities on Customer Engagement : A B2B Perspective

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Abstract

Purpose : This study aimed to create and test a methodology to investigate the impact that trade show organizers' recurring pre-show, at-show, and post-show marketing activities have on increasing exhibitor engagement at the show. Trade show planners need to create well-planned events with well-considered marketing strategies to increase attendance if they want to stand out in a competitive industry.

Design/Methodology/Approach : The study examined a range of three-phase trade show marketing initiatives, including pre-show, at-show, and post-show, that trade show organizers regularly carry out to increase exhibitor participation. This study tested the customer engagement model empirically and validated a 46-item scale that included 10 variables. The model of trade show marketing activities with customer involvement was tested in this study using structural equation modeling and quantitative research techniques. Data from 349 exhibitors at multi-sector trade exhibitions was gathered. The model of trade show marketing activities on exhibitor engagement was tested using SEM as a quantitative research tool, drawing on trade show literature. This goal was accomplished with the use of quantitative surveys that apply correlation and SEM analysis between marketing efforts and customer participation in trade fairs, utilizing the questionnaire method as a data-gathering instrument. Data from 349 exhibitors at multi-sector trade exhibitions was gathered.

Findings : The results demonstrated how trade shows were essentially used as a channel for marketing communications to raise customer involvement. Thus, the organizer needs to comprehend what exhibitors deem successful in a trade show and how trade show marketing initiatives might boost exhibitor engagement. The success of a trade show is greatly impacted by the exhibitors' involvement and active participation; thus, organizers must properly engage them.

Practical Implications : Practitioners could leverage the insights by developing comprehensive marketing plans that encompass pre-show promotion, engaging activities during the event, and follow-up initiatives post-show. Organizations may enhance trade show performance metrics and optimize client interaction by implementing a comprehensive trade show marketing strategy.

Originality/Value : The paucity of research and the literature's lack of attention on trade show organizers rather than exhibitors account for the paper's novel contribution. The research closed this knowledge gap by understanding the dynamic influence of the three stages of marketing activities on different engagement qualities.

Keywords : marketing activities, motivations, trade shows, marketing communication, customer engagement, business-to-business (B2B)

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Trade shows (TSs) offer businesses a financially beneficial way to interact with customers and prospective customers, build relationships with different stakeholders, and introduce new products (Cortez

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et al., 2022). In 2022, 280 trade shows included 142,000 exhibitors and over seven million attendees. Trade exhibits are an effective marketing strategy that puts buyers and sellers in direct contact, allowing them to get to know one another and create profitable relationships with both present and future customers (Blythe, 2002). The global exhibition market was estimated by UFI (2024) to be worth 13.87 billion USD, and by 2026, it is expected to reach a valuation of approximately 36.31 billion USD. Trade exhibitions may communicate and provide value to their exhibitors and attendees with the use of efficient communication. Trade show managers may enhance exhibitor and visitor engagement and retention by efficiently engaging with their consumer base. Consequently, the organizer needs to comprehend what exhibitors deem successful in a trade show and how the three stages of marketing initiatives can effectively entice exhibitors to participate in a trade show.

Trade fairs are considered as business platforms, where trade show organizers offer interaction spaces and shared activities providing a desirable environment exhibiting visually powerful areas. They set exhibit layouts for exhibitors' and define attendees' paths, cultivating engaging experiences and interactions among different sets of stakeholders (Whitfield & Webber, 2011). Trade shows are a mix of advertising and personal selling (Gopalakrishna et al., 1995). Trade shows are used by 85% of decision-makers for informational and buying-related purposes (AUMA, 2022). Marketing initiatives are one of the key elements that determine a business's success. With the help of marketing campaigns, organizers can carry out market research to gain a better understanding of both present and potential exhibitors and attendees, as well as to enhance their market share and profitability.

The scholarly literature in this field is limited, mostly focusing on trade show organizers who are significant players in the exhibition sector, despite the fact that trade shows are scheduled market events and a crucial part of the industrial marketing communication mix. An organizer needs to draw in a sizable number of exhibitors in a competitive market in order to make a profit. However, creating a successful event that benefits exhibitors is primarily dependent on the marketing campaigns designed to draw them.

The research objective is to empirically test the impact of marketing activities undertaken by trade show organizers on exhibitor engagement. Previous studies include creating interest and product awareness (Gopalakrishna et al., 1995), an advantage to exhibitors (Lin, 2016); selling tactics (Chonko et al., 1994), budgeting of trade shows (Lilien, 1983), trade show objectives (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984), trade show effectiveness (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984; Dekimpe et al., 1997; Gottlieb et al., 2011; O'Hara, 1993), communication to prospective attendees through brochures, special services and packages, display formats, and descriptive exhibits (Cavanaugh, 1976; Kerin & Cron, 1987). The primary cause of a trade show's demise is its incapacity to provide a means for exhibitors to accomplish their objectives. Industry insiders advise exhibitors to have various goals; therefore, it is important to know how to interact with them in order to have a successful trade fair. The trade exhibitions in India and the marketing strategies used by the organizers before, during, and after the show, as well as the engagement elements, are not covered in the literature that currently exists. This gap is filled by the study's thorough quantitative investigation of the marketing strategies used by the organizers with consumer interaction at various trade show stages.

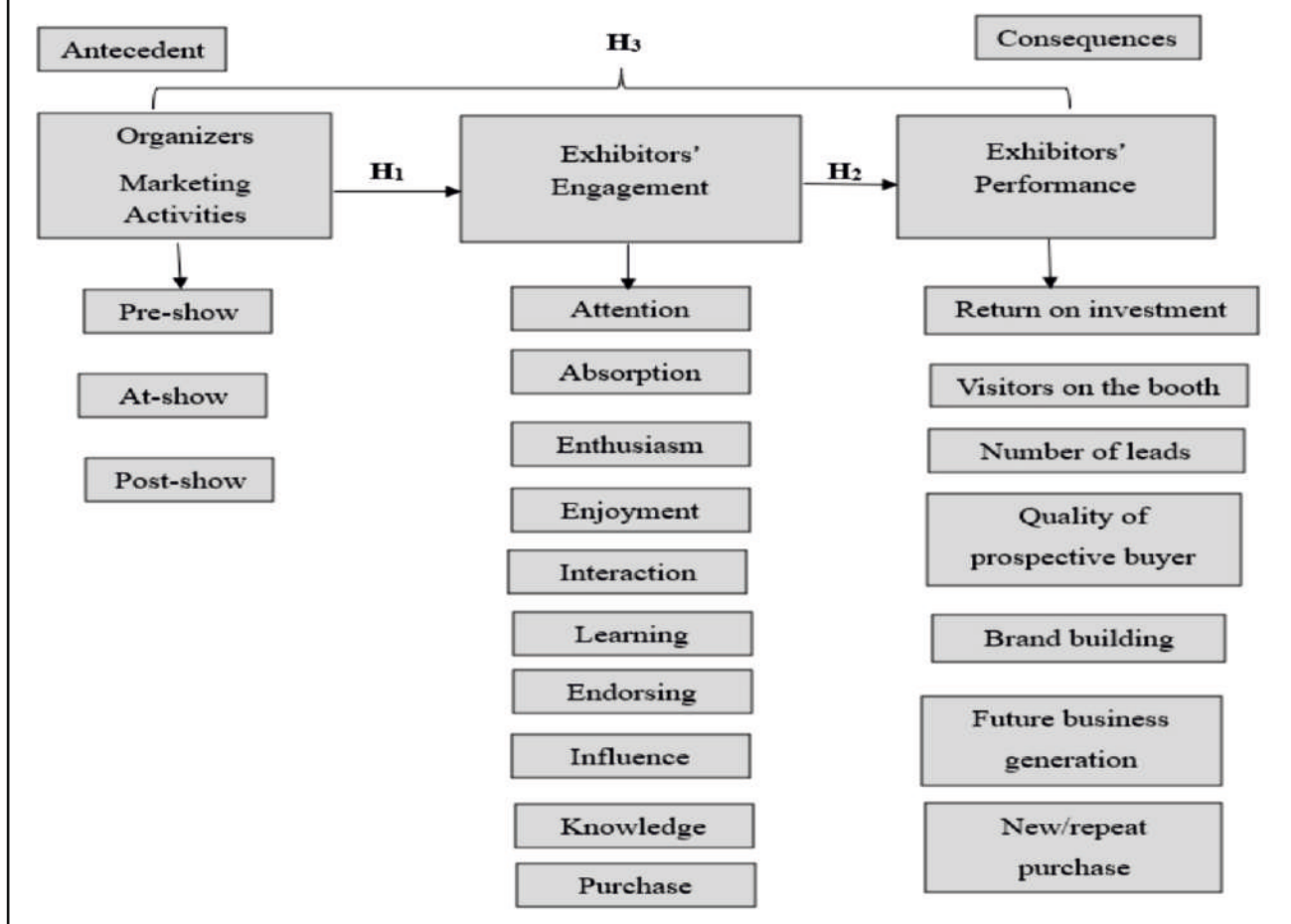
The research paper presents a model of marketing activities, categorically divided into pre-show, at-show, and post-show, undertaken by organizers and their incorporation into the marketing campaign to understand the effect on exhibitors' engagement. An examination of the literature on B2B trading reveals that just 4% of the papers addressed the organizers' point of view (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017). Therefore, for our investigation, we have embraced an explanatory viewpoint from the organizer's point of view. This study offers strategies for enhancing exhibitors' engagement that organizers should implement. Thus, in order to ensure a good trade show performance, trade show organizers must create an efficient marketing plan to increase sales and revenue. A thorough understanding of how organizers successfully engage exhibitors through their marketing efforts is lacking in the current body of literature. To fill this knowledge gap, this study clarifies the relationship between

exhibitor participation and the marketing tactics used by the organizers. Trade exhibitions are, therefore, an ideal environment for researching client interaction.

Literature Review and Conceptual Development

According to Kirchgeorg et al. (2010), trade fairs are conventionally defined as market events of a specific duration, held at regular intervals, at which a large number of companies present the main product range of one or more industry sectors. Trade exhibits are a major business gathering. International trade exhibitions bring in billions of dollars annually. According to Smith et al. (2003), US companies allocate between 10% and 15% of their promotional budget to trade show promotion. The proportion increases for UK firms, where businesses spend twice their market communication budgets on trade shows (Geigenmüller & Bettis-Outland, 2012). According to Herbig et al. (1998), trade shows are regarded as the premier industrial marketing events. An integrated marketing communication-based live engagement is made possible by the multipurpose platform of trade exhibitions. In this context, trade shows facilitate direct and tailored communication between a business and its target market, resulting in a unique and unforgettable experience. Many industrial companies rely heavily on trade exhibits as part of their promotional strategy (Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992). In a B2B setting, trade shows offer opportunities for many buyers and sellers, with purposeful, face-to-face contact, creating a dynamic

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Marketing Activities' Impact on Customer Engagement at Trade Shows



platform for marketing communications (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 2012). Trade exhibits offer a plethora of benefits to industry participants, including in-person interactions, showcasing new product developments, business intelligence, technical advancements, networking with prospective clients and existing ones, and occasionally turning leads into sales (Smith et al., 2004).

Trade exhibitions emphasize the relationship between participating enterprises (exhibitors) and trade organizers in a B2B setting. The reputation of the organizer, quality of the location, guests, and other exhibitors at the show, together with maintenance and exhibition setup, product demos, and removal, are the primary factors that an exhibitor considers. Therefore, it becomes essential for an exhibitor to think about the marketing plan and trade show quality. By using a variety of promotional tactics (such as attending high-quality trade shows), exhibitors are able to more effectively distribute their limited marketing budget (Yuksel & Voola, 2010).

Trade Shows and Customer Engagement

Customer engagement in the B2B context encompasses the interactions, experiences, and connections between organizations that transcend transactional relationships. It entails fostering meaningful and collaborative interactions throughout the customer expedition starting from the first phase of awareness and understanding to the post-purchase support along with advocacy phases. Unlike B2C transactions, where emotional appeals and impulse decisions often play a role, B2B engagements are deeply rooted in rationality, research, and a thorough evaluation of value propositions (Cortez et al., 2022).

Trade shows form a significant aspect of the business marketing process (Rinallo et al., 2010). Large-scale commercial settings offered by trade shows encourage interaction with customers. TFs are marketing platforms fostering face-to-face interaction and developing business networks (Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995; Sarmiento & Simoes, 2019). Trade shows extend exhibitors with opportunities to introduce and acquire new products, find suppliers, and build awareness. The most significant concern of trade show organizers is to efficiently and effectively strengthen the key factors to enhance engagement. For trade show organizers, exhibitors' plans to return become important (Gopalakrishna et al., 2019). Trade exhibitions aim to foster relationships, increase sales, and enable information sharing simultaneously (Blythe, 2002; Ling-Yee, 2006). Customer engagement is a dynamic process that develops over a period as interactions occur (Nandi & Singh, 2021). Attendee exposure from pre-show events encourages them to consider the show before it happens. Real actions improve viewers' engagement and reinforce their impressions of the program. Post-show activities influence attendees' actions through recommendations, purchases, and attending future shows (Gopalakrishna et al., 2019; Tanwar et al., 2021). B2B firms can positively reinforce customer engagement by analyzing its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects for maximizing customer equity (Youssef et al., 2018). Trade shows cultivate the environment for engagement by understanding attendees' needs by providing a relevant physical setting, quality customer-employee interactions, and customer-focused service procedures (Geigenmüller & Bettis-Outland, 2012). Consumers having a positive brand experience at trade shows helps firms to effectively contest for attention with competitive firms' products and services and raise customer engagement levels, generating a positive effect on businesses (Kennett-Hensel et al., 2019).

Pre-show Activities and Customer Engagement

Pre-show marketing activities range from posing information through fax, telephone, or mail messages to prospective attendees, paid advertisements, and media reports in trade magazines. Such activities are also recognized as interest-generating methods involving product demonstrations, samples, takeaways, etc., seeking interested visitors' attention and exploring for more information (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995). This anticipation

can translate into higher engagement during the event itself (Yadav, 2017). The goals of pre-show promotion are to directly engage with qualifying prospects during the exhibition and to target and invite them to the booth. Both invitation (getting people to the booth) and qualifying (finding the proper potential customers by making contact) are essential components of a successful pre-show strategy.

Many businesses advertise themselves well in advance of participating in a trade show where they are exhibiting. Businesses communicate with potential clients through direct mail and phone calls, with the goal of inviting them to visit their exhibit. The number of attendees increases with an increase in booth size, given the size of the prospective audience. Pre-show campaigns are critical for a trade show to be successful (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984). It is imperative to contact prospective customers before the show. For example, teaser emails and formal invitations could be devised to attract customers to the booth.

Pre-show campaigns like advertisements, word of mouth, activity, direct mail, and post-show visits have been identified as the top communication mediums for effectively reaching out before the show (CEIR, 2006). Other activities involve e-mail marketing, premiums, giveaways, samples, online and print advertising, and direct mail for achieving objectives (CEIR, 2009; Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 2012).

The purpose of the pre-show promotional activity is to be on the list of attendees, as 76% of them come to visit a show with an agenda as to which booths to visit. Sales-related performance and image-building are influenced by pre-show advertising. Campaigns run before the show convey information, draw people in, and win them over. Such campaigns help exhibitors collect information about existing or prospective customers strengthening their brand image (image-building) and converting booth attendees into sales leads (sales-related performance) (Lee & Kim, 2008). By focusing on creating awareness, building relationships, providing value, and tailoring messaging, businesses can leverage pre-show marketing to drive excitement and engagement for their events. Thus, the paper proposes the following hypothesis :

✎ **H₁ :** Pre-show marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.

At-show Activities and Customer Engagement

A plethora of products are exhibited by a firm at the trade show. Firms participate in trade shows with different sets of expectations and benefits, some of which are the promotion of corporate image, generation of leads, and/or informal contact with existing customers and several other competitive aspects (Gopalakrishna et al., 1995). The sales team's job in the fast-paced, cutthroat world of trade fairs is to recruit as many participants as possible, qualify them as leads, and complete the responsibilities effectively and efficiently. The most important aspects of the exhibit activities are luring attendees to the booth, having well-trained staff, and having a large enough booth (Seringhaus & Rosson, 1998).

Successful at-show methods for increasing traffic include outdoor advertising, booth personnel training, acquiring literature at the booth, publicity campaigns, exhibit design, product demonstration, size of the exhibit, broadcast, print, and specialized media, and tie-in programs. Attention-getting promotions must be personalized, matching the exhibit objectives with marketing objectives (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984). An increase in the number of booth personnel widens with an increase in the amount of selling efforts of booth personnel leading to an increased lead (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995).

A booth should be placed close to the entrance or exit than in the center of the floor. An alternative viewpoint is that of positioning yourself close to a well-known booth, large brand, or rival booth. The decision regarding booth size depends on the exhibiting firm's objectives. Booth size is the space on the floor rented by a firm in their overall budget. Decisions about booth type involve decisions regarding island (aisles offering dimensionality), standard (island facing), corner (bordered by aisles), and peninsula (aisles on three sides). An open or closed design, or a combination of both, depending on the goal of the exhibiting company and the audience's profile, is used to draw

people to the booth. Other techniques include products to be shown and events to be scheduled. Activities like video monitors, product demos, theatres, individual meetings, or dining space; lighting, color, signages, carpets, and graphics impact the decisions on booth layout and booth design, respectively. Staffing decisions involve activities about the number and training of booth staff, having specialized technical skills and product knowledge for an effective booth result. These measures involve gimmicks or product demos, offering free keychains and pens, signing a celebrity, or hosting a magic show (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995). Thus, the paper proposes the following hypothesis :

↳ **H₂** : At the show, marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.

Post-show Activities and Customer Engagement

Post-show activities using an effective follow-up is a strong indicator of the overall success of many firms. Direct marketing or sales visits are the ways to follow up, turning prospective leads into sales, for efficiently engaging in tracking prospective customers (Gopalakrishna et al., 1995). For a successful exhibit, it is crucial to have a follow-up program. For example, establishing trade show objectives, follow-up mail campaigns, and allowing for more literature by exhibitors to respective customers (Bellizzi & Lipps, 1984). One efficient way to measure success indicators that align with the goals of the exhibitors is to gather important information throughout the event through post-show questionnaires (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 2012). Post-show activities affect the entire show for a longer time by deepening bonds with existing and prospective visitors visiting the booths. Follow-up activities include personal thank you and e-mail notes, informing attendees about attending trade shows through customized letters, media coverage, show-related articles, special trade show offers, converting leads into actual sales, and so on (Lee & Kim, 2008; Siji, 2021). Post-show activities influence attendees' actions in the form of participation in future shows, purchases, and recommendations reinforcing engagement. Thus, the paper proposes the following hypothesis :

↳ **H₃** : Post-show marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.

Empirical Setting

Sample and Data Collection Method

To validate our research methodology, quantitative research methods using a questionnaire method were used as a data collection tool. This objective is fulfilled with the help of applying correlation and SEM analysis between the marketing activities with customer engagement in trade shows. The data were collected from seven industries, namely industrial (engineering/machinery/machine tools), chemicals/plastics/packaging/printing, information technology/security, media/entertainment, textiles/apparel/garments/accessories, defense/security, and travel and tourism within a span of one year (2020–2021). The details of the trade shows and exhibitions were collected from the websites of the different organizers and trade shows. The data were obtained through a self-governed questionnaire of exhibitors involved in trade exhibitions for various sectoral trade shows from the Delhi/NCR region. The study used a non-probability technique of sampling, i.e., snowball sampling to classify several exhibitors for the research. The list was made according to the accessibility of exhibitors and who are known. The questionnaire was focused on variables identified in the literature. Each dimension was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (7 – *most unimportant* ; 6 – *unimportant* ; 5 – *somewhat unimportant* ; 4 – *neutral* ; 3 – *somewhat important* ; 2 – *important*; and 1 – *most important*). Marketing activities and customer engagement dimensions were derived from widely accepted scales (Dessart et al., 2016; Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995; Harrigan et al., 2017; Kumar &

Pansari, 2016; So et al., 2014). The opinions of experts from the academic and industry sectors were considered while improving the questionnaire's validity and assisting in the correction of any potential shortcomings. Responses from exhibitors at various trade events were gathered with the use of survey devices.

Sample Demographics

The sample demographic of the respondents is reported in Table 1. Out of 349 responses for the survey, the sample demographics had 285 males and 74 females. Most of the selected respondents, i.e., 187 respondents, came under 31–45 years of age. Fifty-seven years was the maximum age of the respondents taken for the survey.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Demographics	Sub-categories	Frequency (%)	
Gender	Male	285	81.6 %
	Female	74	21.2 %
Age Group	Less than 30 years	66	18.9 %
	31 – 45 years	187	53.6 %
	Above 45 years	96	27.5 %
Experience	Less than 10 years	115	33.0 %
	10 – 20 years	171	49.0 %
	Above 30 years	63	18.1 %
Industry	Industrial (Engineering/Machinery/Machine Tools)	49	14.0 %
	Chemicals/Plastics/Packaging/Printing	56	16.0 %
	Information Technology/Information Security	47	13.4 %
	Media / Entertainment	44	12.6 %
	Textiles/Apparel/Garments/Accessories	54	15.5 %
	Defense/Security	51	14.7 %
	Travel and Tourism	48	13.8 %

Measurement Model

In this study, pre-show, at-show, and post-show marketing activities undertaken by organizers for exhibitors are studied through nine, ten, and nine statements, respectively, in the questionnaire. In the study, customer engagement is a zero-order construct and is measured with the help of 10 latent constructs. Customer engagement dimensions are divided into 10 categories, namely absorption, attention, endorsing, enjoyment, enthusiasm, influence, interaction, knowledge, learning, and purchase (Dessart et al., 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; So et al., 2014). The 46 statements of customer engagement construct measure the different dimensions of customer engagement. The selected exhibitors were requested to provide their responses against the statements.

Data Analysis and Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) has been applied as a data analysis method to estimate and confirm the model of the study using AMOS software. The study describes the relationship of marketing activities with customer engagement in trade shows. The paper uses correlation analysis and SEM between marketing activities with

customer engagement in trade shows. This section discusses the interpretation of the statistical analysis used in the study.

Marketing Activities

Marketing activities, one of the key determinants of a company's success, help to boost the sales and performance of trade shows and improve its brand (Sridhar et al., 2015). With the help of effective communication, trade shows can communicate and deliver value to their exhibitors and visitors. By effectively reaching out to their customers, trade show organizers can increase the exhibitor's and visitor's attention and retention. Marketing activities in trade shows help to identify new customers by studying their needs and providing solutions in the form of offering new products, services, and experiences (Ling-Yee, 2006). Building a good customer experience and offering the right products and services can go a long way in determining the success of a company's marketing campaign (Shimpi, 2018). Trade show organizers, therefore, need to develop an effective marketing strategy by employing a three-phase framework, pre-show, at-the-show, and post-show, to enhance their sales and revenue. The pre-show phase uses exhibitor's and visitor's marketing, the at-show stage uses event marketing activities, and the post-show phase uses follow-up strategies to nurture relationships with the connected audience (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 2012).

Customer Engagement

Engagement is defined as “a customer's motivationally driven, volitional investment of focal operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge and skills) into [trade show] interactions in service systems” (Hollebeek et al., 2016). This definition improves the previous one, that points to CE as “a dynamic, iterative process” and is “context and stakeholder-specific” (Brodie et al., 2011). Customer engagement refers to various activities that the customer shares with the firm, whether initiated by the firm or the customer. Firms realize the need to engage customers is paramount for them to grow into successful and sustainable businesses influencing firm performance (Dessart et al., 2016; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). It is imperative to understand the exhibitor's motivations for attending the trade show, which is influential in enhancing customer engagement. Customer engagement influences various marketing communication activities that have an impact on the hearts and minds of consumers in a way that steers an increase in the sales, market value, and market share of companies and can influence the trade show performance. The consumer engagement activities are divided into 10 categories, namely absorption, attention, endorsing, enjoyment, enthusiasm, influence, interaction, knowledge, learning, and purchase (Harrigan et al., 2017; So et al., 2014).

Reliability and Validity Analysis

The internal consistency reliability of different factors indicating the marketing activities done by the organizers and exhibitors before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and post-shows, along with the customer engagement, ensures the presence of consistency in the responses. The internal consistency reliability for each included factor in the study is estimated with Cronbach's alpha, which is expected to be greater than 0.7 for each included factor. Table 2 represents the calculated value of Cronbach's alpha for different included factors in the study, i.e., customer engagement (0.945), post-show activities (0.905), pre-show activities (0.927), and at-show activities (0.930). Thus, the results of reliability analysis ensure the presence of consistency reliability in the responses received from the exhibitors who participated in different trade shows.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

	Construct Name	Construct Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>ATM10</i>	At-Show Marketing	0.685	0.931	0.573	0.930
<i>ATM1</i>	Activities	0.734			
<i>ATM2</i>		0.747			
<i>ATM3</i>		0.736			
<i>ATM4</i>		0.801			
<i>ATM5</i>		0.704			
<i>ATM6</i>		0.81			
<i>ATM7</i>		0.787			
<i>ATM8</i>		0.767			
<i>ATM9</i>		0.787			
Absorption	Customer Engagement	0.862	0.945	0.635	0.945
Attention		0.763			
Endorsing		0.775			
Enjoyment		0.704			
Enthusiasm		0.849			
Influence		0.76			
Interaction		0.789			
Knowledge		0.86			
Learning		0.749			
Purchase		0.843			
<i>POS1</i>	Post-Show Marketing	0.701	0.904	0.543	0.905
<i>POS2</i>	Activities	0.71			
<i>POS3</i>		0.681			
<i>POS4</i>		0.659			
<i>POS5</i>		0.732			
<i>POS6</i>		0.821			
<i>POS7</i>		0.775			
<i>POS8</i>		0.802			
<i>PRE1</i>	Pre-Show Marketing	0.863	0.927	0.586	0.927
<i>PRE2</i>	Activities	0.777			
<i>PRE3</i>		0.716			
<i>PRE4</i>		0.77			
<i>PRE5</i>		0.77			
<i>PRE6</i>		0.786			
<i>PRE7</i>		0.668			
<i>PRE8</i>		0.674			
<i>PRE9</i>		0.841			

Construct Validity

The construct validity of the measurement scale representing the different dimensions of marketing activities done by the organizers before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and after the shows, along with the customer engagement, is analyzed through the CFA method. Construct validity requires two types of validity, i.e., convergent validity and discriminant validity. The convergent validity of the included scale examines the correlation between the different items of the marketing activities done by the organizers before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and after the shows, along with the customer engagement expected to be significant. Convergent validity also represents whether the items in the scale have a significant correlation among themselves as well as with constructs.

The discriminant validity of the scale tested whether the different constructs were perceived differently by the respondents or not. The convergent validity of the scale is tested using construct loadings (also known as outer loadings), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), where the construct loading of each item is greater than 0.7, the CR of each factor is greater than 0.7, and AVE of each factor required to be greater than 0.5. The discriminant validity of included factors in the scale is examined with the help of the Fornell–Larcker criteria and HTMT ratio. The resulting reliability and validity analysis of the scale represents the marketing activities done by the organizers and exhibitors before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and post-shows, along with the customer engagement, which is reported in Table 2 and the Appendix.

Convergent Validity

The convergent validity of the measurement scale representing the different dimensions of marketing activities done by the organizers before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and post-shows, along with the customer engagement, is evaluated with the help of construct loadings of the items, CR of the factors, and the AVE of the included factors. The results report that construct loadings of all the items are found to be greater than 0.7, the CR of each factor is found to be greater than 0.7, customer engagement (0.945), post-show marketing activities (0.904), at-show marketing activities (0.931), and pre-show marketing activities (0.927). Thus, it can be concluded that all the required conditions of convergent validity are fulfilled and are reported in Table 3.

Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity of the measurement scale representing the different dimensions of marketing activities done by the organizers before the trade shows, during the trade shows, and after the shows, along with the customer engagement, is measured with the help of Fornell–Larcker criteria, where the square root of AVE is compared with the correlation of each factor. To fulfill the conditions of discriminant validity, the AVE of each

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	At-Show Marketing Activities	Customer Engagement	Post-Show Marketing Activities	Pre-Show Marketing Activities
At-show marketing activities	0.757			
Customer engagement	0.771	0.797		
Post-show marketing activities	0.753	0.726	0.737	
Pre-show marketing activities	0.709	0.669	0.643	0.765

Table 4. Statistical Fitness

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.038	0.06
d_ULS	1.438	3.576
d_G	1.087	1.129
Chi-square	1797.148	1866.757
NFI	0.854	0.849

factor should be greater than its correlation estimate with other factors. The results report that the conditions of, i.e., Fornell–Larcker criteria, are fulfilled, thereby ensuring the presence of discriminant validity. The statistical fitness of the measurement model is shown in Table 4.

Item Multicollinearity

The item multicollinearity problem is examined with the help of the variance inflation factor (VIF). The estimated value of the VIF less than 3 is considered very good and less than 5 is satisfactory. However, VIF values of more than 5 are not accepted. The results of item multicollinearity, as estimated using VIF, are reported in Table 5. The results report that the VIF of all the items in the table is found to be less than 5, thus indicating that the responses are not suffering from the problem of item multicollinearity.

Table 5. Variance Inflation Factor

Item Code	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	Item Code	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
ATM1	2.273	PRE1	3.026
ATM10	2.554	PRE2	2.329
ATM2	1.936	PRE3	1.955
ATM3	1.805	PRE4	2.392
ATM4	2.696	PRE5	2.569
ATM5	2.203	PRE6	2.28
ATM6	2.506	PRE7	1.836
ATM7	1.971	PRE8	2.165
ATM8	2.381	PRE9	2.575
ATM9	2.349	Absorption	3.775
POS1	2.165	Attention	2.252
POS2	2.206	Endorsing	4.889
POS3	1.913	Enjoyment	2.119
POS4	2.139	Enthusiasm	3.676
POS5	2.187	Influence	2.163
POS6	2.306	Interaction	2.662
POS7	2.386	Knowledge	4.885
POS8	2.303	Learning	4.797
		Purchase	4.636

Hypotheses Testing

The marketing activities are categorized into three phases, namely pre-show, at-show, and post-show marketing activities. These activities are supposed to increase customer engagement in the trade shows. The structural model is developed to examine the impact of different types of marketing activities on the engagement of customers at trade shows. The pre-show, at-show marketing, and post-show marketing activities are reflective and assumed as an exogenous construct, however, customer engagement as a reflective construct is considered as an endogenous construct. The structural equation modeling method is applied to examine the following hypotheses:

- ⇒ **H₁** : Pre-show marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.
- ⇒ **H₂** : At a show, marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.
- ⇒ **H₃** : Post-show marketing activities significantly influence customer engagement in the trade shows.

The structural model is shown in Figure 2, and the results of hypotheses testing are reported in Table 6.

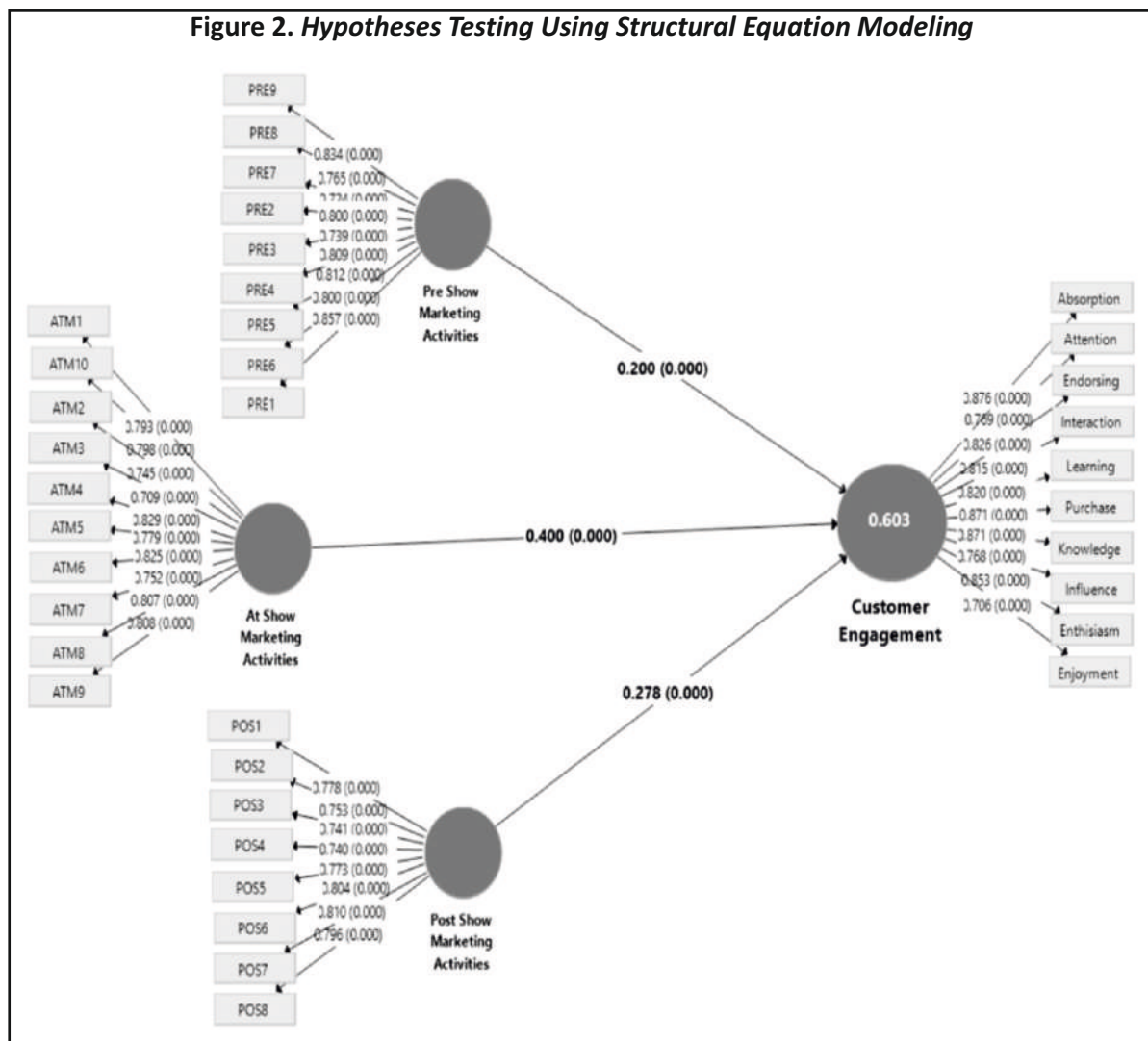


Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing Using SEM

Hypotheses	Endogenous Construct	Exogeneous Construct	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	t-stats.	R square (Q Square)	Remark
H ₁	Customer engagement	At show marketing activities	0.4	0.056	7.121**	60 %	Supported
H ₂	Customer engagement	Post-show marketing activities	0.278	0.05	5.527**	(0.40)	Supported
H ₃	Customer engagement	Pre-show marketing activities	0.2	0.054	3.704**		Supported

The results report that all three hypotheses (H₁, H₂, and H₃) are supported using SEM analysis. The pre-show marketing activities (H₁) are found to significantly increase (path coefficient = 0.2, *t*-stats. = 3.704**) customer engagement in the trade shows. Marketing campaigns conducted before an event draw interest and encourage potential exhibitors to participate in the exhibition. The cornerstone for increasing the prominence and efficacy of pre-show marketing campaigns is strategic promotional activity. By utilizing a multi-channel approach that integrates print, digital, and social media channels, organizers may maximize visibility and engagement, efficiently connecting with prospective exhibitors across several channels of communication.

Similarly, at-show marketing activities (H₂) are found to significantly increase (path coefficient = 0.4, *t*-stats. = 7.121**) customer engagement in the trade shows. Activities held during the show support exhibitors' participation and behavior. Organizers have a vital chance to improve attendance and the whole event experience through at-show marketing initiatives. By leveraging a combination of event marketing strategies, live product demonstrations, strategic networking opportunities, and immersive exhibition design, organizers can create a dynamic and memorable event.

The post-show marketing activities (H₃) are also found to significantly increase (path coefficient = 0.278, *t*-stats = 5.527**) customer engagement in the trade shows. In order to improve exhibitors' engagement, post-show activities employ follow-up campaigns and a variety of marketing strategies, including suggestions, comments, and word-of-mouth initiatives. Through a comprehensive post-show approach, organizers engage exhibitors in a spectrum of initiatives, ranging from follow-up campaigns to digital and physical events, all aimed at nurturing buyer-seller relationships and maximizing the impact of their participation.

The results report that among the three types of activities, the maximum impact on customer engagement comes from at-show marketing activities. The *R* square, which explains the explanatory power of the structural model, indicates that 60% of customer engagement can be explained with the help of different marketing activities. The *Q* square indicates the predictive relevance of the model and is found to be 0.4, which represents significantly higher predictive relevance of the model.

Discussion

This study asserts that trade shows have evolved as a dynamic platform that plays a critical role in reinforcing customer engagement in the sphere of B2B interactions. Though trade shows have been identified as an invaluable marketing platform for interactions, knowledge sharing, and brand exposure, they leave a significant gap in segregating the different marketing activities in the realm of trade shows, resulting in enhanced customer engagement. Our research contributes toward providing a foundation for future research about trade show marketing activities and customer engagement together. The approach to consumer involvement that was used for the study is novel in the trade show, and research on the effects of marketing initiatives at trade shows on engagement is still in its early stages. The study applies multiple elements of consumer interaction in the context of B2B trade exhibitions in an attempt to advance the literature on trade show marketing activities.

This study investigates the connection between exhibitors' engagement and the marketing initiatives used by

trade show organizers. We provide an actual example, evaluate the pre-show, at-show, and post-show marketing initiatives carried out by trade show organizers, and connect them to an understanding of engagement. The results of the study present a statistically significant impact of pre-show, at-show, and post-show marketing activities on different dimensions of customer engagement.

Additionally, our study reveals that trade show marketing influences several aspects of consumer involvement by focusing their attention on things like thinking, observing everything linked to the trade show they visit, and enjoying trade show-related events. Interacting with the trade show, feeling interested, enthusiastic, and involved in the trade show also increases the engagement levels of the exhibitors. The study also reports that exhibitors seek ideas from trade shows they attend, promote, and discuss the benefits with others from the trade shows they attend. Moreover, it has been discovered that giving feedback and making purchases are reliable indicators of involvement levels.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The paper illustrates the first empirical demonstration and tests the three stages of trade show marketing activities that impact customer engagement dimensions—absorption, attention, endorsing, enjoyment, enthusiasm, influence, interaction, knowledge, learning, and purchase. The engagement and trade show articles will benefit greatly from the study's invaluable contributions. This complements the findings of Gopalakrishna et al. (2019), who emphasized the need for businesses to communicate with their clients in both directions and the advantages for organizers of visitor engagement when businesses create anticipation through their advertising, which is reflected in the behavior of attendees through engagement. Second, we have validated earlier studies on customer engagement with tourism and non-tourism brands by applying them in a B2B context (Harrigan et al., 2017; So et al., 2014).

Managerial Implications

The research offers valuable managerial implications. First, our analysis says that individually identifying and clustering the marketing activities into three stages proves advantageous from the viewpoint of organizing the entire trade show. Organizers can meticulously orchestrate a marketing communication plan that generates a sense of excitement and anticipation and creates interest in an upcoming event. Subsequently, tailored messages can be directed toward potential exhibitors to enhance their engagement at the show, leading to heightened engagement levels. Second, our findings accentuate the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to customer engagement by focusing on various dimensions of customer engagement.

Consequently, our study demonstrates that by focusing on generating awareness, building relationships, creating interactive experiences, fostering emotional connections, and gathering real-time feedback, organizers can build stronger relationships with their exhibitors and achieve their marketing goals. Through press releases and post-trade show reviews, as well as by hosting numerous hybrid events and seminars, organizers can use their reputation and goodwill to create ties between exhibitors and organizers through post-show follow-up measures. Last but not least, the results indicate that in order to actively engage with exhibitors and leave a positive impression by making the trade shows enjoyable, B2B organizers need to adjust and acquire the necessary skills and solutions.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Although there are several limitations to the study, there is potential for future research. The sample strategy and geographic scope constitute the initial constraint. Snowball sampling, a non-probability sample method that exclusively includes exhibitors from Delhi/NCR, was used to perform the study. The second limitation is that the study is cross-sectional. Future studies can apply other sampling methods, use longitudinal studies with qualitative tools, and validate the findings in different geographic industries that can affect the generalization of the findings.

Authors' Contribution

Mansi Kapoor conceived the idea and developed a quantitative design to undertake the empirical study. Mansi Kapoor extracted research papers with high reputations, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and codes relevant to the study design. Prof. Rakesh Mohan Joshi verified the analytical methods and supervised the study. The numerical computations were done by Mansi Kapoor using SPSS 26.0.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Appendix

Construct Name		Construct Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>ATM10</i>	At-Show Marketing Activities	0.685	0.931	0.573	0.930
<i>ATM1</i>		0.734			
<i>ATM2</i>		0.747			
<i>ATM3</i>		0.736			
<i>ATM4</i>		0.801			
<i>ATM5</i>		0.704			
<i>ATM6</i>		0.81			
<i>ATM7</i>		0.787			
<i>ATM8</i>		0.767			
<i>ATM9</i>		0.787			
Absorption	Customer Engagement	0.862	0.945	0.635	0.945
Attention		0.763			
Endorsing		0.775			
Enjoyment		0.704			
Enthusiasm		0.849			
Influence		0.76			
Interaction		0.789			
Knowledge		0.86			
Learning		0.749			
Purchase		0.843			
<i>POS1</i>	Post-Show Marketing Activities	0.701	0.904	0.543	0.905
<i>POS2</i>		0.71			
<i>POS3</i>		0.681			
<i>POS4</i>		0.659			
<i>POS5</i>		0.732			
<i>POS6</i>		0.821			
<i>POS7</i>		0.775			
<i>POS8</i>		0.802			
<i>PRE1</i>	Pre-Show Marketing Activities	0.863	0.927	0.586	0.927
<i>PRE2</i>		0.777			
<i>PRE3</i>		0.716			
<i>PRE4</i>		0.77			
<i>PRE5</i>		0.77			
<i>PRE6</i>		0.786			
<i>PRE7</i>		0.668			
<i>PRE8</i>		0.674			
<i>PRE9</i>		0.841			

Constructs	Statements
At-Show	
Marketing Activity	
ATM1	I go through promotional giveaway items like brochures, catalogs, newsletters, show guides, and detailed manuals.
ATM2	I use the exhibition mobile app.
ATM3	I attend conferences and seminars & supplementary events like awards/contests at the trade show.
ATM4	I experience product demonstrations.
ATM5	I use exhibition way finders.
ATM6	I indulge in networking/relationship-building activities/buyer-seller meetings with key clients through discussion forums, joint ventures, backstage meetings, at hotels, clubs etc.
ATM7	I capture leads through RFID/QR codes.
ATM8	I collect visitor feedback/on-the-spot surveys.
ATM9	I attend organizer's networking dinners and cocktail hours through reservation areas and lounges.
ATM10	I continue to undertake PR efforts through industry journalists, influencers on social media, TV, and newspaper reporters.

Pre-Show Marketing Activity	Statement
PRE1	Tie-up with national and international industry associations & industry media partners.
PRE2	Referring to exhibitor's directory lists.
PRE3	Undertake industry networking through road shows.
PRE4	Leveraging industry magazines, newspaper advertisements, & industry newsletters.
PRE5	Interaction through personalized invitations & electronic direct mail.
PRE6	Interaction through social media campaigns on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
PRE7	Exploring the interactive trade show website.
PRE8	Interaction through telemarketing.
PRE9	Organizing pre-show workshops/seminars educating exhibitors to promote their products.

Post-Show Marketing Activity	Statement
POS1	I follow up on visitor leads.
POS2	I arrange visits and meetings with high-prospect visitor leads.
POS3	I undertake post-event marketing campaigns through trade show reviews & press releases.
POS4	I make event films with testimonials.
POS5	I indulge in word-of-mouth activities like dialogue about the trade show through social media posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.
POS6	I hold physical events and workshops.
POS7	I hold digital events and workshops.
POS8	I hold hybrid workshops/conferences like thank you workshops.
POS9	I take up visitor and industry feedback.

Constructs of Customer Engagement

Attention-Related Activities	Statement
ATT1	I spend a lot of time thinking about the trade show.
ATT2	I take time to think about trade shows.
ATT3	I would like to know more about the trade show.
ATT4	I like events that are related to the trade show.
ATT5	I would like to learn more about the trade show.
ATT6	I pay a lot of attention to anything about the trade show.
ATT7	Anything related to the trade show grabs my attention.

Absorption-Related Activities	Statement
ABS1	When interacting with the trade show, I forget everything else around me.
ABS2	Time flies when I am interacting with the trade show.
ABS3	When I am interacting with the trade show, I get carried away.
ABS4	When interacting with the trade show, it is difficult to detach myself.
ABS5	In my interaction with the brand, I am immersed.
ABS6	When interacting with the brand intensely, I feel happy.

Enthusiasm-Related Activities	Statement
ENT1	I feel enthusiastic about the trade show.
ENT2	I am interested in anything about the trade show.
ENT3	I find the trade show interesting.
ENT4	I spend a lot of my discretionary time thinking about the trade show.
ENT5	I am passionate about this trade show.
ENT6	I feel excited about the trade show.
ENT7	I love this trade show.

Enjoyment-Related Activities	Statement
ENJ1	When interacting with the trade show, I feel happy.
ENJ2	I get pleasure from interacting with the trade show.
ENJ3	Interacting with the trade show is like a treat for me.

Interaction-Related Activities	Statement
INT1	In general, I like to get involved in trade show community discussions.
INT2	I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others in the trade show community.
INT3	I am someone who likes actively participating in trade show community discussions.
INT4	In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people in the tradeshow community.
INT5	I often participate in activities of the trade show community.

Learning-Related Activities	Statement
<i>LEA1</i>	I ask trade show questions.
<i>LEA2</i>	I seek ideas or information from the trade show.
<i>LEA3</i>	I seek help from the trade show.

Endorsing-Related Activities	Statement
<i>END1</i>	I promote the trade show.
<i>END2</i>	I try to get others interested in trade shows.
<i>END3</i>	I actively defend the trade show from its critics.
<i>END4</i>	I say positive things about the trade show to other people.

Influence-Related Activities	Statement
<i>INF1</i>	I discuss this trade show on any media.
<i>INF2</i>	I love talking about my trade show experience.
<i>INF3</i>	I discuss the benefits that I get from this trade show with others.
<i>INF4</i>	I am a part of this trade show and mention it in my conversations.

Knowledge-Related Activities	Statement
<i>KNW1</i>	I provide feedback about my experiences with the trade show to the firm.
<i>KNW2</i>	I provide suggestions for improving the performance of the trade show.
<i>KNW3</i>	I provide suggestions/feedback about the new products/services of the trade show.
<i>KNW4</i>	I provide feedback/suggestions for developing new products/services for this trade show.

Purchase-Related Activities	Statement
<i>PUR1</i>	I will continue buying the products/services of the trade show I attend in the near future.
<i>PUR2</i>	My purchases with this trade show I attend make me content.
<i>PUR3</i>	Owning the products/services of the trade show I attend makes me happy.

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