

Article

Measurement of Service Quality in Trade Fair Organization

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Abstract: The success of a trade fair depends on the close collaboration between organizers and exhibitors with potential visitors. While the literature has invested a great deal of interest in the role of the exhibitor and, to a lesser extent, to the visitor, scarce attention has been paid to the vital role played by the fair organizer. The present work analyzes the latter and their importance to the success of a trade fair, which is measured by the quality of the services offered to exhibitors. Using a sample of exhibitors at an International Spanish trade fair, regression analysis is used to examine, at the exploratory level, some quality aspects linked to organizers that can affect the fulfillment of objectives established by exhibitors prior to attending a fair. The results obtained reveal that two dimensions of quality linked to the organizer (event design and quality of results) highly correlate with the final perceptions of exhibitors, and that their deficient quality level prevents the exhibitors from reaching their fair goals.

Keywords: trade fair; exhibitor; fair organizer; perceptions; service quality; satisfaction

1. Introduction

Today, trade fairs constitute a key element of the industrial marketing process [1]. This is reflected in the number of trade fairs held every year throughout the world—a daily average of 85 large trade fairs according the Union of International Fairs (2017) [2]. Trade fairs are considered a useful tool to favor economic development, demonstrate innovations and promote business relationships and opportunities, and their importance as a business, employment and wealth among governments, public administrations and business sectors is essential.

A trade fair is a space where three key agents converge: exhibitors, visitors and trade organizers [3], and the success of a trade fair depends on their close collaboration [4]. The motivations and objectives of each one are very important to understand how relationships within a trade fair are developed.

While organizers are motivated by social variables, exhibitors and visitors are driven by different factors. The former is motivated by the idea of reinforcing market visibility and the possibility of establishing new professional relationships, whereas the latter is attracted by new market opportunities (see Figure 1).

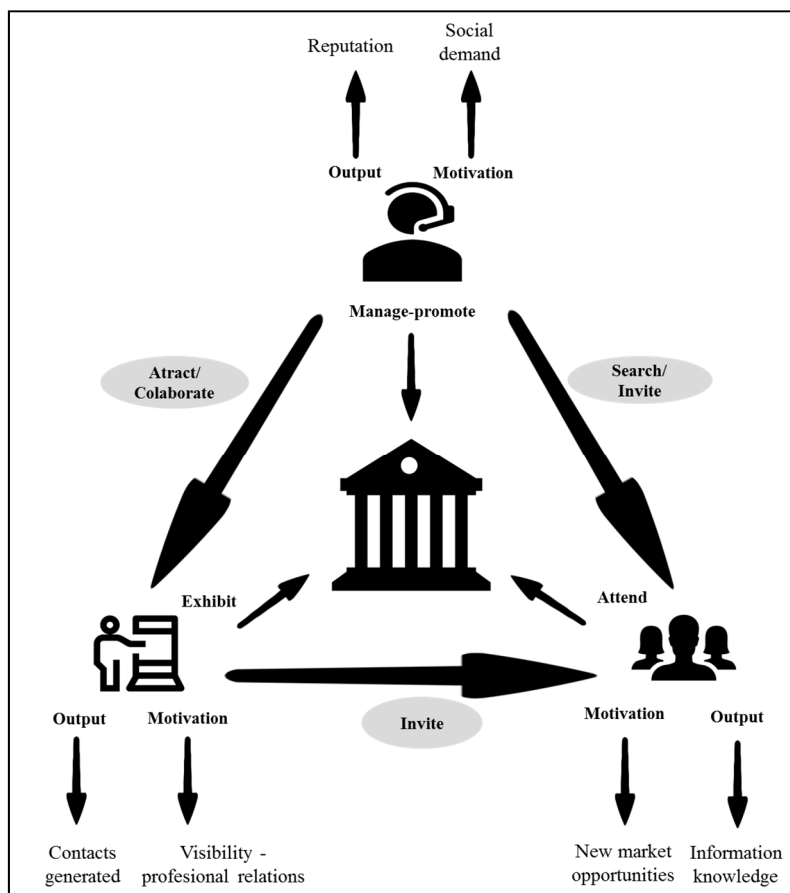


Figure 1. Relations generated in trade fair.

The current state of the fair sector is highly competitive and requires proactive organizers that are able to adapt the supply to the needs of customers by offering high service quality. In a trade fair, the organizer can be considered the source of the fair activity itself, acting as the catalyst that promotes interaction between the supply and the demand, that is, between exhibitors and visitors [5].

Despite the importance of organizers to the success of a fair, this role has been analyzed in few studies [6–11]. In contrast, the literature has mainly focused on the figure of the exhibitor and, to a lesser extent, on the visitor, ignoring the key role played by the organizers of these events before, during and after the fair. In fact, Tafesse and Skallerud (2017) [12] only found four works that dealt exclusively with the figure of the organizer during the period 1980–2014, highlighting the scarce interest devoted to this aspect by marketing literature. Similarly, a recent work by Sarmento and Simoes (2018) [13], which analyzed 125 papers from 1927 to 2016, also verified how research tends to focus predominantly on the exhibitor’s perspective (59.1% of the papers), neglecting the visitor’s viewpoint (23.5%) and virtually ignoring the organizer’s perspective (5.2%). It is our goal to fill this gap, analyzing the figure of the organizer and focusing on the service quality offered at the trade fair. Thus, our model explores organizer trade fair service quality by evaluating exhibitors’ expectations prior to the trade fair and the subsequent fulfillment and satisfaction of said expectations.

Based on this approach, the present work is structured as follows. In Section 2, a theoretical background analysis is conducted of the organizer–exhibitor relationship, considering the different dimensions of quality proposed in the literature to evaluate the services provided by the organizer to exhibitors. In Section 3, the Materials and Methods describe the research design, detailing the different measurement scales used to analyze the level of satisfaction of the exhibitor with the fair organizer, in addition to the corresponding empirical analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the study, while the fifth section is dedicated to the discussion of said results. Conclusions are presented

in the last section, which also includes the limitations of this study as well as future lines of research that are left open to investigation.

2. Theoretical Background

The evolution that trade fairs have undergone in recent decades has resulted in a transformation of the role played by the organizer. These events have abandoned their traditional function of merely supplying a meeting point where exhibitors and visitors can sign sales agreements and, instead, they have now become an information and communication tool [14]. Whereas, in the past, organizers' goals basically focused on ensuring the sale of exhibition space and the attendance of visitors, maintaining a short-lived relationship with exhibitors that barely lasted the duration of the fair [15], these objectives have expanded in today's age. This is the result of stricter demands by both exhibitors and visitors, along with more intense competition generated within the sector due to the globalization of markets and the resurgence of new forms of alternative communication [16,17].

Holding a trade fair poses a serious challenge to organizers, not only because it implies the mobilization of a great deal of technical and human resources, but also because it involves managing numerous organizational aspects of varying complexity with the ultimate goal of achieving the complete satisfaction of the exhibitors. In fact, the organizer–exhibitor relationship is surely the most important of all that are established at these types of events and, most importantly, that which ensures the success of a fair to the greatest extent. It cannot be forgotten that attracting exhibitors is the cornerstone of organizing any trade fair; bearing this in mind, it is evident that all organizational decisions focused on exhibitors seek one clear objective: offer the largest number of services with the best quality possible [18] to achieve satisfaction.

However, the analysis of service quality from the perspective of the organizer has scarcely been considered in the literature, only featuring in the works by Geigenmüller and Bettis-Outland (2012) [9] and Adhitya (2019) [11] (see Table 1). Indeed, the study of fair activities that focus on the organizer has received little attention in the literature. This is the reason why most of the research has been conducted in the last decade, as can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Empirical studies on trade fairs.

Topics	Perspectives		
	Organizer	Exhibitor	Visitor
Exhibition objectives		Lilien (1983) [19], Kijewski et al. (1993) [20], Munuera et al. (1993) [21], Shipley and Wong (1993) [22], Godar and O'connor (2001) [23], Gázquez and Jiménez (2002) [24], Yuksel and Voola (2010) [25], Prado et al. (2013) [26], Nadège and Cambell-Hunt (2015) [27]	Morris (1988) [28]
Exhibition evaluation	Oliver et al. (2015) [29]	Lilien (1983) [19], Munuera and Ruiz (1999) [6]	
Exhibition selection		Gopalakrishna and Williams (1992) [30], Kijewski et al. (1993) [20], Herbig et al. (1997) [31], Seringhaus and Rosson (2001) [32], Tanner et al. (2001) [33], Rice and Almosawi (2002) [34], Jin et al. (2010) [35], Jin et al. (2013) [36], Whitfield et al. (2014) [37]	Smith et al. (2004) [38], Berné and Garcia-Uceda (2008) [39], Jin et al. (2010) [35], Whitfield and Webber (2011) [40], Rittichainuwat and Mair (2012) [41], Han and Verma (2014) [42], Jin and Weber (2016) [43]
Participation decision-making		Shoham (1992) [44], Kijewski et al. (1993) [20], O'Hara (1993) [45]	Morris (1988) [28]
Exhibition budget		Morris (1988) [28]	
Performance	Tafesse (2014) [10]	Dekimpe et al. (1997) [46], Friedmann (2002) [47], Chiou et al. (2007) [48], Li (2007) [49], Bettis et al. (2010) [50], Skallerud (2010) [51]	
Management	Luo (2007) [52]	Shipley et al. (1993) [53], Tanner et al. (2001) [33], Pitta et al. (2006) [54]	Munuera and Ruiz (1999) [6]

Table 1. Cont.

Topics	Perspectives		
	Organizer	Exhibitor	Visitor
Buyer behavior			Rosson and Seringhaus (1995) [55]
Effectiveness	Munuera and Ruiz (1999) [6], Berné and García-Uceda (2010) [7], Rinaldo et al. (2010) [56], Situma (2012) [8], Tafesse (2014) [10]	Gopalakrishna and Williams (1992) [30], O'Hara (1993) [45], Dekimpe et al. (1997) [46], Blythe (1999) [57], Berné and García-Uceda (2010) [7], Yuksel and Voola (2010) [25], Tafesse and Korneliusson (2012) [58], Prado et al. (2013) [26]	Bello and Lohtia (1993) [59], Smith et al. (2003) [60], Zhang et al. (2010) [61], Gottlieb et al. (2014) [62]
Sales/buying technique		Lilien (1983) [19], Shipley and Wong (1993) [22]	Bello and Lohtia (1993) [59]
Service quality	Geigenmüller and Bettis-Outland (2012) [9], Adhitya (2019) [11]	Parasuraman et al. (1988) [63], O'Hara and Herbig (1993) [64], Tanner et al. (2001) [33], Jung (2005) [18], Breiter and Milman (2006) [65], Jin and Weber (2013) [43], Lin and Lin (2013) [66], Lee et al. (2015) [67]	Gottlieb et al. (2014) [62], Sarmiento and Farhangmenr (2016) [68], Lee (2020) [69]
Visiting objectives		Hansen (1996) [70], Munuera and Ruiz (1999) [6], Kozak (2005) [71]	Hansen (1996) [70], Bauer et al. (2008) [72], Park (2009) [73], Sarmiento et al. (2015) [74], Nayak and Bhalla (2016) [75]
Exhibitor behavior		Rosson and Seringhaus (1995) [55], Hultsman (2001) [76]	
Exhibitor and visitor profile		Herbig et al. (1997) [31]	Berné and García-Uceda (2008) [39]
Marketing function and strategy	Kirchgeorg et al. (2010) [17]	Pitta et al. (2006) [54], Kim and Mazumdar (2016) [77]	
Internal relationships		Poorani (1996) [78], Palumbo and Herbig (2002) [79]	Palumbo and Herbig (2002) [79], Bauer et al. (2008) [72]
Economic impact and benefits		Poorani (1996) [78], Palumbo and Herbig (2002) [79]	Wu et al. (2006) [80], Lee (2020) [69]
Satisfaction		Jung (2005) [18], Lin (2016) [81], Adhitya (2019) [11]	
Relationship between exhibitors and organizers	Rinaldo and Golfetto (2011) [5], Jin et al. (2012) [15]	Jin et al. (2012) [15], Rodríguez et al. (2013) [82]	
Human resources	Gregory and Breiter (2001) [83], McCabe (2008) [84]		
Virtual exhibition	Edgar (2002) [85], Lee-Kelley et al. (2004) [86], Geigenmüller (2010) [87]	Wu and Wang (2016) [88]	
Spatial distribution	Rubalcaba and Cuadrado (1995) [89], Jin and Weber (2016) [43]		

Source: Munuera et al. (1999) [21], Berné and García-Uceda (2008) [39], Jin et al. (2012) [15], Tafesse and Skallerud (2017) [12], Sarmiento and Simoes (2018) [13] and own elaboration.

The study of customer satisfaction and service quality, extrapolated to the organizer–exhibitor relationship specifically, is a line of research that has been widely investigated. As a result, there are numerous works that have proposed different dimensions of quality such as tangible elements [63,90,91], quality of results [91,92], reliability [93,94], empathy [90,92,95] or efficiency [92,94,95].

It must be highlighted that the literature presents two main ways of conceptualizing service quality: one based on the approximation of disconfirmation [63,94], and another based on the approximation of evaluating only performance [95].

With regard to the first abovementioned, Gummesson (1979) [96] was one of the first authors to suggest that the concept of service quality was strongly linked to perception and trust.

Later, Grönroos (1984) [94], introduced the notion of total quality in services as the perception of a customer over the difference between the service expected (expectations) and how the service is perceived. Parasuraman et al. (1988) [63] also coincide with this concept of service quality.

This approach, applied to the trade fair sector that the present work analyzes, would be represented by what exhibitors expect from organizers when they attend any given fair, that is, the ability of an organization to satisfy their expectations.

In contrast, the second approach in the literature—quality in terms of performance—considers the debate on the practicality of measuring quality in terms of the discrepancy between what is actually received and what is expected to be received [95].

Although either approach can be applied, the most widely-used tool is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) [63], in line with the disconfirmation model, a scale with five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) for analyzing the differences between expectations and perceptions of services received.

However, Seth et al. (2005) [97] identified 19 different models that evaluated service quality and compared expectations of service and perceived service quality, confirming the existence of different elements of service quality, such as technical, physical, behavioral, tangible and functional aspects, that could influence these relationships.

Therefore, the heterogeneity of the sector services themselves has led to the proposal of various models and measurement scales for analyzing service quality in different contexts (e.g., banking [98], tourism services [99] or e-services [100]).

In the specific case of the present study, which analyzes the unique organizer–exhibitor relationship that evolves in the context of fair activities, the model of relationships generated at trade fairs and the measure scales proposed also attempt to reproduce these specific characteristics. Figure 2 displays this model of relationships.

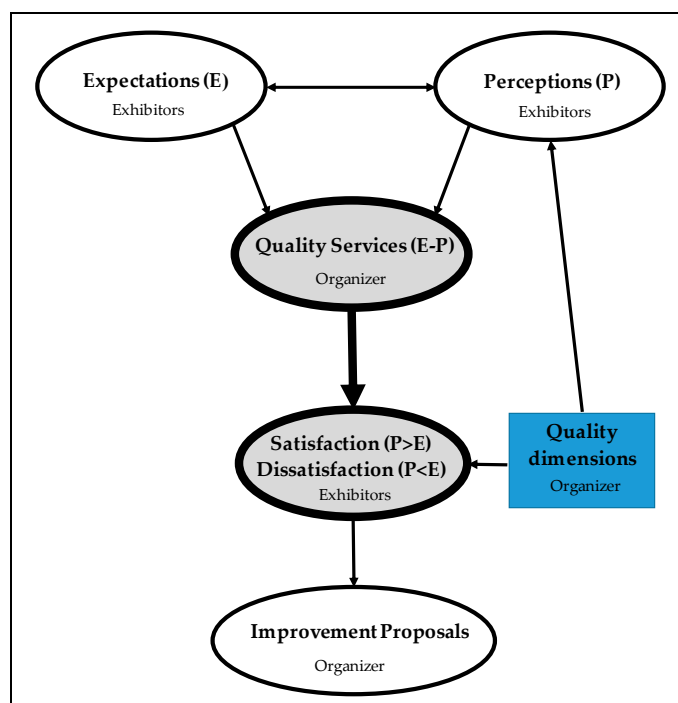


Figure 2. Relationships generated in trade fair.

As can be observed in Figure 2, the service quality provided by the organizer, following the proposal of Parasuraman et al. (1988) [63], is the result of comparing the expectations (objectives) and perceptions of the exhibitor. The present model attempts to explain the degree to which the exhibitor’s expectations are fulfilled by analyzing their satisfaction with the different services (quality dimensions) provided

by the organizer. Thus, this analysis does not consider service quality as a single or global concept but as a composite concept, which will allow us to identify both the quality dimensions exhibitors are satisfied with and those that must be improved upon by the organizer. Insofar as these shortcomings are remedied in preparation for future fair editions, the fulfillment of exhibitor expectations will surely be improved.

Regarding the measurement scales, the present study utilizes an adaptation of different scales used in the literature to analyze the organizer–exhibitor relationship, also considering the service quality dimensions previously mentioned.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

To analyze the service quality offered by the organizer, two surveys were carried out at different points in time on exhibitors at the International Fair of Agriculture in Almería (Spain), a local event of international renown, with an exhibition area of 17,000 m².

For the first survey, the process of collecting data for this exploratory study was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, a questionnaire was sent out one month before the fair to those exhibitors who had confirmed their attendance and, in the second stage, the same questionnaire was administered again, once the event had finished. This first survey intended, on one hand, to identify exhibitors' expectations (objectives) of the fair (beforehand), and, on the other hand, to identify exhibitors' perception based on the fulfillment of those previously established expectations (afterwards).

As for the second survey, a final questionnaire was distributed on the last day of the fair to determine the exhibitors' level of satisfaction with the organization of the event. This last questionnaire also included open questions for the proposal of improvements or changes in future editions.

In the case of the initial survey, the questionnaire was first sent by post to all the national exhibitors (non-institutional) that had confirmed their attendance to the fair. Subsequently, they were contacted by telephone. The number of validated responses was 49 exhibitors. Once the fair had finished, the exhibitors were given the questionnaire again; this time at their corresponding reserved stands, yielding 54 responses. As for the second survey, the decision was made to personally present the questionnaires to exhibitors at their stands, where they were also later collected. Once again, the number of responses was 54. Table 2 displays the technical specifications of the study.

Table 2. Technical specifications of study.

Characteristics	Description
Population	Companies exhibiting ($n = 127$)
Geographical sample scope	National and International
Sample size	49 companies (objectives/expectations) 54 companies (fulfillment of objectives/perceptions) 54 companies (satisfaction with fair organization)
Survey type	Post (objectives/expectations) Personal (fulfillment of objectives/perceptions) Personal (satisfaction with fair organization)
Response rate	38.6% (objectives/expectations) 42.5% (fulfillment of objectives/perceptions) 42.5% (satisfaction with fair organization)
Dates field work carried out	22/4 to 24/5, 2019

3.2. Measures

The questionnaire was based on previously validated measures. The literature was surveyed to identify valid measures for related construct and adapted existing scales. Thus, the variables used in this research were developed according to the following description.

The exhibitors' expectations and perception were measured using a 7-item scale, which was an adapted version of the original 14-item scale designed by Munuera et al. (1993) [21]. Both expectations and perceptions were considered on a 5-point Likert-scale, where 1 indicates "not important at all" and 5 "very important" (see Appendix A).

The exhibitors' satisfaction with organization was measured with an adapted 15-item scale based on Berné and García-Uceda (2008) [39]. This scale is comprised of, although not exclusively, factors related to technical aspects (e.g., facilities or stand assembly), promotion (before the event), and aspects linked to the quality level of the fair (e.g., number of exhibitors and visitors or international presence). The satisfaction was considered on a 5-point Likert-scale, where 1 indicated "very poor" and 5 "very good" (see Appendix A).

Finally, improvements were measured through a variety of open questions which inquired about the actions or changes that the organization should consider improving to ensure the general satisfaction of exhibitors.

3.3. Analysis

Firstly, an analysis of the first survey responses was conducted to assess the values of exhibitors' expectations prior to the fair and exhibitors' perceptions regarding the fulfillment of these objectives on the last day of the fair.

Secondly, an analysis of the responses to the second survey was carried out to determine the satisfaction of the exhibitor with the organization of the fair. The goal was to identify which aspects (items) obtained higher scores according to the exhibitors.

Finally, to analyze the responsibility of the organizer in fulfilling exhibitors' expectations, a series of regressions were carried out that could possibly provide evidence of the existence of correlations between the final perceptions of exhibitors related to their attendance at the fair and the level of quality of the services offered by the organization. To do so, and due to the fact that the scale included in the second survey consisted of 15 items, it was deemed necessary to carry out an explanatory factorial analysis that would allow reducing these variables to the lowest number of dimensions that the literature on service quality normally uses. This was done with the intention of making the estimations more operational. The proposed model is the following:

$$Perception_{t(1, \dots, 7)} = f(F_1, \dots, F_n) \quad (1)$$

where *Perception* is a dependent variable which encompasses the scores received for the various items to measure the degree to which exhibitors' expectations were fulfilled, and F_1, \dots, F_n are factorial scores of the dimensions of quality resulting from the factorial analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of Expectations and Perceptions of the Exhibitor

The average scores obtained for the items on the scale which pertained to the various objectives sought after by the exhibitor attending the fair, both prior to the event itself (expectations 'E') and once it had ended (perceptions 'p'), are displayed in Table 3. Both scales had internal consistency in the reliability analysis, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.802 and 0.890 respectively.

Table 3. Expectations and perceptions of exhibitors attending the fair.

Item	Mean (E)	Mean (p)	E/p
1. Close sales agreements *	3.3	2.6	E > p
2. Establish new contacts with potential buyers *	4.1	2.9	E > p
3. Promote company image and improve reputation*	4.2	3.7	E > p
4. Conduct market research and gather information on competition	3.2	2.8	E > p
5. Disseminate company information *	4.3	3.7	E > p
6. Recruit new distributors and sales representatives	3.1	2.8	E > p
7. Make contact with professionals and specialists who would otherwise be difficult to reach *	3.6	2.8	E > p

* Significant differences exist between the means according to the *T* test.

As can be seen in Table 3, in all cases, the mean values obtained were lower once the fair had finished. This means that exhibitors' expectations (E) prior to attending the fair were greater than the perceptions (p) obtained once it had finished. Therefore, this initial analysis demonstrates that the exhibitors' marketing objectives were not fulfilled. Thus, the results clearly reflect a certain degree of dissatisfaction among exhibitors with the results obtained by the fair.

4.2. Analysis of Satisfaction of Exhibitor with the Organization of the Fair

The mean scores of the different items pertaining to the organizational aspects of a fair, which sought to determine the degree of satisfaction of the exhibitor with the quality of the services offered by the organizer, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Satisfaction of exhibitors with organization of trade fair.

Item	Mean
1. Fair facilities (size, design, functionality, conference halls)	3.4
2. Parking	2.9
3. Cafes, restaurants, etc.	3.3
4. Information service and signage	3.1
5. Cleanliness	3.6
6. Technical services: Assembly, decoration	3.4
7. Security	4.0
8. Press office	3.3
9. Promotion prior to fair	3.1
10. Event date	3.5
11. Quality and number of exhibitors	2.8
12. Quality and number of visitors	2.7
13. Professionalism	3.4
14. Level of internationalization	2.7
15. Attention received from fair stall	3.9

As seen in Table 4, basic services of organizers, such as cleanliness (3.6), security inside and outside the venue (4.0), and proper attention given to exhibitors by fair staff (3.9), obtain highest scores. By contrast, items 11 and 12, which are related to quality and quantity of exhibitors and visitors (2.8 and 2.7, respectively), and 14, related to the level of internationalization (2.7), are the aspects obtaining the lowest scores. The results of this second analysis confirm what was anticipated in the previous analysis of exhibitors' expectations and perceptions.

4.3. Responsibility of the Organizer to Fulfill Exhibitor Expectations

With the aim of determining the extent to which the fair organizer was responsible for exhibitors achieving their objectives or not, a preliminary factorial analysis of the scale was carried out, which made

it possible to group 15 items, initially considered, into 4 factors that explained 68.43% of variance (Table 5). This grouping was done after conducting the varimax method by Kaiser and eliminating items 5, 8 and 15, which did not clearly fit any of the four resulting factors. Although the scale displayed internal consistency when a Cronbach's alpha of 0.821 was obtained in the reliability analysis, it is worth noting that both the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure (0.672) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (sig. 0.000) also validated the suitability of the data for conducting this analysis.

Table 5. Factorial analysis of aspects affecting organization of trade fair.

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1. Fair facilities	0.730			
2. Parking	0.727			
3. Cafes, restaurants, etc.				0.705
4. Information service and signage	0.686			
6. Technical services: Assembly, decoration	0.777			
7. Security			0.811	
9. Promotion prior to fair				0.674
10. Event date				0.834
11. Quality and number of exhibitors		0.917		
12. Quality and number of visitors		0.838		
13. Professionalism			0.700	
14. Level of internationalization			0.599	

As seen in Table 5, the four resulting factors represented the different dimensions of quality. More specifically, Factor 1, which includes Items 1, 2, 4 and 6, covers the aspect linked to dimension “*tangible elements*”; Factor 2, which includes Items 11, 12, represents the dimension “*quality of result*”; Factor 3 (Items 7, 13 and 14), represents “*reliability*”; and, finally, Factor 4 (Items 3, 9 and 10) constitutes the “*event design*” of the trade fair (election of event date, promotion prior to fair and good meal/catering service). These factors can be linked to one or several dimensions of quality included in Table 2, except for Factor 4, which would represent a specific quality dimension of a trade fair.

Finally, the four resulting factors from the factorial analysis were used as explanatory variables to conduct the various regressions. The results are detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Estimation parameters.

Dependent Variable	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4		ANOVA		R ²
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	β	Sig.	F	Sig.	
PERCEP 1	0.028	0.807	0.477	0.000	0.147	0.197	0.362	0.002	7.522	0.000	0.380
PERCEP 2	−0.107	0.337	0.356	0.002	0.315	0.006	0.410	0.001	8.344	0.000	0.405
PERCEP 3	0.113	0.374	0.326	0.013	0.238	0.066	0.206	0.109	3.418	0.015	0.218
PERCEP 4	0.178	0.183	0.157	0.238	0.154	0.248	0.272	0.044	2.224	0.080	0.154
PERCEP 5	0.002	0.984	0.356	0.005	0.004	0.974	0.385	0.003	4.224	0.003	0.275
PERCEP 6	−0.036	0.771	0.373	0.004	0.244	0.051	0.265	0.036	4.548	0.003	0.271
PERCEP 7	0.022	0.860	0.262	0.041	0.173	0.173	0.371	0.005	3.792	0.009	0.236

As can be seen in Table 6, all the estimations are significant overall, according to the values obtained in ANOVA analysis. With regard to the significance of the factors, it is observed that there are two main dimensions of quality responsible for not fulfilling exhibitor expectations: the first representing the “*quality of result*” of the event (Factor 2) and the second, related to “*event design*” (Factor 4).

With respect to the former, it can be observed that there is a significant and positive relationship in nearly all the aspects considered by the exhibitor for attending this fair (with the exception of Item 4, given that the parameter obtained is not significant). The other dimension, “*event design*”, also proves responsible for not fulfilling exhibitor expectations (with the exception of Item 3, given that, again, the parameter obtained is not significant).

These results make it possible to identify which specific organizational aspects were responsible for not fulfilling exhibitors' expectations and, consequently, were the source of their dissatisfaction with the fair.

Finally, from the analysis of exhibitors' suggestions, it is highlighted that only 24 exhibitors provided details of their recommendation for improvement. Table 7 shows the classification of the answers obtained into categories and, at the same time, were grouped into two sets: those implying only recommendations for improvement (65.6%), and those proposing changes (34.4%).

Table 7. Organizational characteristics subjected to improvement.

	Item	Frequency	%
Recommendations (65.6%)	General facilities	7	21.9
	Opening hours and days held	6	18.8
	Facilities and installation of stands	4	12.5
	Sq. meter price of stands	3	9.4
	Lack of interest of some contents	1	3.1
Changes (34.4%)	Visitor quality	5	15.6
	Higher level of internationalization	4	12.5
	Higher international promotion	1	3.1
	More orientated to farmers	1	3.1

5. Discussion

Research on services' marketing reveals that service quality and satisfaction are closely related concepts. Nonetheless, it must be taken into consideration that the quality of a service is difficult to evaluate even after it has been rendered [101], as satisfaction level has a certain element of subjectivity. The motivation for which an exhibitor attends a fair should translate, once the event has ended, into feelings of satisfaction with their decision to attend. This level of satisfaction can be quantified if we consider, for example, the possible sales agreements that can be reached or contacts with potential customers that can be made.

However, in situations like those detailed in this study, in which expectations are higher than perceptions, it is expected that there will be a certain degree of dissatisfaction among exhibitors towards the fair as their objectives were not met and, consequently, they will consider that the economic and human resources invested were of little benefit. Yet, should the exhibitor be held responsible for this poor result or, on the contrary, should the result be attributed to the deficient quality of the services offered by the organizer of the fair?

From the point of view of the exhibitor, correctly choosing the fair to attend is a key factor for achieving marketing objectives, as highlighted by Berné and García-Uceda (2010) [7]. However, the present study focuses on the second supposition: analyze the responsibility of the organizer in not fulfilling exhibitor objectives, through the quality of services offered, and, based on this, evaluate their level of satisfaction.

The organizer is essential for the success of a fair. In fact, as Jin et al. (2013) [36] verified—in one of the first studies that explored the behavior of exhibitors and visitors in the context of a fair in China—among the factors that influence participants' decision-making, "organizer and venue performance" is the most important. Moreover, these authors suggested that if fair organizers offer business opportunities and good quality services, exhibitors and visitors will be willing to attend such events. Undoubtedly, this choice is a decision which carries significant implications, as highlighted by Jin et al. (2010) [35], considering its influence on the sustainable development of the trade fair industry.

Indeed, it must not be forgotten that high quality of fair services will result in satisfaction and loyalty, willingness to make recommendations to others and a reduction in complaints by exhibitors [102].

Thus, understanding exhibitors' perception of the quality of fair services and the influence the latter have on their satisfaction will help organizers to better comprehend the needs of the exhibitor [103]. This understanding is precisely what the present study achieves, which is a similar proposal to work by Adhitya (2019) [11], albeit with a different methodology.

The organizer is aware that the level of participation by exhibitors and visitors is essential in order to achieve fair success. However, firstly, our study demonstrates that quality and the number of exhibitors in attendance at the fair were questionable and, therefore unsatisfactory, as exhibitors were unable to identify their competitors, in addition to other aspects. Secondly, the quality and number of visitors that attended the fair were below expectations, which could be related to the attendance of mainly the general public as opposed to actual professionals associated with the sector and, logically, interested in the presentation of new products.

Albeit evident that the exhibitor is of great importance to the organizer, the visitor must never be forgotten. The exhibitor has a stronger capacity for adaptability as long as attending a fair offers clear success. In contrast, the visitor, in addition to doing business, prefers attending fairs located at destinations offering easy access to minimize travel time and appealing leisure and recreational options, as confirmed by Jin and Weber (2016) [43]. Ultimately, quality will be the best guarantee to ensure that both groups return to the next edition.

6. Conclusions

Despite the undeniable importance of exhibitors and visitors, without whom a fair would be pointless, it is essential to emphasize the role played by the organizer, responsible for conceiving the fair itself and dealing with all the complexities involved in its organization.

This study focused on the organizer, a figure practically forgotten by the literature, with the goal to analyze to what extent organizational efforts affect in satisfaction for the exhibitor and, thus, the degree to which your fair objectives are fulfilled.

The results obtained reveal the existence of two dimensions of service quality provided by the organizer (quality of results and event design) that are responsible for not fulfilling the objectives established by exhibitors prior to attending the fair.

The dimension "quality of results", includes the two most important aspects that normally characterize the prestige of a fair: quality and number of exhibitors and visitors, which obtained the worst scores from the exhibitors. The other dimension of quality is related to "event design". This dimension encompasses very important aspects that organizers must consider (e.g., the event date and the promotion prior to the fair).

Therefore, these analyses establish a relationship between the level of satisfaction for the exhibitor and the dimensions of service quality provided by the fair organizer.

The main limitation of this work is related to the sample size utilized, a consequence of the nature of the trade fair analyzed. Although it is a fair of international renown in its industry (greenhouse agriculture), its scope and availability have prevented us from obtaining further information. Thus, it is somewhat constrained for the purpose of generalizing the conclusions. Consequently, we are aware that it would be quite interesting to extend this line of research by carrying out repetitions of this study at other fairs, preferably of similar size and characteristics, and using a larger sample. Such research would make it possible to validate the satisfaction scale.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Expectations and perceptions of exhibitors attending the fair.

Item
1. Close sales agreements
2. Establish new contacts with potential buyers
3. Promote company image and improve reputation
4. Conduct market research and gather information on competition
5. Disseminate company information
6. Recruit new distributors and sales representatives
7. Make contact with professionals and specialists who would otherwise be difficult to reach

Table A2. Satisfaction of exhibitor with organization of trade fair.

Item
1. Fair facilities (size, design, functionality, conference halls)
2. Parking
3. Cafes, restaurants, etc.
4. Information service and signage
5. Cleanliness
6. Technical services: Assembly, decoration
7. Security
8. Press office
9. Promotion prior to fair
10. Event date
11. Quality and number of exhibitors
12. Quality and number of visitors
13. Professionalism
14. Level of internationalization
15. Attention received from fair stall

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