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ATTRIBUTES INFLUENCING MEETING PLANNERS' DESTINATION SELECTION: A CASE OF ORLANDO, FLORIDA

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The current study used Orlando, Florida as a case study, and investigated whether there are differences between the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, third party) in regard to destination selection attributes. The study further identified attributes that affect future bookings to Orlando. Data were collected from a nationwide survey of meeting planners with a usable sample of 2,388 completed phone surveys and 118 completed online questionnaires. One significant difference was found between the three meeting planner types. This research was performed in the midst of the recent recession and explored the impact the recession has had on planning meetings. Some effects of the economic downturn on the events industry are decreased attendance and more conservative budgets. Most association meeting planners did not cancel or postponed their events, although all planners agree that attendance to their meetings decreased. Third-party planners seemed to be the most sensitive to budget allocations.

Key words: Destination selection; Meeting planners; Associations; Bookings; Convention and Visitors Bureau; Orlando

Introduction

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry represents one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry (Casanova, Kim, & Morrison, 2005; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, & Godlewska, 2008; Weber, 2001; Weber & Roehl, 2001). Whether it is a publically traded company that is obligated by law, healthcare providers that gather for training purposes, or a family reunion, essentially all organizations need to plan and execute some type of event. However, during times of economic downturn, meetings' and events' budgets are on top of the list for budget cuts, and meeting planners are forced to do more with smaller budgets. The latest recession, which started in 2008, has greatly affected the events industry and changed public perception of it (Duffy, 2010). It also made meeting planners more cautious with their destination selection.

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Understanding meeting planners' site selection process and considerations is important for destinations that want to capitalize on the events industry. With the growing competition, destinations must become experts in all facets of the events industry. Meeting planners are different in terms of the main attributes that influence their decision to select a destination. Commonly known MICE segments are corporate, associations, government, and social, military, education, religion, and fraternal (SMERF) (Fenich, 2006; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008). These different segments focus on an array of topics and industries (e.g., environment, agriculture, finance, heritage and culture, real state, sports, technology, and much more). In addition, recent studies have focused on how event type influences the importance of destination attributes (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Rompf et al., 2008). Thus, there is a need for comprehensive empirical research that includes multiple segments of the industry and multiple meeting planner types that are from different geographic locations to generate an overall understanding of attributes that influence meeting planners when they choose a destination. The first step is to portray a current picture of the US MICE industry in terms of events characteristics and meeting planners' characteristics.

While previous studies investigated meeting planners' decision-making process and/or destinations' attributes that are important to meeting planners, many focused on association meeting planners, or did not differentiate between the meeting planner types or the event they were planning. This research investigates the link between three meeting planner types (association, corporate, and third-party planners) and the attributes that influence them when choosing destinations. Meeting planners participating in this research are from different locations around the nation (representing all 50 states and Canada), who plan different events (e.g., trade shows, annual meetings, board meetings, training) for various clients, including, but not limited to, corporations, associations, and social groups. By surveying different meeting planners that plan different events for various segments, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature as well as stimulate an academic interest in the process of site selection by meeting planners of all types.

The main purpose of the research at hand is to understand some of the major attributes that influence the different type of meeting planners when they think of Orlando as a meeting destination for their events. The primary objectives of the proposed research are to:

1. Provide an up-to-date overview of the characteristics of meeting planners and the MICE industry in the US.
2. Determine if there is a difference in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, third party).
3. Determine which destination selection attributes will affect meeting planners' future bookings to Orlando.
4. Determine how the recent downturn in the economy has impacted the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, third party).

Literature Review

The events industry is known for its substantial direct and indirect impact on local economy (Baloglu & Love, 2005), and that is partially why it is a main focus of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) in destinations. For example, during 2007, Orlando hosted 6.1 million visitors that participated in different events (conventions, seminars, etc.), with an estimated economic impact of $2.8 billion (Visit Orlando, 2014a). In 2008, an additional $460 million was spent at the Orange County Convention Center by exhibitors and associations (Visit Orlando, 2014a). In order for these millions to be spent in Orlando, meeting planners and other decision makers had to choose Orlando as the most suitable destination for their events.

Meeting planners are those individuals that "plan, organize, implement, and control . . . events" (Convention Industry Council, 2011). Meeting planners are mainly identified as corporate, association, government or independent (third-party) meeting planners (Casanova et al., 2005). Their type, the organization they plan for, and the type of event they are planning will determine their goals and objectives, and therefore their planning process. While corporate meeting planners view event-related spending as a necessary evil, association meeting planners view it as a source of revenue (Toh, Peterson, & Foster, 2007). Independent planners, or third-party planners, are outside consultants that specialize in meeting planning (Casanova et al., 2005) and adapt themselves to the organization they plan for. Destinations compete for the right to host events. The first step in winning a bid for group events is to understand what makes a destination viable for events in the eyes of the decision makers and stakeholders.

The site selection process is an important component in the MICE industry and includes three key players: meeting suppliers, meeting buyers, and attendees (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Destinations are considered to be meeting suppliers, because they are both the platform for the event and the suppliers of the overall services (e.g., meeting space, rooms, and pre- and postconference activities) (Rogers, 2008). Decision makers have many options, and similar to choosing a hotel or a catering company, destinations are regarded as a supply. Buyers are the decision makers: those who choose the location and structure of the events. Attendees are the heart and soul of the operations, without which there will be no event (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). Previous studies have investigated associations' site selection because associations are the largest part in the MICE industry (International Congress and Convention Association [ICCA], 2005), while the remaining segments (corporate meetings, trade shows, etc.) are left unexplored. A meeting supplier (i.e., a destination) needs to understand all segments of the MICE industry in order to gain a competitive advantage and attract buyers and attendees. Good relationships with the individuals or organizations that plan the meetings are important to a destination that wants to be considered as a viable destination for meetings.

As a result of the growing competition among meeting destinations, the latest recession, the rise of second tier destinations, and events that are being held aboard cruise ships, understanding destination characteristics is even more important today (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Fenich, 2001; Lee & Back, 2005; Rompf et al., 2008). One of the most extensive investigations was done by Crouch and Ritchie (1998), which formulated a conceptual model of the site selection process and urged researchers and convention cities to conduct further research in order to "reduce wasteful expenditures" (p. 65). Although interest increased, most studies on the site selection process focused on destination attributes, and until recently, very few investigated whether event type, for example, influences meeting planners' destination selection decision-making process (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Rompf et al., 2008).

Host destinations are expected to possess certain attributes that are valued by both meeting planners and participants. There are different types of events, in various sizes, and each with specific goals and objectives. A successful destination realizes the need to promote itself to different market segments. Associations' events mostly combine educational and social components in their events, encouraging networking between their attendees (Rompf et al., 2008). Corporations are focused on the agenda at hand and formulate or implement policy and procedures (Fenich, 2006). These different needs and objectives affect the site selection process, including who is actually choosing the destination. It is critical for the destination to be familiar with the decision makers at the specific organization in order to influence their decision (Clark & McCleary, 1995).

Methodology

The case study methodology was chosen for this current study because this method is preferred when "what," "why," and "how" questions are involved (Xiao & Smith, 2006) and can produce beneficial results and implications. According to Yin (2003), this method "is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individuals, groups, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p. 4). Orlando was deemed an appropriate destination to analyze due to the variety and quantity of meetings held in Orlando each year. Orlando is the home of the second largest convention center in the US (over 2 million square feet of exhibit space), and has 116,499 hotel rooms (Visit Orlando, 2014b), making the city capable of accommodating any industry and any group size.

A research partnership project was established in mid-2009 between the Orlando Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau (OOCCVB) and the University of Central Florida's Rosen College of Hospitality Management in Orlando, FL. The purpose of this collaboration was to reach out to meeting planners around the US and attract more businesses to the city of Orlando in the hopes of generating more income and help the city to recover more quickly from the economic downturn. An added value of this cooperation was learning about meeting planners' needs and perceptions in regards to Orlando and other meeting sites in the US, which led to the formulation of the current research. In the spirit of community collaboration, a research team included 4 professors, 20 students, and 2 supervisors to survey meeting planners from around the US. The OOCCVB provided the research team with purchased lists that contained contact information for 24,000 meeting planners from the US, Canada, and some other destinations around the world (including Germany, Russia, and the UK).

Meeting planners in this study were surveyed utilizing a semistructured phone interview designed to understand meeting planners' needs and perceptions in regards to Orlando as a meeting destination. The phone survey was developed based on extensive literature review related to meeting planners' site selection (Baloglu & Love, 2001; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Oppermann, 1996; Vogt, Roehl, & Fesenmaier, 1994) and was submitted to the OOCCVB for approval in order to ensure its compatibility to the OOCCVB goals and objectives. The research team interviewed meeting planners via phone and asked about their needs and perceptions in regard to Orlando as a meeting destination. The phone survey consisted of 18 questions and 10 subquestions. It was divided into three parts, ensuring the most important information was asked at the beginning.

The data collection process was over a 12-month period. Data were gathered from a little over 8,000 meeting planners. For this current study 2,547 meeting planners were randomly selected and analyzed due to time limitations. After cleaning the database from incomplete surveys, 2,388 (30%) of the phone responses were deemed useable for the purpose of this study. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. The team searched for commonly heard statements and reoccurring themes in the phone interviews. The author created an Excel file to assist the research team in translating the qualitative data into quantitative information. Before commencing the coding of data into the new Excel file, team members went through an extensive training as to the meaning of each statement and the ways to code different remarks. The team members transformed the verbal comments from the interviews into codes—if the meeting planner disagreed with a statement (e.g., Orlando has a variety of meeting space), it was coded as "1." If they agree, it was coded as "2." If there was no mention of that specific item, it was coded "0" for "no data." In case of a conflict, the supervisors discussed it with the team and then determined the standard coding.

The original Excel file included 10 identification items (e.g., ID, gender, segment, state, etc.), 67 destination statements (e.g., "Orlando has a good variety of meeting space," "The hotels are overpriced"), 12 items related to the effect of the current economic recession (e.g., "meeting planner position was eliminated," "attendance dropped"), and 49 alternative destinations that meeting planners choose other than Orlando. After coding a little over 700 phone interviews, a frequency analysis was conducted on each statement. Statements that had less than 5% response rate were assumed to be of less importance to the meeting planner and were taken off the overall analysis. For example, having the ability to conduct meeting and events inside attractions was mentioned by less than 1% of the meeting planners, so it was dropped from the final analysis.

Certain items that are of interest to the researchers and the OOCCVB were left despite the low response rate (e.g., "CVB is familiar with per diem allowance"). This resulted in a refined list that included 11 identification items, 38 destination statements, 11 economic statements, and 22 alternative destinations. In addition, a reliability check was performed—three team members were presented with the qualitative data of 54 meeting planners and were asked to translate them to quantitative data. Coding was identical in over 77% of the cases in all items but two: "Type of meeting" and "Is this a third-party meeting planner," which were recoded by the researchers.

In the final stages of the project, the research team developed an online survey to reach out to meeting planners that were not reachable via phone, or requested to be emailed the survey. The online survey was sent to 1,322 meeting planners. The online survey included the same questions as the phone survey. The online survey was sent to 1,322 meeting planners and produced 124 responses, or a 9.4% response rate, which led to 118 usable surveys. Response rates from online surveys can range from 6% to75% (Pan, 2010), with most of them yielding a response rate that is less than 30% (Hung & Law, 2011).

A sample of 2,388 US-based meeting planners (about 30% from total meeting planners that were contacted via phone) and a sample of 118 meeting planners that responded to the online survey were analyzed to determine the US meeting planners' and their events' characteristics. Qualitative analysis was used to address the first objective of the study, which was to provide an up-to-date overview of the characteristics of meeting planners and the MICE industry in the US. Study results from the online survey helped meet the remaining objectives of the study.

Results

As presented in Table 1, the majority of the respondents were association planners. However, while there are many associations in the lists provided by the OOCCVB, they contain some 50 market segments (as defined by the OOCCVB), including government, corporate, incentive events, and even family reunion groups. Previous studies in the meetings and events industry suggest that the majority of meetings and events are held by associations (Choi & Boger, 2002; Clark & McCleary, 1995; Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). The results from this current study are consistent with previous studies.

Table 1
Characteristics of US Meeting Planners and Their Events

Characteristics	Phone Interviews ($N = 2{,}388$)	Online Surveys ($N = 118$)
Planners		
Gender		
Female	72%	82%
Male	28%	12%
Type		
Association	55%	46%
Corporate	30%	27%
Third party	12%	27%
Segments		
Trade	16%	13%
Health	10%	10%
Government	9%	12%
Location		
Florida	24%	21%
Virginia	6%	7%
Maryland	7%	
Washington, DC		6%
Events		
Meeting type		
Conference	33%	19%
Association	22%	31%
Corporate	15%	27%
Average attendance		
101–250	19%	30%
251–500	22%	27%
Length of event		
2–3 nights	73%	50%

In order to determine if there are differences in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planners types, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. This was done from two different aspects: meeting planners' experience with Orlando and meeting planners' perception of Orlando. In both sections, meeting planners were asked to choose their level of agreement with statements about Orlando's attributes on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). Meeting planners were asked to consider past experience with the suppliers in the destination when answering the question, and therefore not all meeting planners were able to answer. Analysis was performed on the 65 meeting planners who answered the question (marked other than 0 = *I don't know*). As presented in Table 2, study results revealed significant mean difference ($p < 0.05$) for one of the eight attributes, which was "My attendees can bring family and friends." It was found that associations' attendees are more likely to bring family and friends to an event than corporate attendees. It is important to note that in regard to receiving support from the OOCCVB, the mean difference for third-party planners is only 2.20, which is much higher than association (1.77) and corporate (1.79) planners. This might be because third-party planners are independent and have their own resources. Meeting planners were in general agreement that Orlando is an overall good value for the organization.

Meeting planners were asked how they consider Orlando as a meeting destination. Analysis was performed on the 116 meeting planners who answered this question. No significant differences were found within the seven attributes that were presented (see Table 3). Meeting planners considered the attribute "Orlando is easily accessible" twice, once based on previous experience (mean 1.29), and once based

Table 2
ANOVA for Comparison of Destination Attributes for Different Meeting Planners (Past Experience Considered)

	Types of Meeting Planners				
	Association ($N = 31$)	Corporate ($N = 14$)	Third Party ($N = 20$)	F Value	p Value
My attendees can bring Family and friends	1.35*	2.07*	1.60	3.766	0.029
There is a variety of accommodations/venues	1.58	1.43	1.55	0.160	0.852
Orlando is easily accessible	1.29	1.43	1.70	2.113	0.130
Orlando offers quality city-wide transportation	2.13	2.57	2.40	0.851	0.432
Orlando has pleasant weather	1.45	1.64	1.75	1.438	0.245
My organization received high quality service	1.68	1.64	1.55	0.230	0.795
Orlando is an overall good value to my organization	1.90	2.00	1.75	0.472	0.626
I receive ample support from the OOCCVB	1.77	1.79	2.20	1.781	0.177

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: *strongly agree* (1), *neutral* (3), *strongly disagree* (5).
*Significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

on perception (1.40). The results were somewhat similar, and the difference could be explained by the fact that in the second analysis the meeting planners that had no experience with Orlando were added. The ANOVA analysis showed that corporate meeting planners agreed with the statement that Orlando is accessible (mean 1.43, highest score 3). However, in the second analysis there were a few corporate meeting planners that disagreed with the statement (mean 1.6, highest score 4).

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict meeting planners' future booking in Orlando. The question "Would you consider conducting any future meetings/events in Orlando?" was assigned as the dependent variable and section nine of the online survey was assigned as the predictors. Results are presented in Table 4 and show that there is a positive linear relationship between "Orlando is on my rotation schedule" and the consideration of future bookings (beta = 0.064, $p = 0.001$). It stands to reason that if Orlando is on the organization's rotation schedule, then the organization will positively consider booking it in the future. In addition, there is a negative linear relationship between the predictor "In order to save time and money, someone from the organization needs to be located in the area" and future booking (beta = −0.037, $p = 0.039$). It appears it is irrelevant to most meeting planners whether or not they have a local representative, which means Orlando can be a viable destination to many organizations.

Effects of the Economic Recession

Affordability is one of the key attributes of a destination (Choi & Boger, 2002; Comas & Moscardo,

Table 3
ANOVA for Comparison of Destination Attributes for Different Meeting Planners (Perception Considered)

	Types of Meeting Planners				
	Association ($N = 40$)	Corporate ($N = 25$)	Third Party ($N = 24$)	F Value	p Value
Orlando is a fun destination	1.62	1.80	1.71	0.441	0.645
Orlando matches my organization's needs	2.18	2.32	2.29	0.269	0.765
Orlando is easily accessible	1.40	1.60	1.71	1.648	0.199
Orlando offers a variety of activities/venues	1.52	1.48	1.46	0.083	0.920
Attendees enjoy being able to mix business and pleasure	1.62	1.56	1.54	0.113	0.893
In order to save time and money someone from the organization needs to be located in the area	2.95	3.64	3.42	2.442	0.093
Orlando is on my rotation schedule	2.75	2.56	2.92	0.751	0.475

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: *strongly agree* (1), *neutral* (3), *strongly disagree* (5).

Table 4
Regression Analysis: Attributes That Affect Future Booking ($N = 118$)

	Consideration to Come Back to Orlando		
Attributes	Beta	*t*-value	Sig. *t*
Orlando is a fun destination	−0.051	−0.455	0.650
Orlando matches my organization's needs	0.179	1.684	0.095
Orlando is easily accessible	−0.115	−1.136	0.259
Orlando offers a variety of activities/venues	0.180	1.423	0.158
Attendees enjoy being able to mix business and pleasure	0.026	0.189	0.850
In order to same time and money someone from the organization needs to be located in the area	−0.183	−2.093	0.039*
Orlando is on my rotation schedule	0.297	3.350	0.001*
Constant		9.419	0.000
Multiple *R*	4.66		
R^2	0.217		
F test statistics/significance	$F = 4.232$ $P = 0.000$		

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: *strongly agree* (1), *neutral* (3), *strongly disagree* (5).
*Significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

2005; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Rompf et al., 2008). This attribute takes an even higher priority during recessions and times of constrained budgets. Meeting planners were asked, "Please consider any economic impact on your meetings or events" and were presented with eight statements to which they needed to respond. The response was on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*), with the option to choose 0 = *I don't know*. Meeting planners agreed that due to the latest economic crisis, attendance to events declined, and they were forced to be more conservative with budgets, particularly with regard to accommodations and food/beverage costs. Third-party planners, who are measured by their negotiation skills and their budget management (Toh, Dekay, & Yates, 2005), seemed to be the most attuned to cost reduction savings.

The results are presented in Table 5 and reveal significant mean differences ($p < 0.05$) between "associations" and "corporate" meeting planners in the question of canceling or postponing events. Associations reported that they did not cancel or postpone meetings due to the economy. This is supported by a recent survey conducted by *Corporate Meetings & Incentives* magazine (MeetingsNet, 2009), in which only 9% of associations meeting planners reported to cancel meetings due to the

Table 5
ANOVA for Comparison of Recession Impact on Events for Different Meeting Planners

	Types of Meeting Planners				
	Association ($N = 55$)	Corporate ($N = 30$)	Third Party ($N = 32$)	*F* Value	*p* Value
Meetings are canceled or postponed	3.45*	2.63*	2.88	3.484	0.034
MP position/department was scaled down or eliminated	3.16	2.97	2.53	1.974	0.144
Meetings must be near HQ or region	3.70	3.50	3.66	0.315	0.730
Attendance is down	2.64	2.76	2.88	0.317	0.691
My attendees can bring family and friends	3.67	3.60	3.58	0.051	0.950
Using virtual meeting tools	3.20	2.97	3.06	0.356	0.701
Room rates have taken higher priority	2.29	2.17	1.78	2.257	0.109
Food and beverage rates have taken higher priority	2.13	2.13	1.81	0.990	0.375

Measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale: *strongly agree* (1), *neutral* (3), *strongly disagree* (5).
*Significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

economic crisis. Since corporations view meetings and events as an expense (Toh et. al., 2007), apparently during tough economic conditions, corporations tend to cut back on meetings, events, and business travel.

Results also show meeting planners report that attendance in their events declined. Meeting planners that were interviewed via phone and answered this question in the survey support this. The 19th Annual Meetings Market Survey in 2010 revealed that 48% of meeting planners reported attendance had declined from 2008 to 2009. In addition, according to Meetings & Conventions (2008), planners have reduced their food and beverage budgets and are requesting more customized menus with lower priced items.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of the current research was to determine the attributes that influence meeting planners when choosing a destination for the meetings based on the three meeting planner types. Meeting planners' characteristics in previous studies focused on demographic information such as sex, age, and years of experience, and were somewhat different than those that are being presented in this study. Determining whether the industry has changed in the last few decades is a difficult task. Our sample was mostly compiled of association meeting planners, which are a great source of revenue for a destination. Many of their attendees enjoy the option of bringing their families and mix business and pleasure while attending meetings, which generates indirect spending patterns.

Study results demonstrate that the majority of the meeting planners are females, although according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), they are only 50.2% of the general population. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is that "perhaps women possess more of the personality traits or skill sets that are required to be a good meeting planner" (Beaulieu & Love, 2005, p. 118). Destinations that want to reach out to new clients and meeting planners should remember that in most cases they are communicating with females and need to adjust their message accordingly. Study results further suggest that meeting planners plan events throughout the year, with no specific season or month. Orlando has year-round comfortable weather, which makes it a perfect destination. In addition, most events are planned for less than 500 attendees and last no more than 3 nights.

The importance of destination selection attributes for meeting planners is well recognized, and this study aimed to determine if there is a difference in destination selection attributes for Orlando among the three meeting planner types (association, corporate, third party). The study findings further revealed that only one significant difference was found between association and corporate planners in the question of family and friends joining attendees for an event. This can be explained by the social nature of association events. A destination that wants to be considered for association events should have a variety of activities that are outside of the main event. Meeting planners are in general agreement that Orlando is a fun destination that offers a good variety of activities. They also agree that attendees enjoy the ability to mix business and pleasure. There were no other significant differences between the three meeting planner types in the other destination attributes examined. Although no significant differences were found, the value of this information is not lessened.

There seem to be two attributes that can predict future bookings to Orlando. First, if Orlando is on an organization's rotation schedule, the consideration to book Orlando for future events increases. This coincided with Clark and McCleary's (1995) suggestion that a destination has to be in the evoke set of destinations in order to be considered as a viable meeting destination. Furthermore, many meeting planners are relying on previous experience when booking the next event and would go back to a successful location (Barley, 2003). Second, 47% of meeting planners disagree (or strongly disagree) with the statement "In order to save time and money someone from the organization needs to be located in the area." That means that local representation is irrelevant for planning in Orlando, and Orlando can be a viable destination to many organizations.

The recent recession seemed to have affected corporate and third party more than associations. All experienced declined attendance, but associations canceled or postponed fewer events than corporations. This might be due to the fact that associations view their events as a source of revenue (Toh et al., 2007). Furthermore, many associations' events have an educational component that has to be delivered within a specific time (once a year, every quarter), and although there are other ways to deliver, the face-to-face method is still the most effective one.

The results of this study offer some practical implications for the OOCCVB (and other similar destinations). First, as mentioned earlier, when sending a general message to the meeting planners' community, it will be wise to remember that the majority are women. One destination attribute that is significantly more important to women is facility quality (Kim, Kim, & Weaver, 2010) and CVBs should be aware of the importance. Orlando has many high-quality, multipurpose meeting facilities, including the second largest convention center in the county, and it should capitalize on that. Being included in an organizations' rotation schedule will generate future booking to the destination, contribute to meeting planners' experience with the destination, and hopefully lead to increased business.

Second, Orlando has great weather year round, which is one reason that meeting planners and attendees are attracted to it. Some meeting planners avoid Orlando during hurricane season, but might consider booking their events during that time anyway if they knew about the extreme weather insurance that the OOCCVB is offering. During the phone interviews it was clear that many meeting planners were not aware of the hurricane insurance. Some even commented that given the right information, they might consider conducting events in Orlando during that season.

Third, technology has become an important part of the event planning process. In order to better market itself, the OOCCVB has created a user-friendly website with access to an abundance of information. The next step might be a mobile device application that will make it easier for meeting planners to use the OOCCVB services and look at information about Orlando as a meeting destination.

Fourth, while data analysis showed that association and corporate meeting planners are in agreement that the OOCCVB provides them with ample support, third-party planners do not feel as strongly. Building good relationship with third-party planners is crucial to a destination that wants to increase business. The OOCCVB needs to communicate to third-party planners that they have the ability to support and assist in the planning process, making it more efficient and cost-effective.

Fifth, the latest recession hurt the events industry in many ways, not only in decreased attendance and cancellations. If Orlando wants to thrive during a tough economy, it needs to cater to both associations and corporate markets, building strong bonds with major associations. Associations are less likely to cancel meetings even when budgets are tight. In addition, associations are less affected by public perception, meaning they are less sensitive to Orlando's image as a leisure destination.

Limitations and Future Research

In conducting this study, the research team used lists of meeting planners that were provided by the OOCCVB. A larger sample may have revealed significant differences between the three meeting planner types (associations, corporate, third party). However, this study is meaningful at an exploratory stage to encourage future research as to any differences between the three meeting planner types in regard to destination selection attributes. Another limitation derives from the missing data from the phone interviews. Because the phone survey was mostly open ended, the information gathered was valuable but difficult to combine with the online survey results. The small sample of the online survey (118 usable surveys) in comparison to the target population poses another challenge, and the findings may be restricted to the particular community sampled (US meeting planners).

This study aimed to determine if there are differences between the three main meeting planner types in regard to destination selection attributes, destination attributes that affect future booking, and the affect of the recent economic downturn. A bigger sample size and extending the list of attributes might provide richer results. The research at hand focused on the US event planning industry. There are many international organizations and planners that operate within the US and around the world. Future studies can include them in the research sample.

During this last recession, the meetings and events industry has experienced some unique challenges, including a shift in public perception. An investigation of the effects of recent events on best practices, budgeting, and return on investment measuring can be beneficial to suppliers and destinations that want to offer the best value for meeting planners and their organizations.

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