1-1-2008

The impact of conference food function performance on attendee satisfaction and behavior

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THE IMPACT OF CONFERENCE FOOD FUNCTION PERFORMANCE ON ATTENDEE SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIOR

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Bachelor of Arts in British and American Culture
Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications
Sogang University
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Science in Hotel Administration
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2008

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Thesis Approval

The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

November 6, 20 08

The Thesis prepared by

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Entitled

The Impact of Conference Food Function Performance on

Attendee Satisfaction and Behavior

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Hotel Administration

Examination Committee Chair

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1017-53

ABSTRACT

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A conference event with high attendance brings in economic resources to the destination city as well as hosting company. Its food functions in particular can be an effective tool to satisfy attendees and build good attendance, as it empowers an attendee's sensory memory of an event. Besides, nutritiously balanced food, which is sought-after these days, improves an attendee's learning ability. The purpose of this research was to identify factors that affect the attendee's perceived performance of and satisfaction with conference food function, and further, to understand an attendee's return intention based on the satisfaction level. It is concluded that the quality of food content is the sole determinant of an attendee's satisfaction with the food function performance and a food function predicts an attendee's intention to return. Ultimately, this research provides effective implications to the industry as to ways to make a successful conference by utilizing food functions to maximize attendee satisfaction.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Yen-Soon Kim, who envisioned this research and led it to a completion. My warm thanks also goes to my entire committee members: Dr. Curtis Love, Dr. Carola Raab, and Dr. Keong Leong, who willingly devoted their outstanding academic insights into the research. I should recognize and thank the Vanguard Integrity Professionals Inc. for granting this research survey, as well as Michelle Millar for her great help. I am also appreciative to the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration for the education and experiences I received.

I would like to express gratitude to everybody who helped me in any manner in the course of my study at UNLV. Especially to my dear friends: Jae-gyung and Charles, Jieun, Min-jeong, Marilyn, Seok-won and his family, Woo-hyoung, Jun-mo and Jung-in, Joo-hee, Eun-kyu, Amanda, Mrs. Whang and Sun-oh and Sun-hye. You have become an invaluable part of my memories here. To my super-sweet friends who have been on my side for years: Minji, Eon-ju, Sang-mi, Go-woon, Hye-won and her family, Hyun-joo, Seong-min, Mihye, Hye-jin, Jihye, Sun-young Lee, Jieun Oh, Sun-young Kim, Jieun Lee. Thank you for allowing me such great friendship despite all my unbearable qualities and physical distance. To my love, having a best friend like you made me feel blessed every minute in these years apart.

Lastly and foremost, I want to give my warmest love to my family, who taught me one has to endeavor to reach their dreams. What I have learned from your unending care, sacrifice and understanding had me carry on as always.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Quality Food at Conferences

In the evident belief that creative thinking is provoked by exotic settings, more conferences are being held in diverse locations of our society. The notion of the economic impact of the conference industry is definitely a booster for its rapid expansion. It is widely acknowledged that a conference event serves as a resource for bringing tourist dollars to the destination city. In addition, it can promote the city's national and regional image, which in turn may bring additional visitors to the area. A recent study performed by the Convention Industry Council reported that total expenditure for the convention and meeting industry in 2005 in the U.S. was $107.2 billion (2007). The food and beverage sector accounts for 28% of the total expenditure for the convention industry, which is the single largest portion (Russell, 2006). This figure increased to 31 % in 2006 (Russell, 2007).

Empowered Attendee Experience

Creating and maintaining excitement throughout an entire conference is critical in satisfying conference attendees. A quality food function is one tool that can be utilized to create such excitement and, at the same time, memories. Chris Pentz, president of the Levittown, PA-based Pentz Group Communications asserts, "you can have a wonderful meeting, put a lot of time and effort and work into it, but they will only remember the

food; that's the reality (Amer, 2004, p.44)." A recent study also verified that the sensory environment provoked by food and drink reinforces the uniqueness and memorability of a guest's experience (Iommazzo, 2002). Paolo Stefani, executive chef of the James Allen Center, stresses that "when it comes to planning food and beverage for groups, we stress that it's not a meal: it's an experience (A new take on taste, 2006, p.10)." One article introduced the "James Bond" evening banquet held at Northwestern University, with ancient castle walls, sleek tables outfitted in black and white and a mysterious cigar lounge (Durocher, 2004). In this event, conference attendees were greatly pleased with this unexpected preparation. Some resorts are offering teambuilding programs through a food making experience. At Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, a cooking challenge is a popular teambuilding option, which has satisfied as many as 600 meeting attendees over 2 to 3 day period. Meanwhile, at the Insurance Conference Planners Association (ICPA)'s northeast chapter meeting held at Sagamore Resort in Bolton Landing, New York, attendees participated with the resort's chefs in the kitchen in preparing a gala luncheon feast. These examples effectively illustrate how significantly food functions can turn an event into an unforgettable experience.

Nutritional Effect on Learning Ability

In addition to the role food plays in creating a memorable experience, many nutrition specialists note its nutritional effect on learning ability. An article by Williams (2003) explores the brain-friendly nutrition at food functions. According to this article, food at conferences should be high in protein with complex carbohydrates and low fat content. Protein rich foods form the foundation of brain-friendly nutrition, since it creates neurotransmitters that are key factors for memory and learning. Fats are not strictly

restricted, since the Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs) are included in fats. EFAs protect the myelin sheath and prevent nerve impulses from slowing down, so they can sustain concentration and memory. A small amount of complex carbohydrates are significant fuel for the brain as they produce glucose, which is the most basic type of energy. It is not recommended to overdo the carbohydrates, which will excessively relax the body by creating the neurotransmitter serotonin. Vitamins and minerals are great helpers for brain activity, while supplements such as caffeine and sugar are not advisable due to their "quick high" effect. Caffeine in coffee, tea and soda drinks basically dehydrates attendees' bodies and makes them more tired after a short-term alertness. This is why a lot of water is required for caffeine drinkers. Sugar is not recommended until the last part of the sessions, since it requires other nutrients in our body to digest. In this regard, the proper snack for attendees will include nuts, seeds and dried fruits. Lastly, alcohol is definitely brain-unfriendly, as it strongly depresses brain function and learning ability. Dr. Ruth Kava, director of nutrition at the New-York based American Council on Science and Health explains that people should not over-stuff themselves with high-fat foods at meetings because it tends to make them sleepy (Cooper & Solmo, 1996).

As a health-conscious lifestyle becomes a main concern for consumers, they started demanding healthier food at the conferences they attend (Thompson, 1993). In the convention industry, the concept of "consumers" can refer to attendees and exhibitors (end-users) and meeting planners (intermediary consumer) (Severt & Palakurthil, 2008). In order for a conference to successfully attract their customers, it is crucial to embrace their demands. To cope with this health-conscious dining style, some catering operators at hotels and convention centers put more effort into designing healthier food options.

For example, Aramark, which serves 30 convention centers nationwide, has launched a new dining concept called "Convention Cafes & Restaurants (CC&R)" to offer fresher and more upscale fare (Iommazzo, 2002). This café is positioned on the exhibit hallway and offers healthier food to attendees. CC&R is now operated at convention centers in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Cincinnati. Aramark also encourages these local convention centers to develop more local recipes and core menu items. Another program that Aramark is offering convention centers is called "Temporary Dining Units (TDUs)." Through this program, this company plans to develop menus strictly for convention centers that will offer freshly made food such as salads and sandwich wraps. Similar efforts can be found in the hotel catering sector. Starwood introduced a "Low-Carb Life-style by Sheraton" program, which features 15 menu items containing less than five net carbohydrates and an assortment of low-carb drinks (Durocher, 2004). Hyatt and Fairmont are offering Atkins-friendly banquet menus, which basically refer to low-carb options. Marriott International designed a "Fit-for-You" menu program, which offers health-conscious and carb-conscious food. Government organizations such as The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have also presented information that educates Americans about healthful diets (Wintergreen, 1993). Their "Food Guide Pyramid" advises that Americans eat 6 to11 servings of breads, cereals and grains a day: 3 to 5 servings of vegetables, 2 to 4 servings of milk, yogurt and cheese, and 2 to 3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, peas, eggs and nuts. It also suggests that fats, oils and sweets be used sparingly.

A recent article investigates the rising trend of convention center catering and points out five phenomena: sustainable cuisine, formal menu tastings, display cooking, smaller

and more complete portions and full-service package solutions (Convention Center Catering Trends, 2007). Sustainable cuisine represents an eco-friendly cuisine made from organic produce. Formal menu tasting implies the movement to standardize the food making process and its tasting. The third factor, display cooking, explains that convention center caterings gradually open their sizzling cooking station in order to interact with customers. The complete portion is to point out that a multiple course sit-down menu is replaced by three-course meals and the food portions are getting smaller and yet are complete. The last phenomenon, full-service package solutions, denotes that catering sales and operations directors are starting to serve as a single provider to help convention organizers understand their catering programs.

Problem Statement

The role that a food function plays in the whole conference program is quite frequently neglected or looked down at in the industry as well as in academia. Little research has been conducted on an attendee's perceived food quality and its impact on their satisfaction. In the industry, when it comes to the food function, the primary concern usually goes to its entitled budget, which takes up a massive portion of the total conference budget. As food is prepared with an obvious intention to save cost, it is quite likely that the same ingredients are utilized into several meals, and meals are presented unattractively. As a result, attendees come a long way only to be stuck in a confined conference venue and to be provided with a conventional, repetitive and non-nutritious menu. Generally, conference food is unrecognizable, oversauced and uninspired.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of attendees' perceived food function performance on their satisfaction with and future behavior intention toward a conference. In other words, this research seeks to identify how an attendee's perceived performance of food factors affects their satisfaction toward the overall food function. Further, this research goes on to examine how a certain level of the attendee's satisfaction with food functions affects their behavioral intention to return for a future conference.

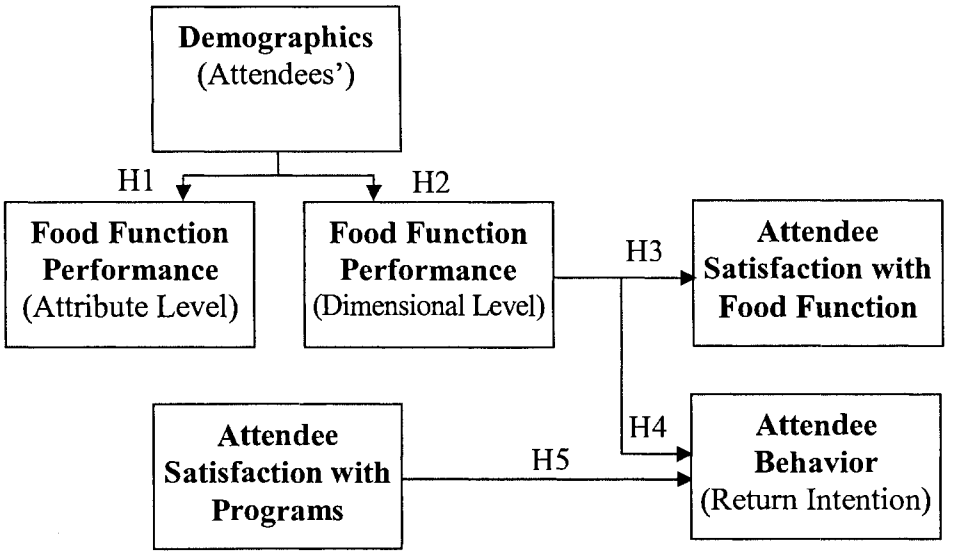
Research Questions

1. What are the differences in the level of attendee satisfaction based on demographic characteristics?
2. What are the food attributes at conferences that satisfy attendees?
3. What are the food attributes at conferences that encourage attendees' return intention?

Model Proposition

The model representing the relationship among food function performance, satisfaction and behavior is proposed (Figure 1). The model explains that demographic figures of attendees influence their perceived performance of conference food functions. Dimensional food function factors are expected to have an impact not only on the attendees' satisfaction but also on their intention to return. In addition, an attendee's satisfaction with different types of conference programs is expected to result in their intention to return as well.

Figure 1. The Proposed Model of the Relationship among Food Function Performance, Satisfaction and Behavior



Hypotheses

Based on the model proposed, five hypotheses are created accordingly.

H_0 1: No significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with food function attributes and their demographic characteristics.

H_a 1: Significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with food function attributes and their demographic characteristics.

H_0 2: No significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors and their demographic characteristics.

H_a 2: Significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors and their demographic characteristics.

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H_0 3: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is not positively related to their satisfaction with the overall food functions.

H_a 3: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is positively related to their satisfaction with the overall food functions.

H_0 4: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is not positively related to their intention to return.

H_a 4: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is positively related to their return intention to return.

H_0 5: An attendee's satisfaction with conference programs is not positively related to their intention to return.

H_a 5: An attendee's satisfaction with conference programs is positively related to their intention to return.

Significance of the Research

It is expected that this research will reveal what current attendees want to have improved in terms of a conference food function. Ultimately, this research will contribute to creating a successful conference by utilizing food functions to maximize attendee satisfaction.

Definition of Terms

The terms specific to this research are defined as listed below. The definitions are described as the Convention Industry Council introduced in their glossary for accepted practices in the convention industry (Accepted Practices Exchange, 2005).

Conference vs. convention: A conference is defined as an event used by any organization to meet and exchange views, open a debate or give publicity on a specific issue. A convention refers to an event where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. Although not generally used as separate meanings, conferences are usually of short duration and on a smaller scale with specific objectives. Through a survey with attendees of a corporate conference, this research aims to discuss findings specific only to the conference industry.

Food function: A food function refers to every type of function in a conference that is designed to provide meals to attendees. Typically, it can include breakfast, lunch, dinner, luncheon, reception and banquet.

Perceived performance: A predictor of customer satisfaction used in many studies (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). As perceived performance is deemed to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction by business studies and organizations, it is an adequate way to determine attendee satisfaction in the convention industry (Severt, Wang, Chen & Breiter, 2007).

Luncheon: A light noonday meal, sometimes with speeches or presentations.

Reception: A stand-up social function where beverages and light foods are served.

Banquet: A formal, often ceremonial, dinner for a select group of people, often in honor of a particular person.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Convention Industry

The meetings, conventions, exhibitions and incentive travel segment is the 29th largest contributor to the gross national product of the U.S. In 2004, the industry generated $122.31 billion in total expenditure, which is roughly 8 percent of the overall $1.3 trillion U.S. travel and tourism industry (Power, 2005). Sanders (2004) noted that severe competition among convention centers forced them to adopt more dramatic promotion strategies, such as reduced rental rates, discounts on food service and exhibition services, free receptions and transportation and funding or entertainment and special events. Severt et al. (2007) also points out that understanding an attendees' decision making process has become more important than ever as they have a large selection of meetings and conferences to choose from. Taking into consideration that a food function is one of the effective tools to promote a conference, a well-performed food function can save a conference from the severe competition. In other words, the key to this competition is who can make the best use of the 31 percent of their budget entitled to the food and beverage expenditure.

Attendee Participation Process

What makes a successful conference is a high level of attendance. To obtain this, a thorough understanding of what motivates conference attendance is crucial. Considerable research has addressed the issue of the convention participation process, which can be largely divided into two subsets: the meeting planner's site selection process and attendees' participation process. It is widely acknowledged that meeting planners play a key role in the site selection of an event. Baloglu & Love (2005) argue that the meeting planners' professional information and experiences empower their influence on the conference site selection. Major site selection factors identified in empirical studies include accessibility, availability of facility, quality of service, affordability, destination image and attractions/entertainment (Lee & Back, 2005). The most powerful factors in meeting planners' site selection process were adequacy of physical facilities and accessibility.

As for the attendee's participation process, the second subset, Price (1993) explains that attendees consider leadership, networking, education and professional savvy in choosing a conference. Although most research has agreed with Price, Zelinlsky (1994) and Oppermann (1995) added that hosting a conference in a favorable destination itself could build good attendance. Oppermann (1996) also emphasized the role of destination by asserting that meeting planners should understand which destinations are more or less favored. In the meantime, the reasons attendees decide not to come to conferences were proven to be lack of funding, time constraints, inaccessibility of the destination and family obligations (Lee & Back, 2005).

The importance-performance analysis is one of the theories that is frequently applied to exploring the participation process (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Breiter & Milman, 2005; Wu & Weber, 2005). Importance and performance of services are measured on a set of selected attributes, however an attendee's motivation and satisfaction are not measured. Severt et al's (2007) and Bauer, Law, Tse and Weber's (2008) studies put a priority on the motivation and satisfaction. Based on a regional conference, Severt et al. (2007) identified five dimensional conference motivations: activities and opportunities, networking, convenience of the conference, education benefits and products. On the other hand, Bauer et al.'s study was based on International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Telecom World 2006 in Hong Kong and concluded that business and networking opportunities were the biggest motivators for attendance. These factors are partially confirmed by Rittichainuwat et al.'s (2001) study that examined the motivations, inhibitors and facilitators of attending an international conference. This study argued that the motivations to attend were self-enhancement, business and association activities and sightseeing, while inhibitors being "conference and personal constraints," "distance, time and money" and facilitators being "affordability and availability of time," "family/spouse" and "distance and ease of access."

Most of these studies do not address the issue of food functions' role in an attendee's participation process. A couple of the studies on a convention center's performance did include accessibility or availability of foodservice facilities in their attributes affecting attendee satisfaction (Breiter & Milman, 2005; Wu & Weber, 2005). These attributes turned out to be of low priority and low importance. Lee, Y., Lee, C., Lee, S. and Babin's (2008) study on festivalscapes (general atmosphere experienced by festival patrons) was

the only study that examined food attributes and admitted their influence on attendee satisfaction. Food attribute was positively associated with positive emotion and satisfaction, and negatively associated with negative emotion, which in turn generated positive satisfaction. This study concluded that food quality and variety should be guaranteed in an effort to earn attendee satisfaction.

As for the studies focusing on a restaurant setting, abundant empirical studies have explored the underlining factors that affect customer satisfaction in restaurants. A review of restaurant customer satisfaction studies found that a great dining experience determines guest satisfaction. Gupta, McLaughlin and Gomez (2007) figured out that the attributes influencing a guest's perceived food quality most were the server appearance, followed by friendly service, prompt seating, food presentation, cheerful greeting, clean and dry table, food portion, temperature, prompt serving, delicious food, server's prompt and exact service, food quality and cost appropriateness. Knutson (1988) found employee greeting, restaurant atmosphere, speed of service and convenience as drivers for guest satisfaction. Gupta et al. (2007) also found that other studies have employed numerous factors that influence customer satisfaction with a dining experience: waiting time, quality of service, responsiveness of front-line employees, menu variety, food prices, food quality, food-quality consistency, ambience of the facilities and convenience.

Another industry that has examined food performance and customer satisfaction is the hospital industry, as food service in a hospital is an essential component of a treatment process. Sahin, Demir, Celik and Teke (2006) evaluated whether the food served to hospital patients met their expectation. Their study revealed that attributes with high reliable correlations with a patient's overall satisfaction were, in order of importance,

taste of food, appearance of food, amount of food, variability of foods, warmth of food, time of food distribution, cleanness of fork, spoon and dishes and attitude and behaviors of the serving staff. Further, Sahin et al. asserted that the distribution time of food would better be decided by patients and not by staffs. It was also advised that a patient's preference should be taken into account by dieticians in planning menus. As compared to the conference setting, however, hospital food cannot be as diverse because a patient's diet is a part of their treatment. Still, other suggestions are valid in a conference setting in a sense that meeting planners should listen to attendees when deciding food service time and menu.

Service Performance and Attendee Satisfaction

One way of evaluating performance is assessing the attributes which consumers deem critical within the evaluated event. In the business studies, performance evaluation is commonly being utilized to identify management-controlled performance attributes of their product and service. It is acknowledged that knowing the performance level of specific attributes in customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction (CS/D) can allow for efficient product management by maximizing the consumer's consumption experience (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Tsiotsou, 2006). Using the performance attributes in evaluating overall satisfaction provides researchers with the ability to use more specific questions in the construction of data measurement instruments (Mittal, Kumar & Tsiros, 1999). As related to the conference industry, Severt et al. (2007) concluded that strong performance cannot guarantee an attendee's return but can certainly provide a better chance than poor performance can. Conference performance/satisfaction is significant when attendees

determine their likelihood to participate in subsequent conferences. Previous studies share consistent viewpoints on the appropriateness of performance evaluation in measuring consumer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Oliver, 1993). This research will create performance attributes related to a conference food function and utilize them as a means of gauging the satisfaction.

Attendee Satisfaction and Behavioral Intention

A stream of research in the marketing area has agreed upon that customer satisfaction is expected to result in repeat purchase. Customer satisfaction is also proven to have a close relationship with purchase intentions (Mittal, et al., 1999: Swan & Combs, 1976). Swan and Combs explain that satisfaction is a post-purchase attitude that affects cognitive and affective aspects in pre-purchase, purchase and post purchase phases of buying goods and choosing services. Brown & Reingen (1987) and Skogland & Siguaw (2004) explain customer satisfaction and loyalty in terms of 3 theoretical foundations: customer satisfaction, involvement and customer loyalty. In this theory, customer satisfaction is defined as "an overall evaluation of performance based on all prior experiences with a firm" (p. 222). As a means of measuring satisfaction, Skogland and Siguaw introduce two popular theories: the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm and comparison level theory. According to the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm, customers decide their satisfaction level by comparing their actual experiences with their previous ones. Confirmation only occurs when the actual performance matches the previous standard.

The comparison level theory suggests that consumers use comparison levels for alternative relationships to decide satisfaction with and propensity to remain in a relationship. Further, Skogland and Siguaw point out that recognition plays a great role in remaining in a relationship. Ego involvement occurs especially upon relatively important purchases that are related to a consumer's self-image and status. In other words, satisfaction should encourage ego involvement that in turn will empower customer loyalty. According to Skogland and Siguaw's definition, customer loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences' and marketing efforts' having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p.224). It is divided into attitudinal commitment such as price insensitivity and more-overt loyalty behavior such as positive word of mouth and repeat business.

Some restaurant studies observed that the first and last impressions bring the greatest impact of repeat-purchase intentions, followed by excellence in service and food quality (Gupta et al., 2007). Gupta et al. noted that the importance of a particular attribute tends to vary in accordance with the type of restaurant and customer. For example, food quality was a critical attribute influencing repeat-purchase intentions in full-service restaurants, whereas waiting time mattered more in quick-service restaurants. In an effort to understand the difference, Gupta introduced a new term, "elasticity: a measure of how guest count responds to an attribute" (p.288) and located the detailed attributes according to satisfaction and elasticity on a 2*2 matrix. For instance, the attributes with high elasticity but low satisfaction scores indicate that these attributes are likely to generate much response in overall guest counts. Results showed that improvements in delicious

food, cost appropriateness, prompt service (high elasticity, low satisfaction) will generate repeat visitors, while improvements in server appearance, clean table, cheerful greeting (low elasticity, high satisfaction) will not.

While a wealth of research concluded that relationships existed among performance, expectation, satisfaction and behavioral intentions, this finding has not been applied to conference attendees, until a few researchers studied the perceptions of the convention consumers (Oliver, 1993). Oliver argues that the conference attendee studies mainly discuss convention consumers' decision-making process including performance evaluation, satisfaction judgment and behavioral intention regarding the conference. Past consumer satisfaction and loyalty studies agree that satisfied customers should present greater loyalty than dissatisfied ones do. Likewise, in a convention setting, it is expected that satisfaction generates favorable word-of mouth that in turn generates return intentions. Severt et al. (2007) agree that conference attendees' satisfaction helps to reinforce positive feelings, making them want to return to the conference next year. Most of the time, word-of-mouth is examined by asking a customer's intention to say positive or negative things about a business (Swan & Oliver, 1989). Most importantly, the review of the marketing studies indicates that in order for conferences to realize a higher level of attendee repeat business, they should recognize their attendees so distinctly that these attendees can attach their emotional and cognitive loyalty to the conference and come back for the next one.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Procedure

The survey design that this research utilized was a self-administered questionnaire that was mailed to 313 attendees of a corporate conference, the Vanguard Security Conference 2008 (VSC 2008).

The survey instrument was a two-page questionnaire designed to measure the attendee's perceived performance of the conference food function. The questionnaire was developed through a twofold process. First, an in-depth literature review was conducted on the topics related to the convention industry and its food functions, as well as customer satisfaction and behavior in the business studies and food industry. This review served as groundwork to identify major food attributes that had an influence on attendees' perceived performance and to create relevant demographic and behavior questions. Referring to the factors identified by reviewed studies, this research collected thirty questions on the food function attributes. Second, the questions were reviewed by a focus group of twenty meeting planners, who had hosted the expected respondents of the survey over the years. Throughout this focus group meeting, the number of food attribute items was narrowed down to twenty one, and four behavior and four demographic questions were finalized. This twofold process equipped a safe boundary to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. Especially, in the focus group interview, the questionnaire

was tested by the interviewees of VSC organizers. This enabled the questionnaire to obtain a decent level of reliability.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to mark their overall satisfaction with all of the food functions provided over a four-day conference. Over the four-day period, breakfast was served daily, and luncheons and receptions were prepared on the first three days. In the middle section of the questionnaire, the questions relating to the satisfaction level with three types of conference programs, education session, networking program and food function were added. Questions measuring the satisfaction with food function attributes and conference programs were asked on a five point Likert-scale ranging from 1: very dissatisfied to 5: very satisfied. The last two sections of the questionnaire were allotted to the demographic and behavior questions. Four demographic questions asked about age, gender, years of field experience and education. Behavior questions mainly asked respondents' formal experience in attending conferences and their return intention formed by their VSC 2008 experience.

Sampling Frame, Data Collection

The sampling frame for this research was attendees at a yearly corporate conference, VSC 2008. The hosting company of the conference, Vanguard Integrity Professionals Inc. has hosted this yearly conference for their customers in different cities for eight years. Most of the attendees were the company's long-term customers who had returned to the conference several times. VSC has invited mostly regular attendees, and has provided quite consistent program formats and session topics, over the years. In this situation, an attendee's satisfaction is expected to be easily influenced by a small dynamic change,

such as a food function, in the conference programs. This is why the sample is considered ideal for the research purpose.

The Vanguard Integrity Professionals Inc. informed the conference attendees of this survey project at the VSC 2008's closing ceremony. Three hundred attendees participate in the company's yearly conference on average, while 313 did this year. The company provided a mailing list of the 313 attendees for this research. The questionnaires were mailed to the 313 attendees of VSC 2008. Every attendee was asked to return the completed form by mail with a self-addressed return envelope included with the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. Using SPSS enabled this research to obtain both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics including one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), factor analysis, correlation and regression. Descriptive statistics illustrated the distribution of the demographics and behavior of the respondents. One-way ANOVA was utilized with an aim to identify significant mean differences between the respondents' satisfaction levels and their demographics. The main purpose of adopting factor analysis was to obtain a relatively small number of variables that can explain most of the variances among the attributes and to apply the derived dimensional factors in subsequent one-way ANOVA and multiple regression analysis. The principal components and orthogonal (VARIMAX) rotation method was chosen in the factor analysis. The appropriateness of the factor analysis was assessed by a reliability alpha test. Variables with a factor loading equal to or greater than

0.5 were considered significant. To find a correlation among those factors derived from the factor analysis and an attendee's satisfaction level and return intention, the multiple linear regression analysis was conducted at a 0.05 significance level.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter presents the result of data analysis. To define profiles of respondents and detect relationship between their responses, one-way ANOVA analysis was employed. Another primary purpose of this research was to find the impact of the food function performance on overall attendee satisfaction and return intention. For this purpose, factor analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis were conducted using SPSS 16.0.

Response Rate

Out of the 313 questionnaires distributed to attendees of the VSC 2008, 103 usable responses were returned. In all, the responses represent a 33.23% response rate. Considering the survey was conducted through a mail survey, the response rate of 33.23% is a satisfying number, as most of the mail surveys performed by the hosting company usually record a 30% response rate.

Profile of Respondents

In order to define the nature of respondents, the descriptive statistics were applied in studying demographic data collected through questionnaires (Table 1). The total number of valid responses in the demographic sector fell down to 98 as 5 respondents refused to

offer their demographic information. Males (60.2%) slightly outnumbered females (39.8%). This is specific to the industry rather than the conference. The conference was about computer security, where a majority of specialists in this particular industry are males. A majority of the respondents were 50 years old or older (43.9%) or 40-49 years old (38.8%), followed by less than 40 years old (17.3%). It turned out that less than an half of them had worked in the computer security area for more than 20 years (44.9%), while the others for 11-20 years (28.6%) and for 10 years or less (26.5%). The education level of respondents was college or master's degree (55.1%) and high school or some college (44.9%). As far as their behavior in attending conferences was concerned, most of them answered that they would attend a conference at least once per year: once (51.6%), twice or more (21.1%), none (27.4%). Speaking of VSC 2008 alone, respondents were roughly equally divided between first-time attendees (48.4%) and repeating attendees (51.6%). Lastly, their motivation to attend the conference was mainly "education" (62.2%), followed by "required by company" (21.1%) and "Networking with business people" (16.7%).

Attendee Satisfaction

Attendee Satisfaction with Food Function Attributes

The descriptive statistics were performed to achieve mean scores and standard deviations of the twenty attributes of food functions at the VSC 2008 (Table 2). The satisfaction level was measured on a 5 point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree: 2=disagree: 3=neutral: 4=agree: 5=strongly agree. While the mean score for the

Table 1: Profile of Respondents (N=98)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	59	60.2
Female	39	39.8
Age		
Less than 40	17	17.3
40-49	38	38.8
50 or more	43	43.9
No. of years in current profession		
10 or less	26	26.5
11-20	28	28.6
More than 20	44	44.9
Education level		
High school or some college	44	44.9
College or master's degree	54	55.1
No. of attending conferences per year		
None	26	27.4
1	49	51.6
2 or more	20	21.1
No. of attendance in this conference in total		
1	46	48.4
2 or more	49	51.6
Motivation to attend this conference		
Education	56	62.2
Required by company	19	21.1
Networking with businesspeople	15	16.7

satisfaction with the overall food functions was 4.063, the mean scores for each food function attribute ranged from 3.48 to 4.41. The standard deviations ranged from 0.708 to 1.112. The highest satisfaction level reported by the respondents was towards "available utensils (4.41)." Attributes that reported higher satisfaction than the overall mean were "prompt service (4.38)," "attractive food (4.37)," "fresh ingredients (4.36)," "Friendly

server (4.32)," "correct order (4.30)," "function to help network (4.29)," "proper food temperature (4.26)," "dining room ambiance (4.15)," "tasty food (4.14)," "comfortable sitting (4.08)," in the order of highest score. Attributes that reported lower satisfaction were "sufficient space between seats (4.06)," "unique menu selection (3.94)," "nutritious menu selection (3.89)," "right menu (3.89)," "variable menu (3.89)," "memorable experience (3.73)," "variable beverage (3.72)," "special dietaries (3.60)," "menu to keep awake (3.48)," in the order of highest score.

Table 2: Respondents' Satisfaction with Food Function Attributes

Food function attributes	N	Mean	S. D.
Available utensils	103	4.41	.785
Prompt service	103	4.38	.768
Attractive food	99	4.37	.708
Fresh ingredients	103	4.36	.752
Friendly server	103	4.32	.717
Correct order	100	4.30	.798
Function to help network	102	4.29	.752
Proper food temperature	101	4.26	.770
Dining room ambiance	99	4.15	.825
Tasty food	103	4.14	.864
Comfortable sitting	102	4.08	.817
Sufficient space between seats	102	4.06	.963
Unique menu selection	103	3.94	.938
Nutritious menu selection	102	3.89	.932
Right menu	102	3.89	1.004
Variable menu	99	3.89	1.029
Memorable food function	103	3.73	.899
Variable beverage	102	3.72	1.120
Special dietaries	85	3.60	.928
Menu to keep awake	101	3.48	.923

Satisfaction level measured on the 5 point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree: 2=disagree: 3=neutral: 4=agree: 5=strongly agree
Overall mean=4.063, N=103

Relationship between Satisfaction with Food Function Attributes and Respondent's Demographic Characteristics

For the purpose of identifying the respondents' demographic characteristics in relation to their satisfaction with twenty food function attributes, hypothesis 1 was proposed in the first chapter. Below are the null hypothesis (H_0) and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) as proposed earlier.

H_0 1: No significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with food function attributes and their demographic characteristics.

H_a 1: Significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with food function attributes and their demographic characteristics.

A one-way ANOVA test was employed to verify these hypotheses. A post hoc test using the Fisher's least-significant difference (LSD) was conducted to detect differences between demographic groups. The differences were considered significant at $p<0.05$. The LSD method automatically adjusts the size of the critical value used to decide whether an observed difference between two means is significant (Schuyler, 2000). The demographic characteristics that were measured in comparison to the satisfaction with each food function attribute were "gender," "age," "number of years in the current profession," "education level," "number of attending conference per year," "number of attending VSC" and "motivation." The significant differences were detected between satisfaction and "gender," "age," "education level," "number of attending conference per year," "number of attending VSC" and "motivation."

At first, gender groups presented meaningful mean differences in their satisfaction level with "fresh ingredients"(Table 3) and "function to help network" (Table 4) "Fresh ingredients" was found satisfying more by females than males (p=0.04). As for "function to help network," males were shown to have a higher satisfaction level than that of females (p =0.017).

Table 3: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Fresh Ingredients and Gender

Attributes	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			Male	Female		
Fresh ingredients	Gender	N	59	39	4.354	0.04
		Mean	4.31	4.59		
		S.D.	0.676	0.637		
(*I*) Gender	(*J*) Gender			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
Male	Female			-.28*		

Table 4: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Function to Help Network and Gender

Attributes	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			Male	Female		
Function to help network	Gender	N	46	26	5.979	0.017
		Mean	4.48	4.08		
		S.D.	0.586	0.796		
(*I*) Gender	(*J*) Gender			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
Male	Female			.4*		

By age, it was confirmed that different age groups exhibited meaningful mean differences in their satisfaction with "variable beverage" attribute (Table 5). Age groups below 40 years old were greatly less satisfied with the variety of beverages than those of 40-49 years old (p=0.01) and more than 50 years old did (p=0.011).

Table 5: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Variable Beverage and Age

Attribute	Factor		Categories			F value	p-Value
			< 40	40-49	≥50		
Variable Beverage	Age	N	17	37	43	4.007	0.021
		Mean	3.12	3.92	3.88		
		S.D.	1.317	0.954	0.981		
	(*I*) Age		(*J*) Age		Mean difference (*I-J*)		Sig.
	<40		40-49		-.801*		.010
			≥50		-.766*		.011

Based on the respondents' education level, the most relevant attributes were "correct order" (Table 6) and "special dietary" (Table 7). The result affirmed that attendees with higher education level tended to be more satisfied with both "correct order" ($p= 0.008$) and "special dietary" ($p=0.016$).

Table 6: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Correct Order and Education

Attribute	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			High school-Some college	College-Master's		
Correct order	Education level	N	42	53	7.275	0.008
		Mean	4.12	4.51		
		S.D.	0.832	0.576		
(*I*) High school-Some college	(*J*) College-Master's degree			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
High school-Some college	College-master's degree			-.29*		

Table 7: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Special Dietary and Education

Attribute	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			High school-Some college	College-Master's		
Special dietary	Education level	N	36	44	6.11	0.016
		Mean	3.36	3.84		
		S.D.	.723	.963		
(*I*) High school-Some college	(*J*) College-Master's degree			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
High school-Some college	College-Master's degree			-.48*		

Attendee satisfaction scores also differed based on demographic figures related to attendees' behavioral patterns including "number of attending conference per year," "number of attending VSC" and "motivation." Based on the "number of attending conference per year," the significant mean difference between groups was found in the "sufficient space between chairs" attribute (Table 8). The Post Hoc test using LSD method revealed that those who would attend conferences twice or more per year were significantly more satisfied than those who would do so once a year (p=0.012). On the other hand, this demographic figure also illustrated a distinct link to the attribute, "menu to keep awake" (Table 9). Attendees who would attend conferences more than twice per

Table 8: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Sufficient Space between Chairs and Number of Attending Conference per Year

Attribute	Factor		Categories			F value	p-Value
			0	1	≥2		
Sufficient space between chairs	No. of attending conference/yr	N	18	37	15	3.327	0.042
		Mean	4.06	3.89	4.6		
		S.D.	0.639	1.075	0.632		
	(*I*) No. of attending conference/yr		(*J*) No. of attending conference/yr		Mean difference (*I-J*)		Sig.
	1		≥2		-.708*		.012

Table 9: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Menu to Help Awake and Number of Attending Conference per Year

Attribute	Factor		Categories			F value	p-Value
			0	1	≥2		
Menu to keep awake	No. of attending conference/yr	N	18	37	15	3.17	0.048
		Mean	3.33	3.38	4.0		
		S.D.	0.686	0.982	0.756		
	(*I*) No. of attending conference/yr		(*J*) No. of attending conference/yr		Mean difference (*I-J*)		Sig.
	≥2		0		.667*		.032
			1		.622*		.023

year were more satisfied with the menu's ability to keep them awake in sessions than those who would attend one conference per year (p =0.023) or those who attended none (p =0.032).

In the mean time, "number of attending VSC in total" turned out to be related to the "prompt service" (Table 10), "tasty food" (Table 11) and "memorable food function" (Table 12). Those who returned to the conference were less satisfied with the food function's prompt service than those who attended the conference for the first time (p=0.033). As for "tasty food," those repeat attendees were less satisfied with the taste of the food than those who attended the conference for the first time (p=0.004). Similarly, repeat attendees demonstrated lower satisfaction with the statement, "the food functions were of a memorable experience" than first-time attendees did (p=0.019). In all, repeat attendees were commonly less satisfied with these three attributes.

Table 10: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Prompt Service and Number of Attending VSC

Attribute	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			1	≥2		
Prompt service	No. of attending VSC	N	37	33	4.755	0.033
		Mean	4.54	4.18		
		S.D.	0.558	0.808		
(*I*) No. of attending VSC	(*J*) No. of attending VSC		Mean difference (*I-J*)			
1	≥2		.36*			

Table 11: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Tasty Food and Number of Attending VSC

Attribute	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			1	≥2		
Tasty food	No. of attending VSC	N	46	49	8.565	0.004
		Mean	4.41	3.96		
		S.D.	0.686	0.815		
(*I*) No. of attending VSC	(*J*) No. of attending VSC			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
1	≥2			.45*		

Table 12: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Memorable Food Function and Number of Attending VSC

Attribute	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			1	≥2		
Memorable food function	No. of attending VSC	N	46	49	5.721	0.019
		Mean	3.93	3.53		
		S.D.	0.827	0.819		
(*I*) No. of attending VSC	(*J*) No. of attending VSC			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
1	≥2			.4*		

Lastly, another demographic figure related to conference attending behavior was motivation. Attendees' motivation to attend the conference had to do with the attribute, "availability of utensils" (Table 13). A significant difference was found between the respondents who came for "networking with businesspeople" versus those who were "required to attend by the company" or came for "education." Respondents with "networking with businesspeople" motivation were greatly more satisfied with availability of utensils than those with other motivations ("education" p=.010, "required by company" p=0.018).

Table 13: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Availability of Utensils and Motivation

Attribute	Factor		Categories			F value	p-Value
			Networking	Education	Required by co.		
Availability of utensils	Motivation	N	11	42	14	3.911	0.025
		Mean	4.91	4.40	4.36		
		S.D.	0.302	0.544	0.745		
(*I*) Motivation		(*J*) Motivation			Mean difference (*I-J*)		Sig.
Networking		Education			.504*		.010
		Required by co.			.552*		.018

Accordingly, null hypothesis 1 is rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis 1: "significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with food function attributes and their demographic characteristics."

Measurement of Attendee Satisfaction with Food Function Attributes

In order to examine the structure of the food function attributes, an exploratory factor analysis was employed. Principle component analysis (PCA) using orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX) was used for the factor analysis. PCA is an appropriate selection when the primary concern is on predicting the minimum number of factors needed to account for the maximum portion of the variance rather than on obtaining the latent dimensions contained in the variables. VARIMAX is particularly suited to determining the minimum number of factors to account for the maximum amount of variance in the data (Hair et al., 1998). The loading cut-off point of 0.5 was set with the use of a $p<0.05$. A .50 loading implies that 25 percent of the variance is accounted for by the factors, which should be considered practically significant (Hair et al., 1998) The sample size of 103 is appropriate as it slightly exceeds the minimum requirement of 100 (Hair et al., 1998). The appropriateness of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by using both Bartlett's test

for sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO-MSA). Bartlett's test showed the value of 918.252 and the associated significance was 0.00. This test implicates that nonzero correlations exist in these attributes at the significance level of 0.05. The KMO measure showed the value of 0.86, when values of 0.50 or above were required for good factor analysis (Hair et al., 1998). After all, both of the two tests confirm the adequacy of the factor analysis.

The analysis generated a clear factor structure between four factors with twenty attributes (Table 14). These four dimensional factors explained 63.856% of the total variance. Communality estimates ranged from 0.469 to 0.803. One attribute, "variable menu," loaded on two factors, indicating that there was a minimal overlap among those two factors. As a result of quality interpretation on eigenvalue, those four dimensional factors were viewed as four distinct categories of twenty food function attributes in terms of the nature of the service: factor 1=service delivery, factor 2=food content quality, factor 3=recognition of personal preference and factor 4=menu selection.

To establish the scale reliability of four dimensional factors, an internal consistency reliability coefficient was evaluated using a coefficient alpha measure (Cronbach's alpha). The result showed that the alpha coefficients of all four factors ranging from 0.716 to 0.871 exceeded the recommended minimum level of 0.70 in accepting the reliability of factors (Hair et al., 1998). Accordingly, the four dimensional factors resulting from the factor analysis in this research is proven to be reliable.

The first dimensional factor named "service delivery" had six loadings. The food function attributes that belonged to this factor loading were sufficient space between seats, prompt service, comfortable sitting, friendly server, proper food temperature and

Table 14: Results of Factor Analysis for Food Function Attributes

Factor and variables	Varimax rotated loading				
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Communality
F1-Service delivery					
Sufficient space between seats	0.843				0.785
Prompt service	0.694				0.704
Comfortable sitting	0.693				0.635
Friendly server	0.675				0.610
Proper food temperature	0.560				0.677
Dining room ambiance	0.540				0.554
F2-Food content quality					
Tasty food		0.860			0.803
Fresh ingredients		0.693			0.681
Right menu		0.678			0.688
Attractive food		0.677			0.721
Availability of utensils		0.510			0.505
F3-Recognition of personal preference					
Special dietary menu			0.680		0.469
Unique menu selection			0.673		0.662
Correct order			0.606		0.638
Memorable food function			0.579		0.723
Networking opportunity			0.532		0.486
F4-Menu selection					
Variable beverage				0.818	0.728
Variable menu				0.543	0.596
Menu to keep awake				0.513	0.608
Nutritious menu				0.503	0.499
Total variance explained					
% of variance explained	18.838	18.752	13.694	12.572	63.856
Cronbanch's alpha	.871	.861	.783	.716	.881
Eigenvalue	8.713	1.451	1.322	1.285	

Note: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO-MSA): 0.86: Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, x^2=918.252, significance at p=0.00

dining room ambiance. This factor explained 18.838% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 8.713. The second dimensional factor commonly addressed the issue of the content of

food itself and was named "food content quality." This dimensional factor includes five attributes: tasty food, fresh ingredients, right menu, attractive food and availability of utensils. This factor explained 18.752% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.451. The third dimensional factor has something to do with recognizing individual personal preference toward a dining experience. Thus, it can be labeled "recognition of personal preference" with five original attributes: special dietary menu, unique menu selection, correct order, memorable food function and networking opportunity. This dimensional factor explains 13.694% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.322. Lastly, the fourth dimensional factor is labeled as "menu selection" as its attributes address issues such as variable beverage, variable menu, menu to keep awake and nutritious menu. The percentage of the variance this factor explains is 12.572 with an eigenvalue of 1.285.

Relationship between Satisfaction with Dimensional Food Function Factors and Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

In order to identify respondents' demographic characteristics related to their satisfaction with the four dimensional food function factors, hypothesis 2 was proposed in the first chapter. Below are the null hypothesis (H_0) and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) as proposed earlier.

H_0 2: No significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors and their demographic characteristics.

H_a 2: Significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors and their demographic characteristics.

A one-way ANOVA test was employed to verify these hypotheses. A LSD Post Hoc multiple comparison test was conducted as well in order to detect differences between demographic groups. The significant differences will be discussed based on the four factors defined earlier by factor analysis: factor 1=service quality, factor 2=food content quality, factor 3=recognition of personal preference and factor 4=menu selection. The demographic characteristics that were measured in comparison to the satisfaction with each food function dimensional factor were "gender," "age," "number of years in the current profession," "education level," "number of attending conference per year," "number of attending VSC" and "motivation."

The significant score difference between demographic groups was only shown in analyzing the dimensional factor 3, "recognition of personal preference" (Table 15). This factor was evidently relevant to attendees' education level. The group with college or master's degree was shown to be more satisfied with the conference organizer's service to recognize their personal preference than the group of high school or some college graduates was ($p=0.013$). Looking into the five food function attributes of this dimensional factor 3, which were "available special dietary menu," "unique menu selection," "correct order," "memorable food function" and "function to help network," it was discussed earlier that "correct order" and "special dietary" were the food function attributes that were most relevant to education level. The result reaffirms that attendees with higher education levels tend to be more satisfied with the service to recognize their preference, especially with "correct order" and "special dietary."

Table 15: Results of One-way ANOVA for Satisfaction with Recognition of Personal Preference and Education

Dimensional factor	Factor		Categories		F value	p-Value
			High school-Some college	College-Master		
Recognition of personal preference	Education level	N	35	44	6.468	0.013
		Mean	3.20	3.47		
		S.D.	0.503	0.426		
(*I*) High school-Some college	(*J*) College-Master's degree			Mean difference (*I-J*)		
High school-Some college	Master's degree			-.27*		

Accordingly, null hypothesis 2 is rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis 2: "significant differences exist between an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors and their demographic characteristics." Hence, there exist significant differences in an attendee's satisfaction with "recognition of personal preference" depending on their education level.

The Impact of Food Function Performance on an Attendee's Satisfaction with Overall Food Functions

In order to gauge how an attendee's perceived performance of the four food function factors had an impact on their satisfaction toward the overall food functions, hypothesis 3 was proposed earlier in the first chapter. The null hypothesis (H_0) and alternative hypothesis (H_a) are as follows.

H_0 3: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is not positively related to their satisfaction with overall food functions.

H_a 3: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is positively related to their satisfaction with overall food functions.

A multiple regression analysis was performed in testing the hypotheses. In the analysis, the satisfaction with overall food functions was regressed by the four dimensional food function factors defined through factor analysis, which were "service delivery," "food content quality," "recognition of personal preference" and "menu selection." The four dimensional food function factors were considered the independent variables, while the "satisfaction with overall food functions" was the dependent variables. The assumptions to be examined beforehand for regression analysis were linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of the residuals and normality. These were assessed by analyzing residuals and partial regression plots. As no significant violation of the outliers was found, the data were considered adequate for regression analysis.

The variance of inflation (VIF) to test the extent of multi-collinearity and collinearity implied that there was no multi-collinearity in this analysis. The VIFs ranging from 1.874 to 2.857 denote that the regression coefficients are not likely to be affected adversely by multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 1998) (Table 16).

Some of the 103 respondents provided incomplete responses, resulting in 76 observations available for the analysis. The ratio of observations to independent variables is 19:1, when the desired ratio is between 15 to 20 observations to each independent variable (Hair et al., 1998). The result demonstrated that one of all the four dimensional food function factors, "food content quality," was significant in predicting the satisfaction with overall food functions. The significance level was below 0.05 (p=0.000), allowing

Table 16: Results of the Multiple Linear Regression for Dimensional Food Factors and Satisfaction with Overall food functions

Dependent variable	Overall satisfaction with food functions				
Independent variables	Dimensional food function factors				
Multiple R	.690				
R^2	.476				
Adjusted R^2	.447				
Standard error	.612				
F	16.136				
N	76				
Sig.	0.000				
Independent variable	b	Beta	Std. Error	Sig.	VIF
Constant	.375		.531	.482	
Service delivery	-.016	-.013	.166	.923	2.413
Food content quality	.752	.605	.18	.000	2.857
Recognition of personal preference	.205	.154	.156	.193	1.874
Menu selection	-.014	-.013	.152	.927	2.511

this research to reject null hypothesis 3. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis 3 is well supported: "an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is positively related to their satisfaction with overall food functions." Hence, it is determined that an attendee's satisfaction with "food content quality" is positively related to their satisfaction with overall food functions.

The multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.69. This indicates a 69 percent association between the regression of "food content quality" and "satisfaction with overall food functions." The R square (R^2) was 0.476, which could be converted to Adjusted R^2 value of 0.447. This value indicates that 44.7% of the variability in "satisfaction with overall food functions" could be explained by "food content quality." The regression coefficient (β) for the "food content quality" was 0.605 and the intercept (b) was 0.752 (p=0.000). The predicted value of "satisfaction with overall food

functions" is 0.752 plus 0.605 times the value of "food quality content." The multiple regression analysis can give rise to the following model:

y=.752+0.605x

where,

y=dependent variable "satisfaction with overall food functions"

x=independent variable "food content quality"

According to this model, one dimensional food function factor "food content quality" carried a distinctly positive relationship with "satisfaction with overall food functions." In other words, the attendee's satisfaction with overall food functions depends extensively on "food content quality" other than the other three dimensional factors: "service delivery," "recognition of personal preference" and "menu selection." Therefore, it can be concluded that the quality of the food content itself is the strongest predictor of an attendee's satisfaction with a conference food function. In this sense, as the level of satisfaction with the food content quality increases, the satisfaction with the overall food functions is likely to increase in response.

Attendee Satisfaction and Return Intention

The Impact of Food Function Performance on an Attendee's Return Intention

Descriptive statistics were performed to find the respondents' intention to return to the VSC 2008. When asked whether to return next year or not, a majority of the respondents (75.7%) answered they would return for the conference next year (Table 17).

12.6% of them were not willing to return to the conference, while 4.9% had not decided yet.

Table 17: Respondents' Willingness to Return Next Year (N=103)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	78	75.7
No	13	12.6
Don't know	5	4.9
Missing	7	6.8
Total	103	100

Hypothesis 4 was proposed by this research with an aim to understand how an attendee's satisfaction with the dimensional four food function factors had an influence on their intention to return. The null hypothesis (H_0) and alternative hypothesis (H_a) are stated below.

H_0 4: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is not positively related to their intention to return.

H_a 4: An attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is positively related to their intention to return.

A multiple linear regression analysis was applied as same as in hypothesis 3. Put this way, the independent variables remained the same with the four food function factors: "service delivery," "food content quality," "recognition of personal preference" and "menu selection," when the dependent variable was replaced by "return intention." The assumptions for regression analysis (linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of the

residuals and normality) were confirmed by analyzing residuals and partial regression plots. As a result, the data were considered adequate for regression analysis as no significant violation of the outliers was found.

The result indicated that none of the four dimensional food factors was significant in predicting the attendee's intention to return to the conference next year (Table 18). The significance level was greater than 0.05 (p= 0.313), which does not allow this study to reject null hypothesis 4, "an attendee's satisfaction with dimensional food function factors is not positively related to their intention to return". Therefore, it can be concluded that none of the four dimensional food function factors could be a meaningful predictor of an attendee's intention to return. Although the four aspects of a food function at a conference improve, it is not likely to significantly affect an attendee's future intention on whether or not to return to the conference next year.

Table 18: Results of the Multiple Linear Regression for Dimensional Food Function Factors and Return Intention

Dependent variable	Return intention				
Independent variables	Food function factors				
Multiple R	.262				
R^2	.069				
Adjusted R^2	.012				
Standard error	.739				
F	1.214				
N	71				
Sig.	.313				
Independent variable	b	Beta	Std. Error	Sig.	VIF
Constant	.482		.845	.571	
Service delivery	-.045	-.033	.217	.838	1.798
Food content quality	-.111	-.082	.229	.628	2.011
Recognition of personal preference	.314	.23	.196	.113	1.457
Menu selection	.139	.122	.193	.474	2.030

The Impact of Each Program's Performance on an Attendee's Return Intention

Another variable that was deemed to possess considerable correlation with an attendee's return intention was their satisfaction with each program type in the conference. Under this assumption, hypothesis 5 was proposed earlier in the first chapter, which gave rise to null hypothesis 5. The null hypothesis (H_0) and alternative hypothesis (H_a) are as follows.

H_0 5: An attendee's satisfaction with conference programs is not positively related to their intention to return.

H_a 5: An attendee's satisfaction with conference programs is positively related to their intention to return.

For the purpose of testing H_0 5, the multiple linear regression analysis method was employed as well. In the analysis, the "return intention" of attendees to come back for the conference next year was regressed by their satisfaction with three different types of conference programs: education sessions, networking programs and food functions. In short, the independent variables contained three types of conference programs, while the dependent variable did an attendee's "return intention." The assumptions for regression analysis (linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of the residuals and normality) were examined by assessing residuals and partial regression plots. The examination detected no significant violation of the outliers and allowed the data to be utilized in multiple linear regression analysis.

The variance of inflation (VIF) to test the extent of multi-collinearity and collinearity implied that there was no multi-collinearity in this analysis. The VIFs close to 1 implicate that the regression coefficients are not likely to be affected adversely by multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 1998) (Table 19).

Table 19: Results of the Multiple Linear Regression for Satisfaction with Programs and Return Intention

Dependent variable	Return intention
Independent variables	Satisfaction with each program
Multiple R	.473
R^2	.224
Adjusted R^2	.197
Standard error	.641
F	8.465
N	92
Sig.	.000

Independent variable	b	Beta	Std. Error	Sig.	VIF
Constant	.643		.680	.347	
Educational session	-.076	-.055	.133	.568	1.036
Networking opportunity	-.019	-.020	.092	.841	1.080
Food function	.362	.480	.073	.000	1.062

Some of the 103 respondents provided incomplete responses, resulting in 92 observations available for the analysis. The ratio of observations to independent variables was 30.67:1, when the desired ratio is between 15 to 20 observations to each independent variable (Hair et al., 1998). The analysis suggested that one independent variable, "food function," was significant in predicting the attendee's intention to return. The significance level was below 0.05 ($p = 0.000$), meaning the null hypothesis 5 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis 5 is supported: "an attendee's satisfaction with conference programs is positively related to their intention to return." Thus, an attendee's satisfaction

with "food function" programs is positively related to their intention to return to a future conference.

The multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.473. This indicates a 47.3 percent association between the regression of "food function" and "return intention." The R square (R^2) was 0.224, which could be converted to an Adjusted R^2 value of 0.197. It can be interpreted that 19.7% of the variability in "return intention" could be explained by "food function." The regression coefficient (β) for the "food function" was 0.48 and the intercept (b) was 0.362 (p=0.000). The predicted value of "return intention" is 0.362 plus 0.48 times the value of "food function." The multiple regression analysis can give rise to the following model:

y=0.362+0.48x

where,

y=dependent variable "return intention"

x=independent variable "food function"

According to this model, satisfaction with only food function programs is connotative of a positive relationship with return intention, while other type of programs, education session and networking programs are not. Consequently, an attendee's intention to return to the conference next year heavily depends on their satisfaction with "food function" at the conference, not on with "education session" nor "networking program." This is to say that, out of all types of conference programs, "food function" program is the most qualified predictor of an attendee's future behavior. In this regard, as the perceived

performance of food function programs improves at a conference, an attendee's return is quite likely to occur in response.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Key Findings

In the phase of testing the first and second hypothesis, it was determined that there exist significant differences in the satisfaction scores of food function attributes and dimensional factors depending on the attendee's demographic figures. First, for the attribute level of food function, "gender" groups displayed significantly different satisfaction scores toward "fresh ingredients" and "networking opportunity." Males scored less satisfaction with fresh ingredients than females did. This is to say that male attendees desire more freshness out of their food than female attendees do. To the contrary, males were shown to be more satisfied with the food function's role as a networking motivator than females were. This indicates that females need more diverse tools to provoke their networking activity other than merely serving food. Another way that a demographic figure posed relevance to a food attribute was the "age" to "variable beverage." Younger attendees displayed outstandingly less satisfaction with the variety of beverages than those of older ages. The younger the attendees are, the more variety of beverages is desired. The satisfaction scores of the attributes differed notably depending on attendees' behavioral patterns related to attending conference. At first, different motivations resulted in significant differences in satisfaction with "availability of utensils." Attendees whose motivation was mainly networking were distinctly more

satisfied with the availability of utensils than those who attended for education or as a company requirement were. Reasonably, networking-oriented people can put more value in having an enjoyable time, while education-seekers aim to get something out of their experience. In addition, those who were forced to attend by their companies are not motivated to fully appreciate the experience. Consequently, it is likely that networking-oriented people can be more forgiving about relatively unnecessary services such as utensils and sauces, as long as the necessary service such as food is provided adequately. More interesting findings had to do with the behavior of frequenting conferences. Attendees who attended conferences more than twice per year displayed a higher level of satisfaction with "sufficient space between seats" and "menu to keep awake" than those who would do so once a year or less did. On the contrary, attendees who returned to the same conference displayed a lower level of satisfaction with several attributes including "prompt service," "tasty food" and "memorable food function." It can be inferred that an attendee's expectations decrease as they are exposed to more and more conferences. However, their expectation might stay uncompromised toward several attributes as they have repeatedly returned to a specific conference. Repeat attendees anticipate their food to be more tasteful and served in a more prompt manner in a more memorable ambiance.

For the dimensional factor level of food function performance, the satisfaction score of "recognition of personal preference" exhibited an extensively significant link to the education level. As attendees possessed lower education level, they were less satisfied with the food function's aspect of recognizing individual preferences by offering correct order, special dietary menu, memorable experience, networking opportunity and unique menu. This suggests that attendees with some college or lower education desire more

intense recognition of their personal preference than those with college or master's degree do. In particular, the difference was more distinctly exhibited in "correct order" and "special dietary" attributes.

In the phase of testing the third hypothesis, it was assessed if satisfaction with a specific dimensional food function factor is positively related to that with the overall food function performance. The test verified that "food content quality" was the strongest predictor of all four factors in measuring the satisfaction with overall food functions. A food function with food content of outstanding quality is more likely to earn satisfied attendees than the one with a focus on service delivery, recognition of personal preference or menu selection is. In all, the attractiveness, accuracy, tastefulness and freshness of the food itself are most likely to lead to the overall satisfaction in a conference food function.

The last two phases of the analysis identified the determinants of an attendee's return intention by testing the fourth and fifth hypotheses. It was proven that satisfaction with food function programs was the sole driver of an attendee's return, although no particular dimensional food factor showed a direct impact on their return. Out of the three types of conference programs, which are "education session," "networking program" and "food function," the "food function" possesses the most intense correlation with an attendee's intention to return. Conclusively, it is crucial to perform a quality food function to retain current attendees, rather than to focus on developing flawless education sessions or networking programs. It should be noted that, in the VSC 2008's food functions, most of the low satisfaction scores were prominent in attributes of the two particular dimensional factors, "menu selection" and "recognition of personal preference." A wealth of literature

confirmed that more health-conscious menu selection is demanded by customers (Cooper & Solmo, 1996; Thompson, 1993; Williams, 2003). Besides, considerable marketing research has stressed that recognizing personal needs is essential in encouraging customers' intention to return (Skogland & Siguaw, 2004; Swan & Combs 1976). Supposing that a food function is a decisive tool to create more return attendees, a conference should offer food functions that has more healthful options and better recognize attendees' preference so that it can differentiate itself from other conferences in competition.

Conclusions

These findings support previous findings that strong performance is influential in predicting an attendee's satisfaction and return intention (Oppermann,1993; 1995; Price, 1993; Severt et al., 2007; Tsiotsou, 2006). These findings further confirm the appropriateness of this research in adopting the performance evaluation model from previous findings. In this research, well perceived performance of a food function attribute resulted in a high level of satisfaction with that attribute. In addition to previously identified findings, this study revealed the important role that food function plays in retaining attendees. An attendee's satisfaction with one dimensional food function factor, "food content quality," in comparison with the other three, "service delivery," "recognition of personal preference," and "menu selection," was solely found to be significant in predicting their satisfaction with the overall food functions. This factor itself failed to prove its impact on return intention. Instead, of all types of the conference programs, "education session," "networking program," and "food function,"

the satisfaction with "food function" displayed the most significantly positive relationship with an attendee's intention to return in a conference. In conclusion, food function performance takes a critical position in bringing back current conference attendees, who put food content quality before other qualities in a food function.

Implications

This research offers strategic guidance to conference management concerned with a competitive market. First of all, management should take into account the demographic characteristics of its attendees in planning a conference in order to successfully attract attendees and retain them. According to the findings, in order to obtain the highest possible satisfaction from a group with an education level between high school and some college, the service to recognize individual preference should be employed. For this purpose, the special dietary needs of attendees should be properly accommodated and the food served correctly in a memorable and arousing ambiance. To satisfy a group with higher education, all service aspects should reach a certain level in quality, as recognizing their preference itself cannot guarantee higher overall satisfaction.

Considering gender difference in attendees, management should serve fresher-looking food in a food function where its attendees are dominantly males, while it should offer more diverse networking tools for a food function dominated by females. Freshness of food is a decisive factor for men in evaluating a food function. Once they are satisfied with the freshness, then they will find the overall food function enjoyable enough to be involved in. Yet for women, merely serving food cannot provoke their intention to network with other people.

With regard to age difference, a variety of beverages is definitely an issue. When the attendees' ages are below 40, it would be crucial to include complementary drinks with a wide range of variety in meal planning. It is advised that energy drinks and even alcoholic drinks be provided for special occasions such as a reception and a farewell night.

The last consideration management should take is the attendee's behavioral pattern related to attending conferences. Attendees who seek networking rather than education are less concerned about the organizer's preparation of proper utensils, such as fork and tablecloths. Further, as attendees experience more conferences and learn which services are commonly provided, their expectation goes lower than their first- time conference and they display higher satisfaction with most attributes. However, their expectation actually goes up regarding several factors as they return to a specific conference. It should be noted that even experienced attendees would not compromise their expectation toward tasty food, prompt service and memorable food function.

To make a food function a success, management should maintain its focus on the quality of food content. According to the findings, conference food should be an accurate and flavorful menu, be made with fresh ingredients, be attractively presented and have good availability of utensils. Attendees do not find conference food satisfactory because of its promise of a good service delivery, recognition of personal preference and menu selection.

For the purpose of earning more return attendees, management should realize that a certain amount of effort put into a food function can earn more repeat business in comparison to that put into education sessions or any other programs. For the level of

dimensional food function factors, any of the four dimensional factors did not turn out to significantly affect an attendee's intention to return. However, it should be noted that of all types of conference programs, food function was the only program that had an influence on the return intention. With an aim to retain a sufficient number of repeat attendees, management should strive to differentiate its conference by offering a food function of higher quality. In this regard, conference food functions should offer more health-conscious menus and additional services to recognize individual preference.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

1. Conference organizers should provide food functions tailored to dominant demographic figures of their attendees.
2. Conference food functions should be organized with a focus on the quality of the food contents that each dish contains, such as attractiveness, accurateness, taste and freshness of food.
3. Conference organizers should provide more health-conscious foods and recognize individual preference so that they can differentiate their conference and retain more attendees in the competitive market.

Limitations and Future Study

Although this research has provided a starting point from which to explore the role of conference food function, it contains a few limitations. This research focused on service,

food content and menu as its dimensions in evaluating food function attributes with an exception of "price" value. This dimension could not be examined due to the specific request of the hosting company that willingly granted this research survey. In reality, value to price was determined as one of the factors relevant to the attendee satisfaction in several studies (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Gupta et al., 2007; Rittichainuwat, Beck & LaLopa, 2001; Wu & Weber, 2005). Another limitation is that the results may not be generalized to the entire convention industry, because the research was performed through a corporate conference where most of its attendees were repeat attendees. While a conference usually includes meals in the registration fee, a number of mega conventions do not. Besides, the desire for learning is obviously higher in conferences than in exhibitions or shows. This difference might have empowered the attendee's perceived importance of food functions as a learning accelerator. The considerably small sample size of 103 might also contribute to the lack of generalizability.

For these reasons, future studies should explore the relationship between the price value and the perceived performance of food function. The perceived value of food served will vary greatly depending on both the subject as well as the amount of registration fee payment. Moreover, additional research could be conducted using a larger sample size of mega events such as The Las Vegas Restaurant Show or The Consumer Electronics Show (CES). Differences many exist in attendees' perceived performance of food function in bigger meetings that have more focus on networking and exhibition and less on education. This will guide conference organizers to implement more effective strategies based on the nature of their event.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for your participation in the VSC 2008. This evaluation is designed to evaluate your satisfaction with the conference, especially with its food functions and to contribute to a thesis study of a graduate student of Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas, Yoonie Lee. The title of the study is "The Impact of Conference Food Function Performance on Attendee's Satisfaction and Behavior". This evaluation is made of 4 categories: food function evaluation, overall conference evaluation, your opinion and demographic information. It would take approximately 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. It would be highly appreciated if you could read through the questions below and provide us with your valuable opinion. Your answers will not be used or released for any other purposes than measuring the attendee satisfaction with the Conference. All questions are optional, and you may stop answering or skip questions as you wish to. For more suggestions or inquiries, please feel free to contact Yoonie Lee at P. (702) 487-1117 E. yoonie3@hotmail.com and Dr. Yen-Soon Kim at P. (702) 895-5443 E. yen-soon.kim@unlv.edu. For questions regarding manner in which the research is being conducted, you may also contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas at P. (702) 895-2794 E. OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

VANGUARD SECURITY CONFERENCE 2008 EVALUATION

Thank you for your participation in this evaluation. This evaluation is designed to evaluate your satisfaction with the conference, especially with its food functions. Please mail the completed form in an enclosed envelope with an enclosed stamp to **Ms. Yoon-young Lee (2121 E. Warm Springs Rd. #2043, Las Vegas, NV 89119)** no later than **Sep 23, 2008**.

I. FOOD FUNCTION EVALUATION

Please **circle** your level of agreement with following statements on **OVERALL** food functions for the conference.

	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1	I was served promptly.	1	2	3	4	5	
2	Food servers were pleasant and friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	
3	The appearance of food was attractive.	1	2	3	4	5	
4	My food orders were correct and complete.	1	2	3	4	5	
5	Temperature of food was appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	
6	Organizers chose right menu.	1	2	3	4	5	
7	A variety of menu items were available.	1	2	3	4	5	
8	Seating was comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5	
9	Dining rooms had the right ambiance and atmosphere.	1	2	3	4	5	
10	The foods were tasty and flavorful.	1	2	3	4	5	
11	The organizers took my order for my special dietary needs.	1	2	3	4	5	
12	The ingredients of the food looked fresh.	1	2	3	4	5	
13	Availability of sauces, utensils, napkins, etc. was good.	1	2	3	4	5	
14	A variety of beverages were available.	1	2	3	4	5	
15	The menu selections were nutritiously-balanced.	1	2	3	4	5	
16	The menu selections helped me stay alert in sessions.	1	2	3	4	5	
17	Food functions were of a memorable experience.	1	2	3	4	5	
18	Food functions helped me network with other attendees.	1	2	3	4	5	
19	The menu selections were unique.	1	2	3	4	5	
20	The space between chairs and tables were sufficient.	1	2	3	4	5	
21	Overall, I was satisfied with the food functions.	1	2	3	4	5	

II. OVERALL CONFERENCE EVALUATION

Please **circle** your level of satisfaction with each aspect of this conference below.

Programs	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	N/A
Education sessions	1	2	3	4	5	
Networking opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	
Food functions	1	2	3	4	5	

III. YOUR OPINION

1. How many times have you attended the Vanguard Security Conference including this year?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more

2. How often do you attend conferences per year including other conferences?
☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more

3. Are you willing to return to the next year's Vanguard conference?

☐ Yes
☐ No (Why: _____)
☐ Don't know

4. What was your motivation to attend this conference? (**Please select only ONE**)

☐ To learn recent trends
☐ To network with related businesspeople
☐ Recommended by friend
☐ Required by company
☐ Others: _____

IV. ABOUT YOURSELF

The questions below are optional and will only be used for research purpose.
1. You are

☐ Female ☐ Male

2. Please check your age.

☐ Below 20 ☐ 20-29 ☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60 or more

3. Please check how many years you have been in your current profession.

☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-5 years
☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16-20 years
☐ More than 20 years

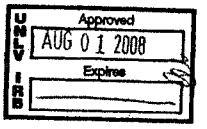
4. Please check the highest level of your education.

☐ No formal schooling ☐ High school ☐ Some college
☐ College degree ☐ Masters degree ☐ Doctoral degree

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL FORM

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS



Social/Behavioral IRB – Exempt Review
Approved as Exempt

DATE: August 11, 2008

TO: **Dr. Yen-Soon Kim,** Hotel Administration

FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Co-Chair PJ LC
Protocol Title: **The Impact of Conference Food Function Performance on Attendee's Satisfaction and Behavior**
OPRS# 0806-2781

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.

PLEASE NOTE:
Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

The protocol has been reviewed and deemed exempt from IRB review. It is not in need of further review or approval by the IRB.

Any changes to the exempt protocol may cause this project to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a **Modification Form.**

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

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