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Effects of the pre-show, at-show and post-show firm activities on trade show performance measurement

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Abstract

Literature on trade show has been widening recently as with the acceleration of globalization trade shows are viewed not only as sales and promotion tools utilized by companies but also as a marketing strategy that integrates sales and promotion of company products and services, developing relationship building both with local and international customers and other stakeholders, increasing and sustaining the company image, benchmarking the company by analyzing the competition in the market, etc. Participation in international trade shows creates an excellent opportunity of entering new markets for firms and especially for SMEs which lead to the increase in their export thus easing the internationalization of their business. Within the context of this study, we aim to reveal empirical evidence of trade show performance measurement that is said to be effected by various firm activities conducted at pre-show, at-show and post-show stages of the trade show. As the method of data collection primary data collection was used with a development of a questionnaire which was conducted on a sample constituting of 124 firms 112 of which are SMEs at three international trade shows held in Istanbul, Turkey in 2013. Key findings are that sales-related and information-gathering performances are the most important for Turkish SMEs whereas at least one component from each stage of the trade show effect these performances.

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INTRODUCTION

Although trade show sector development in Turkey relies back to 1936 with an opening of the Izmir International Fair, this sector developed nationally with the opening of exhibition centers in various parts of the country until 1980's (Acartürk, 2012). Export incentive regulations put forward during the early 1980's and increase in the industrial production capability of Turkish firms increased export to foreign countries (Erdil, 2012). This eventually served as a reason of the development of the Turkish trade show sector in an international context. Ulaş (2004) identified 5 different foreign market entry strategies for SMEs in Turkey and as a result of her study participation in national and

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international trade shows where incentives and support of the government are provided, was shown to be one of the most appropriate foreign market entry strategies due to its cost effectiveness. With an acceleration of the globalization in 1980's and 1990's there was a dramatic increase in trade shows held and money allocated on trade show budget by firms. Therefore, most of the prominent and vast amounts of researches on trade show are conducted in 90's (Pöllman, 2013). Most of those works pursue sales approach by prioritizing lead generation and product demonstration in explaining the importance, role, functions and overall success of the trade show (Bonoma, 1983; Kerin and Cron, 1987; Tanner and Chonko, 1995). By the mid-90s focus of the trade show literature started to shift towards trade show performance and failure of the exhibiting firm managers carrying out multiple objectives of trade show was an underlying reason of this shift (Pöllman, 2013). Researchers conducted in the context of trade show measurement employs lead generation efficiency, attraction, contact and conversion efficiency, attraction effectiveness index, etc. (Gopalakrishna and Williams, 1992; Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995; Dekimpie *et al.*, 1997; Rosson and Seringhaus, 1998; Tanner and Chonko, 1995). Latter researches dedicated to trade show recognized the insufficiency of sales and lead generation approach of the trade show performance measurement, thus new approaches relied on more sophisticated methods as outcome-based and behavioral-based approach of the performance measurement (Hansen, 2004).

Evaluation of the trade show performance considering its pre-show, at-show and post-show activities separately is another important factor in trade show literature. The reason is that trade show is such an activity that requires differentiated firm activities, resources and marketing approaches from the time the decision to participate at a certain trade show until the end of the trade show (Seringhaus and Rosson, 2004). A three step process of the trade show has been used in many research studies in order to show the importance of each activity and the stage it belongs (Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995; 1998; Seringhaus and Rosson, 1998; Tanner, 2002; Li, 2006; Lee and Kim, 2008). The importance of dividing the trade show activities into three stages is that exhibitors have to behave differently at pre-show, at-show and post-show since visitor behavior and needs vary depending on the stage of the trade show (Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995). Our research is based on revealing the effects of the pre-show, at-show and post-show firm activities on several trade show performance dimensions as image-building, information-gathering, sales-related, relationship- building and motivation by testing the research model with Turkish SMEs. Firstly, study presents the relevant literature review of trade show performance measurement, firm activities by three stages of the trade show. Research methodology, analyses results and research model will take place at second section. The results of the analyses will be discussed and recommendations will be provided for managers and academicians at the last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Trade show performance measurement

Tafesse *et al.* (2010) identifies two different approaches followed in trade show performance measurement one as the perceptual data which is obtained from exhibit manager's subjective rating and the other approach relies on objective indicators which are the exhibitors' activity measures. The most commonly utilized type of approach is the exhibit managers' perception or subjective rating of delivered performance on several trade show performances (Hansen, 2004; Lee & Kim, 2008). These trade show performances are as follows:

Sales-related performance: all the company activities concerning the sales objectives as sales volume, sales value or order amount, as well as the number of visitors to the booth, the number of leads generated, the average cost per visitor and the cost per generated lead. Lead generation efficiency (Gopalakrishna & Williams, 1992) selling at the show, new product testing, writing orders, obtaining leads, developing prospects, etc. (Hansen, 1999; 2004).

Information-gathering performance: includes all activities related to the collection of information about competitors, customers, industry trends, and new products demonstrated at trade show (Rosson and Seringhaus, 1995; Blythe, 2000), new technologies (Rice and Almosawi, 2002) and information about potential partners (Hansen, 2004)

Image-building performance: This is a company performance dedicated to all activities related to improving and enhancing company image at trade show. Bonoma (1993) emphasizes the importance of maintaining company image with competitors, customers and with the industry in general as a marketing communication to be performed at trade show.

Relationship-building performance: all activities related to maintaining and developing relationships with existing customers and establishing relationships with potential customers. Exhibitors tend to improve their relationship with existing customers (Tanner *et al.*, 2001; Hansen, 2004; Li, 2006), establishing relationships with new customers (Tanner & Chonko, 1995).

Motivation performance: include maintaining and enhancing the motivation of both company employees and customers. Participating at trade show are sales force morale, training and motivating the sales force (Hansen, 2004).

2.2 Firm activities conducted at three stages of trade show

A three step process of the trade show has been used in many research studies in order to show the importance of each activity and the stage it belongs (Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995; 1998; Seringhaus and Rosson, 1998; Tanner, 2002; Li, 2006; Lee and Kim, 2008; Ling-ye, 2010; Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2013). The importance of dividing the trade show activities into three stages is that exhibitors have to behave differently at pre-show, at-show and post-show since visitor behavior and needs vary depending on the stage of the trade show (Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995).

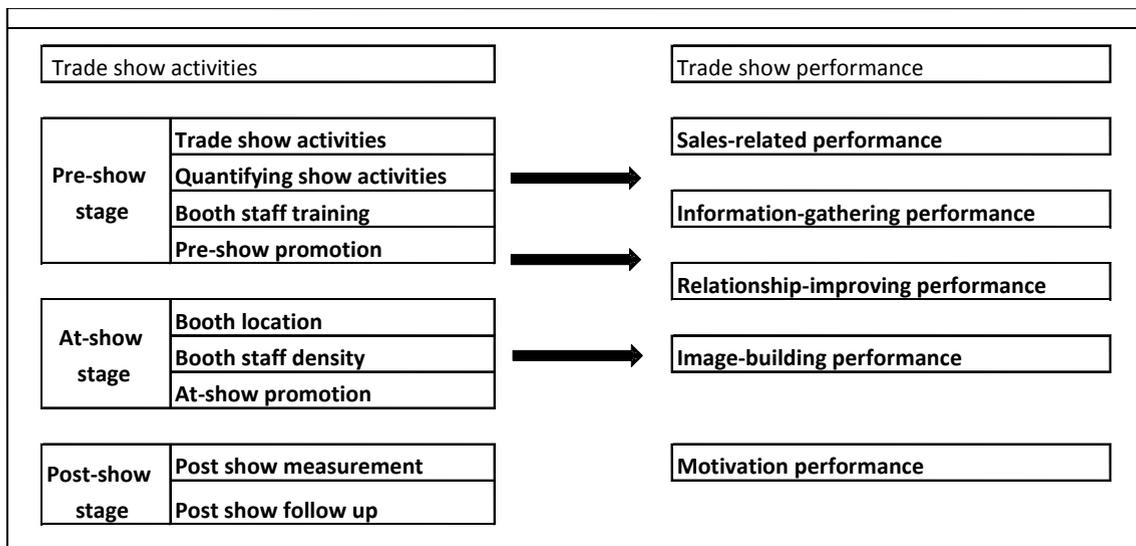
Pre-show activities: Seringhaus and Rosson (2004) argue the importance of pre-show communication ranging from information provided to potential visitors through telephone, fax or mail messages, and use of press releases to paid advertising in trade magazines. Dekimpie et al (1997) ephasize the importance of more direct contact with potential customers as trade show period reaches. Li and Kim (2008) classify three major determinants of pre-show activities; (1) quantifying objectives, (2) pre-show promotion and (3) booth staff training. Li (2010) stresses role of internet usage while Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013) suggest direct mail, print ad and e-mail being the most efficient promotion tool at pre-show stage.

At-show activities: Choosing the right size and location of booth, hiring the right and trained employees, but more importantly attracting the visitors and providing the information needed is the most critical points that constitute at-show firm activities (Seringhaus and Rosson, 2004). Lee and Kim (2008) classify four major determinants of at-show activities; (1) booth size, (2) booth location, (3) on-site promotion and (4) booth staff density.

Post-show activities: Post-show activities at trade show consist of follow-up and measurement and evaluation of the trade show performance (Lee and Kim, 2008). Post-show follow up activities are usually personal e-mail thank you note, personalized letter with the further information requested at the show, reminder of the final expiration date for the trade show special offer etc. It’s actually the most critical phase for firms where converting leads into sales depends on the timely follow-up of the contacts made during the trade show. Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013) also argue that personal selling, e-mail and telephone are the most vital communication tools that should be used for post-show actions taken by firms.

As a result of the literature review provided above, suggested research framework is presented below which helps to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study:

Figure 1: Research framework



METHODOLOGY

Data was collected by using a questionnaire consisting of 68 questions. In order to conduct the questionnaire, three trade shows held in Istanbul in May-June, 2013 were visited and companies were randomly chosen in order to complete the questionnaire. The list of the trade shows selected for this research is as follows:

Table 1: List of the trade shows of the research

Name of the trade show	Date	Organizer Company	Venue
EVTEKS 2013 19th Istanbul Home Textile Exhibition	15.05.2013-19.05.2013	Istanbul Trade Fairs Inc.	CNR Expo Center
ITM 2013 International Textile Machinery	29.05.2013-01.06.2013	Tüyap Tüm Fuarçılık Yapım A.Ş.	TÜYAP
Natural Stone Turkey, 2013	05.06.2013-08.06.2013	Cnr Ekspo Fuarçılık	CNR Expo Center

The questionnaire form was distributed to 165 firms out of which 147 were returned out of which 23 questionnaires were eliminated since were containing incomplete data thus by ending up with 124 questionnaires with a return rate of 84% eligible questionnaires convenient for data analysis. Results of the frequency analysis conducted on characteristics of the sample companies sub grouped as general profile of the respondent and general profile of the company are as given in the below Table 2:

Table 2: Characteristics of the sample companies

General profile of the respondent			General profile of the company		
Category	Freq.	Rate (%)	Category	Freq.	Rate (%)
<i>Position in the company</i>			<i>Sector</i>		
Owner/ General Manager	46	37.1	Natural stone	77	62.1
Sales/Marketing Manager	31	25	Textile machinery	26	21
Export Manager	28	22.6	Home textile	21	16.9
Other	19	15.3	Total	124	100
Total	124	100	<i>Employee number</i>		
<i>Education level</i>			lower than 50	75	60.5
High school	13	10.5	51-250	21	17
University degree	82	66.1	101-250	16	12.8
Master's degree	29	23.4	More than 251	12	9.7
Total	125	100.8	Total	124	100
<i>Work experience in the company</i>			<i>Trade show participation/year</i>		
less than 5 years	72	58.1	less than 3 times	93	75
6-10 years	24	19.4	4-6 times	24	19.4
11-20 years	22	17.7	more than 7 times	7	5.6
more than 21 years	6	4.8	Total	124	100
Total	124	100			

Five point Likert scale was adopted in order to measure pre-show, at-show and post-show variables except booth staff density component which was measured by actual data received from the study as number of employees including temporary service employees as hostess, translator during the trade show divided by booth size in square meter. Respondents were asked how frequently they use the promotional tools specified for before and during the trade show (from 5=Always to 1=Never) and for the remaining components degree of agreement of the respondents (from 5=Completely agree to 1= Completely disagree) was used. Trade show performance components said to be effected by the trade show firms activities and which are regarded as dependent variables, were also measured through subjective rating of exhibitors of the delivered performances by using Five point Likert scale (from 5=Completely agree to 1= Completely disagree).

FINDINGS

Factor analysis was conducted for both company trade show activities and trade show performance measurement. Factor analysis of company trade show activities yielded 8 factors and factor analysis of trade show performances resulted in 4 factors with the elimination of motivation performance from this study. The factor analysis results for both dependent and independent variables with factor names, loadings, explained variance, reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) scores are presented in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively.

Table 3: Factor Analysis results for Independent variables

Factor Name/ Trade show stage	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Reliability
Factor 1: Post show measurement / Post show activity		22,405	0,976
Post show sales	0,969		
Number of sales generated from new customers	0,965		
At-show sales	0,964		
Number of quality leads generated at the show	0,957		
Number of sales generated from existing customers	0,949		
Number of visitors to booth	0,937		
Number of literature distributed (catalogs, brochures, etc)	0,873		
Press coverage	0,735		
Factor 2: Post show follow up / Post show activity		12,939	0,882
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing trade show visitors' role in purchase decisions	0,850		
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing trade show visitors' sizes of purchase	0,835		
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing trade show visitors' product-category interest	0,765		
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing trade show visitors' company/ product knowledge	0,761		
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing additional information requirements for their managers	0,741		
The exhibit managers followed up by analyzing trade show visitors' time required before decisions	0,709		
Factor 3: Special events / At show activity		8,746	0,764
Seminars	0,869		
Contests	0,803		
Videos	0,791		
Giveaways	0,547		
Factor 4: Booth staff training / Pre show activity		7,761	0,785
The exhibit staff had prior trade show experience	0,785		
The exhibit staff was selected by a special selection criteria	0,75		
The exhibit staff was provided with systematic staff training before the show	0,668		
The exhibit staff was trained to arouse product interest	0,619		
Factor 5: Booth location / At show activity		7,646	0,828
I suggest the same booth location for the next trade show to our company	0,875		
Our firm's booth location was better than our competitors booth location	0,844		
Our booth location had a much stronger traffic flow than other competitor booths in show	0,801		
Factor 6: Two-way communication / At show activity		5,699	0,680
Receptions	0,853		
Product demonstrations	0,837		
Factor 7: Classical promotion tools / Pre show activity		5,182	0,661
Telephone	0,898		
Fax	0,734		
Factor 8: Quantifying show objectives / Pre show activity		5,025	0,623
Objectives should be set before participating a trade show	0,838		
Objectives should be measureable in order to quantify them	0,763		
	Total	75,402	
	Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,778
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi Square		3,088,207
	df		465
	Sig.		0,000

Table 4: Factor Analysis of Dependent Variables

Factor Name	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Reliability
Factor 1: Image-building performance		21.987	0.928
Brand recognition reinforcement	0.827		
Corporate image improvement	0.813		
Brand image improvement	0.790		
Corporate recognition reinforcement	0.730		
Maintain and enhance existing relationship with existing clients	0.646		
Communicate face-to-face with potential clients	0.552		
Factor 2: Sales-related performance		20.015	0.897
Secure sales leads from new clients	0.81		
Secure sales leads from existing clients	0.779		
Actual sales to existing customers	0.763		
Actual sales to new customers	0.756		
Make new contract at trade show	0.719		
Find new prospective clients	0.519		
Factor 3: Relationship-building performance		15.901	0.813
Meet new distributors	0.777		
Maintain and develop relationship with suppliers	0.758		
Contacts with major decision makers	0.695		
Build relationship with new clients	0.598		
Factor 4: Information-gathering performance		14.106	0.860
Collect information on competitors	0.784		
Exchange information and experience with our competitors, suppliers and customers	0.774		
Collect market information	0.714		
Train and develop our sales team	0.702		
	Total	72.009	
	Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.911
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi Square		1797.422
	df		190
	Sig.		0.000

After completing the factor analysis for both dependent and independent variables research study proceeds with correlation analysis in order to identify the strength and the direction of the relationship between company trade show activities and trade show performance. In the following Table 5, variables having values with the correlation at a significance level of 1% and 5% are bolded and considered for the further Regression analysis. As a result quantifying show objectives, booth staff training and booth location are positively related with sales-related performance and quantifying show objectives, booth staff training, two-way communication and post show follow up are positively related with information-gathering performance.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of company trade show activities and trade show performance

Correlations ^a					
		Image building performance	Sales-related performance	Relationship building performance	Information gathering performance
Quantifying show objectives	Pearson Correlation	,137	,177*	,131	,214*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,130	,049	,146	,017
Classical promotional tools	Pearson Correlation	,051	,015	-,027	-,080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,571	,868	,765	,376
Booth staff training	Pearson Correlation	,162	,272**	,153	,195*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,072	,002	,089	,030
Special Events	Pearson Correlation	-,068	,058	-,134	,017
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,454	,519	,137	,851
Two-way communication	Pearson Correlation	,146	,087	,079	,210*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,106	,337	,382	,019
Booth location	Pearson Correlation	,075	,217*	,073	,048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,410	,015	,418	,597
Post show measurement	Pearson Correlation	-,089	-,054	,041	,055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,324	,551	,652	,541
Post show follow up	Pearson Correlation	-,002	,076	,079	,244**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,985	,400	,382	,006

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Regression Analysis of Sales-related performance

R² shows us what percentage of dependent variable is explained by independent variables. In our case 10,5% of variance in sales related performance is explained by variables included in this model that are quantifying show objectives, booth staff training and booth locations which considered to have effects on sales related performance. The remaining part is explained by other variables not included in the model.

Interpretation of the F statistics values in ANOVA table enables us to test If the model is significant as a whole. Table 6 depicts that p value is 0,004 which is lower than 0,05 and means that at least one of the independent variables is statistically significant to explain the dependent variable.

Table 6: ANOVA test of sales-related performance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	8,984	3	2,995	4,670	,004^a
Residual	76,943	120	,641		
Total	85,927	123			

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Booth location, Quantifying show objectives, Booth staff training
- b. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

As it can be depicted from Table 7, Booth staff training variable is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level and booth location variable is statistically significant at a 90% confidence level to explain the sales related performance as a whole.

Table 7: Regression analysis for Sales-related performance

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1,917	,544		3,524	,001
Quantifying show objectives	,100	,108	,086	,925	,357
Booth staff training	,251	,118	,202	2,125	,036
Booth location	,136	,077	,158	1,771	,079

a. Dependent Variable: Sales performance

Regression Analysis of Information-gathering performance

14% of variance in the Information gathering performance is explained by quantifying show objectives, two-way communication and booth staff training variables all together. As it is seen in Table 8, p value is 0,001 which is less than 0,05, consequently H_0 is rejected which means that at least one variable among quantifying show objectives, two-way communication, booth staff training and post show follow up is statistically significant to define Information gathering performance.

Table 8: ANOVA test of Information-gathering performance

ANOVA ^b						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11,539	4	2,885	4,834	,001 ^a
	Residual	71,013	119	,597		
	Total	82,552	123			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Post show follow up, Quantifying show objectives, Two-way communication, Booth staff training

b. Dependent Variable: Information gathering performance

Thus, coefficients of each independent variable are tested with t statistics in order to identify which independent variable(s) have statistically significant meaning to define independent variable. As a result, Quantifying show objectives, two-way communication and post-show follow up are statistically significant variable at $p < 0, 05$.

Table 9: Regression analysis of Information-gathering performance

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,462	,568		2,574	,011
	Quantifying show objectives	,211	,105	,185	2,011	,047
	Booth staff training	,025	,123	,021	,204	,839
	Two-way communication	,155	,059	,226	2,623	,010
	Post show follow up	,209	,100	,200	2,103	,038

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Trade show sector has a significant role in the economy of any country in terms of various aspects. In the case of Turkey, it has a great contribution to the tourism sector, trade and development of the local and regional economy. Majority of the companies participating at trade shows are SMEs for whom trade shows organized either in the country or abroad are great opportunity for them to get opened for the outside world which increases their export eventually. Therefore this issue is of high importance for the government which provides various governmental supports both for its organization in Turkey and for SMEs to take participation in abroad.

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors or company resources that effect on each dimension of the trade show performance. Moreover, this study analyzed the company activities effecting the trade show performance in three different stages as in what kind of activities companies get engaged before the trade show in order to inform its customers, who are actually potential visitors of the show, and make relevant preparations for trade show, what exhibitors perform during the trade show not only to attract visitors to the booth but also serve them based on their interests, and what actions are taken after the show in terms of overall evaluation and following the sales orders and/or leads or other requirements received from visitors during the show. The study has a great contribution to both Turkish trade show literature in terms of the application of the research framework and revealing the results representing Turkish trade show sector and to the research framework itself by being conducted in various trade shows sectors and conducting the Factor analysis for trade show activities performed in three different stages.

Based on the results for exhibitors participating trade shows in Turkey who are mainly Turkish companies among four trade show performances only sales-related and information-gathering performance were found to be important by being effected by company activities representing all three stages. For Turkish companies strategic activities such as booth staff training and booth location are important rather than booth size or booth staff number in enhancing the sales-related trade show performance. Rather than increasing the area of the booth or number of staff at the booth it is important for Turkish companies to ensure a good booth location and train its staff for the trade show. These are of high importance and correct strategies in case of small and medium sized companies. Because as we know compared to larger companies SME has limited material and personnel resources allocated for trade show therefore it's very important for them to properly utilize those resources in the most efficient way. Instead of going for booths at the corners or outer halls, companies may secure themselves good location by making an early application to the organizing company. Besides a good booth location booth staff is another crucial factor that contributes to the sales-related performance of the trade show. Instead of increasing the booth staff number, it is more preferable to train the booth staff so they can meet all the requirements of the visitors during the show. Booth staff should be able to appropriately respond to visitors, give proper attention and provide all the necessary information both regarding the products and the company.

Another important trade show performance is the information-gathering performance. Quantifying show objectives, two-way communication during the show and post show follow up were found to have valid influence on information-gathering performance at trade show. Quantifying show objectives which means that before participating at the trade show companies should set specific trade show objectives they intend to achieve as a result of the trade show, and that these objectives should be set in a way so that they can be measurable later on have a positive relationship with information-gathering performance of the trade show. It can be interpreted that information-gathering, which can be either information about customers, company competitors, products and new trends in the industry, is one of the main reasons why companies actually exhibit at trade shows, since usually information gathering is expected to occur during the show and after the trade show. Furthermore, two-way communication, under which we consider product demonstration and receptions during the trade show effect the information-gathering performance. It can be interpreted that face-to-face communication in a physical environment with a visitor by demonstrating a product where booth staff explains the product features and shows how it is utilized or responds to any kind of visitor question regarding the product exhibited at the trade show and visitor receptions in the booth in terms of talking and discussing all kind of questions is much more important rather than simply displaying the video, distributing souvenirs or promotional materials. Another important factor in information-gathering is the post show follow up activity. Results of the study show that although Turkish companies do not almost use techniques of measuring the trade show they do follow up trade shows after the show which is a very important point.

This study is an empirical study which tried to reveal the effects of trade show activities on trade show performances. The results of the study cannot be generalized for all trade shows held in Turkey since study included only three trade shows held in Istanbul and adopted convenience method as a sampling method. Recommendation for future studies is to compare the trade show performance difference between trade show participation in Turkey and in abroad which is especially important for export-oriented companies. Such study can help to identify the type of

company activities conducted, and reached performances in two different participation as in Turkey and abroad. Moreover, it will be helpful for companies in terms of deciding on or investing their restricted resources in more effective activities that should be helpful in reaching intended trade show performances.

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