

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ATTENDANCE OF IAMSLIC MEMBERS AT IAMSLIC ANNUAL CONFERENCES

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Abstract

A research survey was conducted to determine the factors that affect the attendance of International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) members at annual conferences. Findings of related studies revealed that participants (librarians and other professionals) attend conferences for career development. Moreover, participation in a conference was affected by several factors including location, affordability, safety, and the demography of the participants. Among IAMSLIC members, networking, affordability and educational opportunities were the dominant factors in attending a conference and location was of least significance. Members of IAMSLIC attended annual conferences for the opportunity for networking with other professionals, updates on current trends and developments in the profession.

Keywords: Career development; congresses and conventions - attendance; IAMSLIC; international organization; librarians; meetings.

Introduction

The International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers (IAMSLIC) is an “association of individuals and organizations interested in library and information science, especially as these are applied to the recording, retrieval and dissemination of knowledge and information in all aspects of aquatic and marine sciences and their allied disciplines” (IAMSLIC, 2016). As of 2016, IAMSLIC has 279 member librarians from different countries, divided among six Regional Groups (IAMSLIC Membership Committee, 2016) and some members unaffiliated with any Regional Group. The groups are: AFRIAMSLIC - comprised of members from African countries; Cyamus - members from West coast of North America and Hawai’i; EURASLIC (European Association of Aquatic Sciences Libraries and Information Centers) - members from Europe; Latin America - members from Mexico, Central America and South America; PIRG (Pacific Islands Regional Group) - members from Pacific Islands countries, Australia, New Zealand and Asian countries; and SAIL - members from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of North America, central Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas, Caribbean, eastern Mexico, and Panama (IAMSLIC, 2016). Since its foundation in 1975 (Uhlinger, 1999; Metzger, 2007) until 2015, IAMSLIC has held 41 annual conferences, which enabled aquatic and marine science librarians around the world to meet, discuss things of communal interest and build networks for the advancement of aquatic and marine science librarianship. On average, there were at least 60 attendees at IAMSLIC annual conferences. According to the study conducted by Butler (2006), members identified attendance at the

conference as one of the top three benefits of joining the association, with communication and resource sharing as the first and second benefits respectively. As a matter of fact, a little more than one-half attend IAMSLIC conferences regularly (Butler, 2006).

Librarians as well as other professionals attend conferences for their professional development or advancement, especially those who are working in academic institutions. Conferences are great avenues for librarians to keep up with current trends and developments in the profession and gain new skills which they can apply in their jobs. On the other hand, a librarian's attendance at a conference is always affected by factors internal or external to him. The study was conducted In order to understand why aquatic and marine librarians participate in IAMSLIC annual conferences,.

Using a three-part survey instrument, the study gathered information on the factors that affected the attendance of aquatic and marine librarians from past IAMSLIC annual conferences, such as: 1) Destination stimuli - members were motivated to attend the conference because of the opportunity for combining business and holiday; 2) Professional and social networking opportunities - members were motivated to attend the conference because it gave them an opportunity to develop social and professional contacts thru face-to-face discussions; 3) Educational opportunities - members were motivated to attend the conference because it gave them the opportunity to increase knowledge by listening to speakers and to gather useful information; 4) Safety and health situation - members' decisions to attend the conference depends on their safety and health situation and of the conference location; and 5) Travel-ability - members' decision to attend the conference depends on the time factor and the affordability of the conference. Table 1 shows the factors affecting the attendance of IAMSLIC members to its annual conferences that were being studied and the indicators in each factor. Moreover, the study determines if the above-mentioned factors were affected by the respondents' demographics.

Table 1. Factors Affecting Attendance to IAMSLIC Conference

Factors and Indicators Affecting Members' Attendance
Factor 1: Destination stimuli
<i>Indicators</i>
a. Opportunity to visit the conference destination
b. Extra opportunities available at the destination
c. Attractive image of the conference destination
Factor 2: Professional and social networking opportunities
<i>Indicators</i>
a. Seeing people I know in my field
b. Personal interactions with colleagues and friends
c. Developing a professional network
d. Involvement with the association

Factor 3: Factor 3: Educational opportunities

Indicators

- a. Keeping up with changes in my profession
- b. Listening to respected speakers
- c. Topic of the conference
- d. Fulfilling my desire to learn

Factor 4: Safety and health situation

Indicators

- a. Safety and security situation at the conference destination
- b. Hygiene standards at the conference destination
- c. My health conditions for travel

Factor 5: Travelability

Indicators

- a. Time required to travel to the conference destination
- b. Total cost of attending the conference
- c. My personal financial situation

Literature Review

There is huge amount of research proving that attendance of conventions or conferences does contribute to attendees' continuing professional development. Examples are the studies of Corcoran and McGuinness (2014), Harrison (2010) and Tomaszewski and MacDonald (2009) about librarians; Borg (2014) about teachers; Aziz, Jet & Rahman (2013) about pharmacists; and of Jenerette, et al. (2016) about clinicians. However, attendance at conventions or conferences is affected by some factors which may either be internal or external to the participants. Severt et al. (2007) found out that there are five dimensions of conference motivation among the conference attendees in the southeast United States: activities and opportunities, networking, convenience of conference, educational benefits, and products and deals. Moreover, Rittichainuwat et al. (2008) revealed that restaurant industry educators' conference attendance was motivated by sightseeing, self-enhancement, and business and association activities; were inhibited by conference and personal constraints, and distance, time, and money; and were facilitated by affordability and availability of time, family/spouse, and distance and ease of access. Furthermore, the conference program, networking opportunities, external activities, location, and cost were the five factors which influence both attendance and satisfaction according to Tanford, et al. (2012).

In order to help "future researchers and practitioners in understanding potential attendees' convention participation decision-making," Yoo and Chon (2008) developed a measurement scale to identify the factors and the indicators (see Table 1) affecting convention participation decision-making that was adapted in this study.

Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

A three-part survey instrument was used in data gathering to all IAMSLIC members who have attended any IAMSLIC annual conferences. The first part of the instrument gathered the demographic data; the second part gathered the data about the factors which affected members' attendance at its annual conferences; while the third part was an open-ended question which gathered members' comments or suggestions for the development or improvement of future IAMSLIC conferences. The measurement scale used to examine the factors affecting conference participation decision-making was adapted from Yo & Chon (2008). The respondents were asked to rank the degree of importance of each indicator in every factor in a Likert Scale (1 = Not Important, 2 = Somewhat Unimportant, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Important, 5 = Very Important). The factors were ranked according to the highest mean score. The mean score of every factor was calculated by adding the mean score of each indicator under every factor and was divided according to the total number of indicators.

Two versions of the survey instrument were made, an online survey form in GoogleDocs and a PDF version. Three invitations to participate to the online survey were sent to the IAMSLIC Discussion List and the Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Abstracts (ASFA) Board Listserv. These contained a link to the online survey form and the PDF version as an attachment. Moreover, an invitation to participate was also posted at the IAMSLIC Blog. The responses were gathered from April to July 30, 2016.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile and Membership Information of the Respondents

Ninety six responses were gathered throughout the 4-month survey period, of which 87 (91%) were considered valid. Almost three-fourths (73.6%) of the respondents were females, while a little more than one-fourth (26.4%) were males. The gender of the respondents reflects the current status of the IAMSLIC members wherein the majority are females. The majority of the respondents were from United States (52%) and the remaining 48% were from 29 different countries (see Figure 1). The greater proportion of the respondents were approaching retirement age (Baby boomers- 54 years old or older) (56.3%), with at least a master's degree (80.5%) and were working in special libraries (54%). At least 4 in every 10 were holding a supervisory position. Table 2 shows the demographic profile and membership information of the respondents.

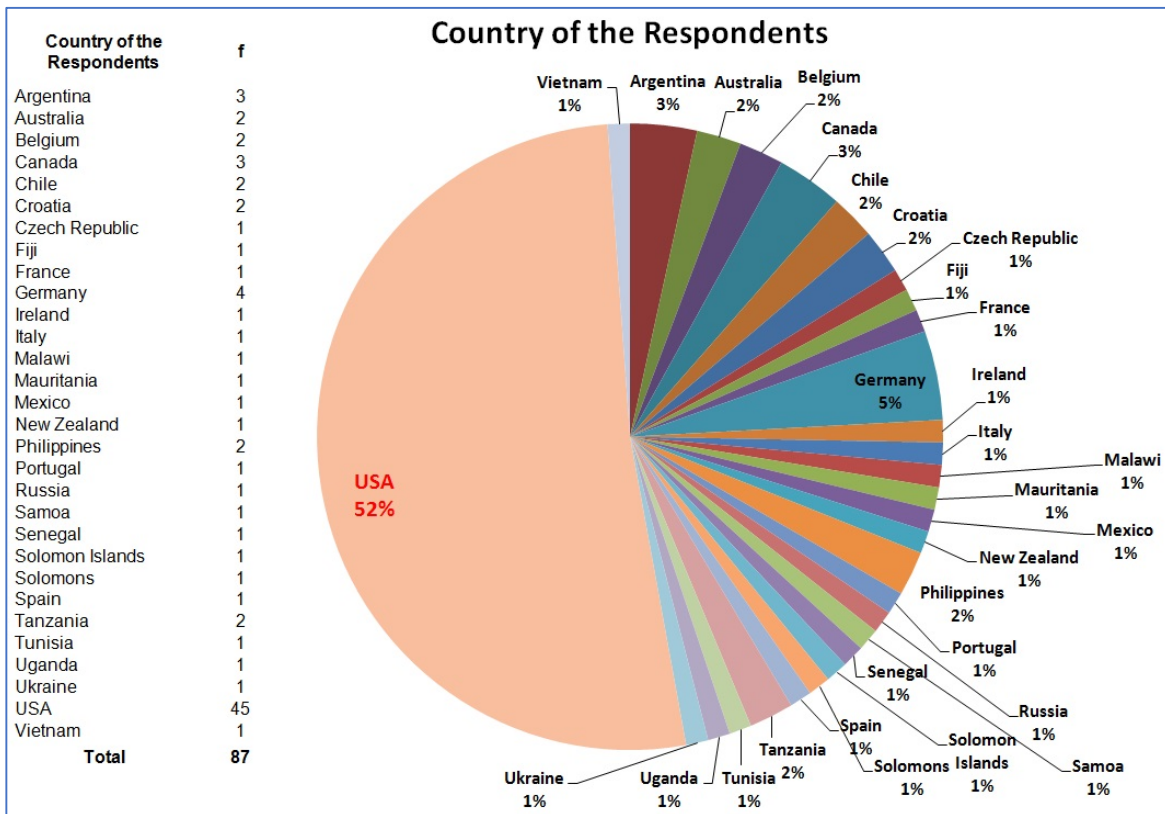


Figure 1. Distribution of the Respondents per Country

As shown in Table 2, at least 6 in every 10 (61%) respondents were members of IAMSLIC for more than 10 years, of which a little less than three-tenths (28.7%) had been members for two decades or more. However, at most one-fifth (19.5%) were quite new to the Association who had been members for at most 5 years. When grouped according to Regional Group affiliation one-third (33.3%) of the respondents were from SAIL and almost one-fifth (18.4%) were from Cyamus, supporting the data in Figure 1 showing that more than one-half of the respondents were from United States. A small proportion of less than one-tenth were from AFRIAMSLIC and Latin America. It is worth noting that a small proportion (4.6%) of the respondents were affiliated with multiple Regional Groups. Six in every 10 (62.1%) of the respondents had attended the annual conferences at least once but not more than five times, while at least two in every 10 (20.7%) had attended more than 10 times. Almost nine-tenths (86.2%) expressed willingness to attend future IAMSLIC annual conferences, a very good indicator of members' satisfaction on how the annual conferences were being organized and with the Association as well.

Table 2. Demographic Profile and Membership Information of the Respondents			
Demographics	%	Membership Details	%
Gender		Length of Membership (Years)	
Male	26.4	21 and Above	28.7
Female	73.6	16-20	20.7
		11-15	11.5
Age		6-10	19.5
Baby Boomers & above (54 years old and above)	56.3	1-5	19.5
Generation X (38-53 years old)	32.2		
Generation Y (37 years and below)	11.5	Regional Group Affiliation	
		AFRIAMSLIC	8
		Cyamus	18.4
Education		EURASLIC	16.1
Doctoral Degree	4.6	Latin America	6.9
Master's Degree	75.9	PIRG	11.5
Bachelor's Degree	19.5	SAIL	33.3
		Multiple Regional Groups (MRG)	4.6
Type of Library		None	1.1
Academic	46.8		
Special	53	Frequency of Attendance at Annual Conference	
		16 or more times – 10	11.5
Position or Designation		11-15 times – 8	9.2
Supervisory	44.8	6-10 times – 15	17.2
Non-Supervisory	46	1-5 times – 54	62.1
Retired	9.2		
		Willingness to Attend Future Conferences	
		Yes	86.2
		No	13.8

Table 2. Demographic Profile and Membership Information of the Respondents

Factors Affecting Members' Attendance at the Annual Conferences

As shown in Table 3, similarly with the findings of Vega and Connell (2007) among librarians in United States, of Mair and Thompson (2009) among delegates of UK association conferences, and of Mair (2014) among delegates of an Australian conference, among IAMSLIC members professional and social networking opportunities was the top factor affecting their attendance at its annual conferences.

Another highly ranked factor was the educational opportunities offered by the conference. On the other hand, the destination stimuli or the opportunity for combining business and holiday by visiting the conference location was of least importance. The result suggests that among IAMSLIC members the location of the conference was the least motivator of their attendance of the Association's annual conferences, contradicting the findings of Rittichainuwat, et al. (2001); Severt, et al. (2007); and of Tretyakevich and Maggi (2011). Therefore, networking opportunities and conference-related factors were the most important reasons why IAMSLIC members attended Annual Conference for their personal and professional development.

Table 3. Ranking of the Factors Affecting Attendance to Annual Conferences

Rank	Factor	Mean Score
1	Factor 2. Professional and social networking opportunities	4.45
2	Factor 3. Educational opportunities	4.22
3	Factor 5. Travelability	3.92
4	Factor 4. Safety and health situation	3.61
5	Factor 1. Destination stimuli	3.38

Indicators of Members' Attendance at the IAMSLIC Annual Conferences

Consistent with the ranking of factors, three of the top five indicators of members' attendance at IAMSLIC annual conferences were from Factor 2. Professional and social networking opportunities - developing a professional network, personal interactions with colleagues and friends, and the opportunity to see people they know in the field - ranked first, third and fourth respectively. Moreover, two of the top five indicators were from Factor 3. Educational opportunities - the opportunity to keep up with changes in the profession and listening to respected speakers - ranked second and fifth respectively. Additionally, the financial aspects of attending the conference were also considered as important indicators for member's attendance. These were the total cost of attending the conference and the member's personal financial situation, and ranked sixth and ninth respectively. On the other hand, two of the lowest ranked indicators were from Factor 1. Destination stimuli - the availability of extra opportunities at the destination and the destination image of the conference location ranked 16th and 17th respectively. The result contradicts with the findings of Malekmohammadi et al. (2011) stating that pleasure-seeking motives were the top motivational factor among international conference attendees in Singapore. Table 4 shows the ranking of indicators affecting attendance of IAMSLIC members at its annual conferences.

Table 4. Ranking of Indicators Affecting Attendance to Annual Conferences

Rank	Indicator	Factor	Mean Score
1	Developing a professional network	2	4.59
2	Keeping up with changes in my profession	3	4.53
3	Personal interactions with colleagues and friends	2	4.52
4	Seeing people I know in my field	2	4.50
5	Listening to respected speakers	3	4.34
6	Total cost of attending the conference	5	4.22
7	Involvement with the association	2	4.20
8	Fulfilling my desire to learn	3	4.20
9	My personal financial situation	5	4.08
10	Topic of the conference	3	3.83
11	Opportunity to visit the conference destination	1	3.75
12	Safety and security situation at the conference destination	4	3.72
13	My health conditions for travel	4	3.57
14	Hygiene standards at the conference destination	4	3.52
15	Time required to travel to the conference destination	5	3.44
16	Extra opportunities available at the destination	1	3.41
17	Destination image of the conference location	1	2.94

Factors Affecting Attendance to Annual Conferences Grouped according to Regional Group Affiliation

As presented in Table 5, Factor 2, the availability of professional and social networking opportunities was the top factor affecting the attendance of members to IAMSLIC annual conferences among all Regional Groups except AFRIAMSLIC members, who rated Factor 3, Educational opportunities, and members with Multiple Regional Group affiliation, who rated Factor 5, Travelability, as the top rated factor. On the other hand, Factor 1, Destination stimuli, was the least rated factor among all Regional Groups except Latin America who rated Factor 4, Safety and health situation, as the least rated factor.

Therefore, to encourage greater attendance among members of different Regional Groups, the organizers of the Conference should consider providing avenues for participants to socialize and to get acquainted with each other. Moreover, timely and relevant topics should be selected as many members see the conference as an avenue to learn the current trends and developments in the profession, specifically for encouraging members of AFRIAMSLIC. Similarly, the affordability of the conference must also be considered as it was the top factor affecting the attendance of members with Multiple Regional Group Affiliation. However, when deciding the venue for future conferences, the Site Selection Committee should never consider the destination image of place as the top criterion when selecting one site over the other.

Table 5. Factors Affecting Attendance to Annual Conferences Grouped according to Regional Group Affiliation

Regional Group Affiliation	Mean Score				
	Factor 1. Destination Stimuli	Factor 2. Professional and Social Networking Opportunities	Factor 3. Educational Opportunities	Factor 4. Safety and Health Situation	Factor 5. Travelability
AFRIAMSLIC	3.43	4.39	4.54	3.62	4.1
Cyamus	3.48	4.58	4.08	3.38	3.79
EURASLIC	3.33	4.38	4.16	3.4	3.83
Latin America	3.83	4.92	4.71	3.78	3.61
PIRG	3.27	4.68	4.48	4.37	4.07
SAIL	3.36	4.28	4.09	3.48	3.94
Multiple Regional Groups	2.92	4.44	4.25	3.83	4.5
Total	3.38	4.45	4.22	3.61	3.92

Comments or Suggestions for the Development/Improvement of Future IAMSLIC Conferences

Table 6 is a summary of comments and suggestions given by the respondents of the study for the improvement or development of future IAMSLIC Conferences. The responses were grouped into several categories, mainly on the improvement of conference program, and the conference online presence for the benefit of non-attending members. Options for the date, location, frequency and venue of the future conferences were also given. Other than the fact that the travel cost was very high, for some the

conference cost was too high as well, thus cheaper and more accessible venues must be selected. Equal opportunity to participate must be given to members of each Regional Group, additionally more grants must be provided to improve the attendance of members from Developing Countries. In support of the findings of the study that the opportunity to expand professional and social networks was the top factor affecting the attendance of members to IAMSLIC annual conferences, it was suggested that the participants must be given opportunities to interact with each other, especially between seasoned and newly recruited members. Thus, the creation of a smaller working group to encourage exchange of ideas during the conference was suggested. In order to increase membership and to ensure continuity of the programs of the Association the recruitment of younger members was suggested, since a great proportion of the members were over 50 years old. Appreciation for the efficient management of the conference was also given.

Table 6. Comments or Suggestions for the Improvement of Future IAMSLIC Conferences

Category	Comments or suggestions
Conference Program	Program should be distributed earlier so that members can prepare at the earliest possible time to secure funding support
	Broaden the conference theme to encourage more speakers
	Provide special sessions for new members
	Include a training session as it may assist members in securing funding support from their parent organizations
	Improve scientific sessions and quality of presentations
	Topics like digitization and document preservation are no longer relevant
Virtual Conference and Online Presence	Virtual conference participation should be considered
	Live remote access to the conference sessions
	Continue the blogging and social media activities to update non-participating members
	Sessions should be recorded and made accessible to all members
Date, Location, Frequency and Venue	Can be done every two years to encourage more participants
	Consider changing the sequence so that the two North American conferences are not in adjacent years
	It is easier to get institutional funding support if IAMSLIC is hosted by well-known international organizations such as FAO/UN
	A late August or early September conference is suggested (due to teaching responsibilities)
	Selecting a major city as the location could encourage more participants than the remote ones
	Hold more frequently in mainland US
Cost	Choose a cheaper venue
	Consider lowering the conference cost
	Very high travel cost

In-Conference Networking (Member to Member interaction)	New members could be paired up with a seasoned IAMSLIC member so they can be introduced to new people
	Create smaller working groups to encourage exchange of ideas
Membership	Attract more young members
Appreciation	Gave opportunities for librarians from developing countries to participate
	Very well organized
	One of the best conferences

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results suggest that the indicators affecting the attendance of IAMSLIC members at its annual conference were common to a majority of the members regardless of their Regional Group affiliation. These were their desire to develop a professional network, keep up with the current trends and development in the profession, communicate with colleagues and friends, and listen to respected speakers. Moreover, attendance at a conference was also affected by members' financial situations and travel time. On the other hand, the destination image of the venue was not an important factor. Thus it is suggested that when organizing future conferences, the IAMSLIC Executive Board should ensure that opportunities for the participants to socialize and to get acquainted with each other are provided, timely and relevant topics are selected, expert speakers are invited (keynote speaker/s), and inexpensive venues (affordable accommodations should be selected, and major cities should be selected over remote ones).

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