

Prospects of virtual exhibitions in the Global South: An exhibitors' perception

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic saw an increase in digitalization in various industries across the globe including the events sector, resulting in a shift in attention toward virtual exhibitions. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to assess the prospects and potential of virtual exhibitions from the exhibitors' perspective. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 151 exhibitors attending the Sanganai/Hlanganani World Tourism Expo held in Zimbabwe. Data was analyzed using frequency distribution, One-Way ANOVA and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The major findings show that there is more preference for physical exhibitions, although there is recognition that virtual events can add value to the exhibition industry. However, considering that the respondents regard physical exhibitions as important and at the same time highlight the potential of virtual exhibitions, hybrid exhibitions become a viable option in the face of threats from future disruptions emanating from pandemics and natural disasters.

Keywords: Hybrid exhibitions, physical exhibitions, tourism exhibitions, trade fairs, trade shows, virtual exhibitions