

## 2000s

# Improving Attendance at Academic Conferences

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### **Abstract**

Academic conferences struggle with declining attendance. This paper reviews the literature on motivators for and obstacles to attendance, as well as marketing for conferences. This is applied to an Information Systems conference with a 25+ year history. Analysis of tangible factors like travel cost, lodging cost, and location attractiveness does not indicate any influence on the attendance as measured by the number of presentations at the conference. This indicates that intangible factors, such as professional development and publication opportunities are more important. Based on the literature, we make recommendations at the conference for increasing registration and attendance. Further study is suggested.

**Keywords:** conference attendance, motivators, obstacles, marketing

# Improving Attendance at Academic Conferences.

*Teko Jan Ernst Bekkering*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Academic conferences play a central role in the life of scholars and practitioners: they present fresh insights, forge new collaborations and get real-time feedback on their work. Early-career faculty and seasoned scholars attend these conferences to gain knowledge, build professional networks, and step away from their routine university duties.

Attendance at academic conferences has declined, posing a challenge for organizers. This paper reviews motivators and obstacles to attendance, so organizers can focus on effective measures to increase attendance.

Key motivators include the opportunity of publishing in peer-reviewed proceedings and journals, meeting potential co-authors or funders, and benchmarking ideas against other projects. On the other hand, obstacles like cost (registration, travel, accommodation), time away from teaching or family, visa hurdles, and even “imposter syndrome” can all lead potential participants to stay at home.

This is an exploratory study of applying conference attendance factors to a specific conference. The Information Systems and Computing Academic Professionals (ISCAP) conference is a conference in the Information Systems field. It originates in the early 1980s, when the Education Special Interest Group (EDSIG) of the Association for Information Systems began hosting an informal “educators’ day” alongside major IS meetings. By 1985, the gathering established its own annual Information Systems Education Conference (ISECON). Through the 1990s and 2000s, ISECON grew from a 50-person workshop into a full multi-track conference, merging with the Conference on Information Systems Applied Research (CONISAR), rebranding to Information Systems and Computing Academic Professionals (ISCAP) in 2023, and creating four dedicated journals.

Since the early 2000s, attendance has slowly declined in number of presentations. This trend can be seen in Figure 1 (2019 had to be excluded due to lack of data for CONISAR). Based on this trend, the conference loses 3 presentations each year.

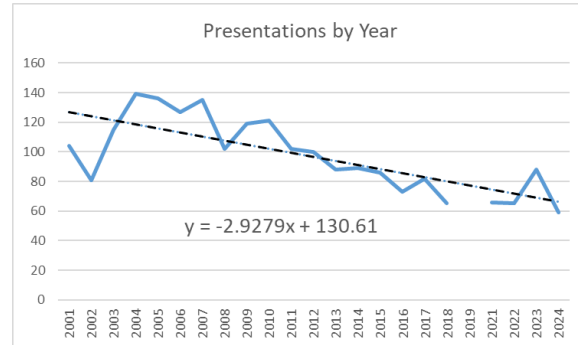


Figure 1 - Presentations by Year

This study aims to start a conversation to reverse that trend.

In the second section, we review the literature on motivators for registration, obstacles faced by faculty, and marketing strategies. We apply tangible factors to ISCAP in the next section, analyze the results in the fourth section, and make recommendations in the final section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conferences, both academic and professional, have been studied academically for years. Authors come from academia, including Information Systems, the medical field, marketing, tourism, and many others. Since the literature on IS conferences is limited, we broadened the review to all fields. We will first review the literature on what motivates conference attendance. This is followed by a discussion of barriers to attendance. The literature review concludes with the decision-making process and literature on marketing conferences.

### Motivations for Attendance

Conference attendance is motivated by educational benefits such as skill development, career enhancement, and knowledge acquisition; conference-related factors such as a strong program, engaging topics, and keynote speakers; networking opportunities such as socializing, making new connections, and joining networking spaces; and availability of quality technology including fast wi-fi and power supply availability (Cassar et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020). Top priorities are generally identified as academic

development and networking (Aktas & Demirel, 2019; Büyükyavuz, 2016; Gössling et al., 2021). Occasionally, studies identify conferences as a form of congress tourism (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001).

### **Knowledge Acquisition**

Knowledge acquisition is consistently cited as a motivator for attending academic conferences (Mair et al., 2018). Fowler et al. (2021) report that two-thirds of Information Systems scholars attend conferences to learn about new research and teaching ideas, making “learning about new research” and “teaching ideas” the top motivations. Hauss (2021) echoes this, showing that doctoral students value conferences for critical feedback on their work and exposure to alternative research methods, while postdocs prize the opportunity to refine their professional identity through engagement with cutting-edge scholarship.

Beyond content uptake, scholars attend specifically to build practical skills and deepen their pedagogical competence. Sanders et al. (2022) frame this as “teaching human capital investment” and “research human capital investment,” two of eight developmental goals driving conference participation. Vander Schee & DeLong (2022) further demonstrate that marketing educators, even in a virtual format, actively seek workshops and sessions that enhance their research capabilities and resume credentials—what they term “competence motivation.”

Conferences also deliver intangible returns that reinforce ongoing learning. Edelheim et al. (2018) identify “keeping up with changes in the profession” and “hearing respected experts speak” as core benefits, suggesting that scholars rely on conferences to stay current in fast-moving fields. Oester et al. (2017) find that a majority of marine conservation delegates learn new techniques and generate novel ideas directly applicable to their research. Together, these findings underscore that conferences are prized as engines of continuous professional development and knowledge acquisition.

### **Networking Opportunities**

Networking opportunities form another motivator for conference attendance (Mair et al., 2018). In one study, 53% of successful collaborations started at national and international conferences, and 90% of conference participants expressed a strong interest in international collaboration (Asbury, 2017). The influence of actually meeting increases sharing interests. Scholz et al. (2014)

discussed the influence of interaction on common attendance at presentations. If two participants had no prior interaction, their likelihood of attending the same talk was 50.8% (nearly random). If participants had face-to-face contact before the talk, attendance probability increased to 58.74%. Interactions during coffee breaks before sessions further increased the likelihood of shared attendance to 65.5%. Hauss (2021) shows that both doctoral students and postdocs rely on conferences to establish new professional connections and deepen existing relationships, often with supervisors facilitating introductions that accelerate integration into disciplinary networks. Fowler et al. (2021) identify a group of “networkers”—about 58.5% of Information Systems scholars—who attend primarily for social engagement alongside research, seeking out casual discussions and group events to build rapport. Vander Schee and DeLong (2022) echo this in their study of marketing educators, finding that relatedness needs drive in-person participation. Sanders et al. (2022) frame these behaviors under “social capital investment,” positioning networking not just as socializing but as a strategic goal for mentorship, collaboration, and career mobility.

The payoff from conference networking extends beyond initial introductions. Edelheim et al. (2018) report that doctoral candidates highly prize informal conversations that blossom into interdisciplinary mentorships and collaborative projects. Oester et al. (2017) quantify this impact: 91% of attendees made new contacts, 64% of those led to joint publications, and nearly 40% resulted in successful grant proposals. These serendipitous encounters—coffee-break chats turning into research partnerships, hallway introductions sparking industry collaborations—underscore how conferences act as incubators for future scholarship and career advancement. In this way, networking emerges not as a peripheral benefit but as a primary engine of professional growth.

### **Career Advancement**

Career advancement is another motivator for conference attendance. Fowler et al. (2021) note that while Information Systems scholars primarily seek new research and teaching ideas, many also value conferences for the professional credit they confer - even if presentation visibility ranks slightly lower. Eke (2011) found that Nigerian librarians view conference participation as a direct pathway to enhanced professional credibility and promotion opportunities. Similarly, Muensank and Sawaengkun (2024) observed that both senior faculty and final-year students

leverage conferences to improve their academic profiles.

Conference publications also lead to journal publications. Publication opportunities in high-impact journals increase conference appeal (Dimitrios et al., 2014). The availability of indexed journal publications (Scopus, SSCI, ESCI) was preferred over proceedings or non-indexed journals (Cavusoglu et al., 2023; Dimitrios et al., 2014). Conference attendance also increases research visibility and citation rates. In a natural experiment, where papers were not presented at a conference cancelled due to a hurricane, citations increased by 3% within two years and 5% in two years after the conference resumed (Leon & McQuillin, 2020).

Beyond institutional recognition, conferences serve as strategic arenas for long-term career self-management. Sanders et al. (2022) frame attendance in terms of "strategic mobility opportunity creation", highlighting how academics use conferences to explore new career paths. Oester et al. (2017) quantify the practical payoff: nearly 40% attributed successful grant proposals to connections forged at the meeting, while 64% reported new publication collaborations. For many scholars, the promise of concrete career gains—funding, publications, promotions—makes conference attendance a critical investment in their professional futures.

### **Institutional Requirements**

Institutions often tie conference attendance to formal performance metrics. Conferences confer academic credit, even when conferences have lower visibility than journal publications (Fowler et al., 2021). Furthermore, Sanders et al. (2022) note that universities and HR departments align funding with institutional priorities, directing resources to conferences that build research capital or support pedagogical development.

### **Validation and Feedback**

Academic conferences serve as vital platforms for scholars to seek validation and constructive critique of their work. Hauss (2021) found that doctoral students especially prize conference presentations because they yield critical commentary from established researchers, helping refine methodologies and solidify arguments. Postdocs likewise view these interactions as opportunities to benchmark their progress against peers and adjust their career trajectories. Sanders et al. (2022) embed this dynamic in their career self-management framework, listing "academic mentorship" as a distinct goal—attendees deliberately pursue

mentors and senior colleagues at conferences to gain candid feedback on research design, teaching approaches, and publication strategies.

Yet the promise of feedback is not always fulfilled. Rowe (2018) critiques many conferences for offering only cursory feedback. Presenters often leave sessions without the in-depth guidance they sought. This gap has spurred recommendations for more interactive formats: dedicated critique panels in poster sessions, small-group workshops, and roundtables.

### **Social and Cultural Aspects**

Social connection and informal interaction are powerful motivators for attending conferences. Vander Schee and DeLong (2022) found that attendees often choose in-person events to fulfill relatedness needs, using coffee breaks, meals, and receptions to share experiences and reinforce peer support. Sanders et al. (2022) describe this as "social network maintenance," noting how academics use informal settings like poster socials, hallway chats, and dinner gatherings to sustain mentorships and foster new collaborations.

Cultural rituals enhance the social value of conferences, particularly for scholars from collectivist cultures who appreciate communal events fostering shared identity (Sanders et al., 2022). Integrating regional traditions also promotes relaxation and global awareness, enriching the research environment (Oester et al., 2017).

### **Prestige and Recognition**

Academic prestige and the promise of enhanced recognition drive many scholars to prioritize high-profile conferences. Nicholas Rowe (2018) notes that delegates often view premier events as stages for reputation building, deliberately targeting well-known venues to showcase their work and gain visibility among leading peers.

### **Escaping Routine**

An important, yet often overlooked, motivator for conference attendance is the desire to escape daily routines. Fowler et al. (2021) note that Information Systems scholars often view conferences as a "sabbatical," an intentional break from routine academic duties that recharges intellectual batteries. Friesen (2024) found a similar effect among undergraduates, who benefit from the chance to leave campus and explore a new city, returning with fresh ideas and renewed enthusiasm. Conference programs that include field trips and cultural excursions further enhance this sense of escape. Oester et al. (2017)

highlight that attendees particularly value tours that move them out of lecture halls and into real-world research settings.

### **Barriers to Attendance**

Like motivators, barriers to attendance are multiple. They include high costs for registration, travel, and accommodation; limited financial support by universities; time limitations caused by work commitments and late conference announcements; and occasionally safety concerns (Cassar et al., 2020; Mair & Frew, 2018; Omorobi et al., 2025).

### **Financial Cost**

Financial cost is the most frequently cited obstacle to conference attendance (Mair & Frew, 2018). While hotel and travel costs have remained relatively stable, registration fees have doubled over the past decade (Mann et al., 2024). Scholars often forgo conferences because the combined costs of registration, travel, and accommodation quickly exceed personal or departmental budgets (Doğan, 2023; Eke, 2011; Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024; Muensank & Sawaengkun, 2024), particularly for international travel. A small number of countries produce the majority of papers accepted at high-tier conferences, but Europe and China play a central role in global research dissemination (Mannocci et al., 2019). Cavusoglu et al. (2023) found that attendance significantly declines when conference costs exceed \$2,000, with researchers preferring events under \$1,000.

### **Lack of Institutional Support and Funding Limitations**

As academic travel budgets shrink, financial support is increasingly tied to presenting, with some institutions only funding full oral presenters (Oester et al., 2017). This trend encourages scholars to submit, and occasionally inflate, abstracts to secure funding. Of course, the quality of these papers tends to be low. Reduced institutional support has led many to attend virtual events despite a clear preference for in-person networking (Vander Schee & DeLong, 2022). Parncutt et al. (2019) and Ram et al. (2024) suggest that universities recognize in person and online participation equally.

### **Scheduling Conflicts**

Heavy teaching loads, research deadlines, and administrative duties can create scheduling conflicts (Mair et al., 2018). Conference dates may collide with midterm grading periods, departmental meetings, or grant proposal deadlines, forcing scholars to choose between campus responsibilities and professional

development opportunities (Muensank & Sawaengkun, 2024). As a result, even when financial assistance is available, academics may defer attendance or rely on virtual formats simply to work around their busy calendars.

Time-zone coordination in multi-hub conferences can exacerbate these conflicts (Parncutt et al., 2019). While dividing daily schedules into morning and afternoon global interaction blocks helps, participants still struggle with sessions scheduled outside their regular work hours—early morning keynotes or late-night panels often go unattended by those who must fulfill daytime teaching or lab commitments (Parncutt et al., 2019). Carving out uninterrupted time during busy academic cycles remains a persistent barrier to conference participation.

### **Work and Family Responsibilities**

This only intensifies when personal commitments, such as caregiving or parental responsibilities, must be juggled alongside professional ones (Mair & Frew, 2018). Scholars may find themselves forced to choose between campus obligations and family duties (Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024). This tends to fall disproportionately on female scholars (Biggs et al., 2018; Knoll et al., 2019). In practice, this often means deferring attendance or turning to less desirable virtual options simply to keep up with domestic routines (Muensank & Sawaengkun, 2024). Conference onsite childcare would be a helpful potential service (Bos et al., 2019; Cardel et al., 2022; Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024). Multi-hub and hybrid formats, designed to increase access, still require participants to block out fixed periods for live presentations (Parncutt et al., 2019; Walton et al., 2022).

### **Geographical and Travel Constraints**

Regional disparities and travel logistics present significant hurdles for conference attendees. Scholars in regions far from major academic centers face complications from long journeys and visa requirements (Cavusoglu et al., 2023; Doğan, 2023; Eke, 2011; Sarabipour et al., 2020), a burden that can be particularly acute for LGBTQ+ individuals and other minority groups (Anonymous, 2020; Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024). The effort required to arrange distant travel, including flights, accommodations, and documentation, can outweigh the professional benefits (Idiegbeyan-ose et al., 2015). The "one-site" model sidelines researchers from underrepresented regions (Parncutt et al., 2019), forcing them to endure multiple flights and demanding land transport to reach venues (Oester et al., 2017). While multi-site venues could mitigate these challenges (Witt et al.,

1995), their adoption remains limited (Parncutt et al., 2019).

### **Accessibility and Inclusivity Issues**

Digital divide issues may compound geographic challenges. Reliance on proprietary software platforms and uneven time-zone accommodations can sideline participants without reliable broadband or institutional IT support (Etzion et al., 2022; Page & Mosen, 2024; Parncutt et al., 2019). Selective institutional sponsorship further narrows who can participate. When limited budgets force institutions to cap the number of sponsored attendees, priority is given to senior faculty, perpetuating a cycle where underrepresented groups and emerging researchers remain excluded from attendance (Muensank & Sawaengkun, 2024).

### **Perceived Lack of Relevance**

Perceived lack of relevance often proves a decisive barrier to conference attendance, especially when programs diverge from practitioners' core challenges. Scholars prioritize conferences that they perceive as more relevant. In hybrid and virtual settings, participants focus on sessions with clear connections between content and attendees' everyday responsibilities, whether research or pedagogy related (Vander Schee & DeLong, 2022).

### **Marketing Strategies**

Conference marketing includes increasing motivators and decreasing barriers to attendance. Decisions to attend conferences are processes rather than single events. Mair (2005) describes the following stages:

1. Initial Awareness and Interest. Delegates become aware of the conference through marketing, word-of-mouth, or institutional recommendations. They assess relevance to their field, reputation of speakers, and potential networking opportunities.
2. Consideration & Evaluation. Attendees weigh costs, location, timing, and institutional support. They compare the conference with alternative events or other professional commitments. Funding availability (grants, employer sponsorship) plays a crucial role in decision-making.
3. Commitment & Registration. Once convinced of the conference's value, delegates register and arrange travel/accommodation. Early-bird discounts and institutional deadlines often influence the timing of registration.
4. Pre-Conference Engagement. Attendees prepare by reviewing the agenda, selecting sessions, and scheduling meetings. Some may submit research abstracts or coordinate with

colleagues for collaborative presentations.

5. On-Site Participation. Delegates engage in sessions, networking events, and informal discussions. Their experience is shaped by venue quality, session relevance, and social interactions.
6. Post-Conference Reflection and Impact. Attendees evaluate whether the conference met expectations and provided professional benefits. They may share insights with colleagues, publish findings, or establish new collaborations. Satisfaction levels influence future attendance decisions.

This comprehensive evaluation process determines initial as well as repeat attendance.

### **Defining the Target Audience**

Defining and segmenting the audience is the first step to effective conference marketing (Kim et al., 2020). By profiling groups in marketing materials — emphasizing hands-on critique sessions for PhD students, career-development panels for postdocs, and rich networking receptions for relational attendees — each group can find clear value in registering.

Tailoring messaging to practitioners and sector specialists is equally crucial. Some scholar prefer conferences that promise concrete skill-building, others focus on teaching theory or recreational activities (Oester et al., 2017; Vander Schee & DeLong, 2022). Advertising these unique experiences will draw both seasoned faculty and early-career scientists.

Finally, the outreach channels should match the defined segments. Social-capital seekers engage heavily on Twitter backchannels, so active hashtag campaigns and curated live-tweet feeds can increase registrations (Sanders et al., 2022; Wen et al., 2014). Campus ambassadors and student listservs reach undergraduates and graduate students most effectively, while specialized listservs and industry newsletters tap practitioners and librarians. Interestingly, age may not be much of a factor in deciding to attend (Severt et al., 2009).

### **Leveraging Social Media**

Whereas email and websites are strong communication, social media, especially Twitter, has become an valuable tool for conference promotion (Kim et al., 2020). Dedicated hashtags and live-tweet streams sustain engagement before, during, and after meetings (Albertson & Rogers, 2023). By launching a hashtag campaign six to eight weeks ahead of time, teasing speaker quotes, and hosting Twitter Q&As, organizers tap directly into the networking impulse that draws

nearly 60 percent of “networkers” to conferences (Fowler et al., 2021).

Other scholars gravitate toward LinkedIn posts and specialized Facebook groups when they see clear alignment with their skill-building goals (Vander Schee & DeLong, 2022), and doctoral candidates respond well to Slack channels and private forums offering deep-dive methodological discussions (Hauss, 2021). Crafting short LinkedIn articles highlighting upcoming workshops, sharing bite-sized video teasers on Instagram or TikTok, and posting speaker spotlights in discipline-specific Slack or Teams communities helps each cohort perceive direct value. If the conference wishes to attract Chinese scholars, it may be necessary to include China-specific platforms such as WeChat since Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are less popular in China (Pavluković et al., 2022).

Finally, social media analytics allow organizers to adjust their messaging in real time. Monitoring engagement metrics like retweets, comment threads, and link clicks, helps identify which session previews or speaker announcements resonate best. Encouraging user-generated content, such as photo contests or “best takeaways” posts, leverages authentic attendee voices and multiplies reach.

### **Modeling the Promotion Process through Social Media**

Using social media to promote academic conferences has been the subject of one academic study. Plikas et al. (2100) explored how social media can effectively promote academic conferences and used simulation modeling to identify optimal strategies. They argue that academic conferences can use strategic social media engagement to have a broader reach and increase participation. They identified four social media strategies:

1. Use blogging to post event details, registration links, speaker interviews, and updates.
2. Use academic and general event directories to improve visibility
3. Build online communities to foster engagement and discussion (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter).
4. Use social sharing buttons on websites and blog posts to reach more audience.

Using simulation modeling, they found that blogs generated the highest satisfaction and profitability, event directories had the lowest impact, and engagement strategies improved participant involvement and attendance. Specific suggestions based on their work (2017, 2100) will

be discussed at the conference.

### **Designing Conference Websites**

Conference websites must immediately communicate their value to distinct attendee segments. Providing access to full conference materials, including papers, can strengthen its academic impact (Rowe, 2018). Effective website design is crucial for engagement, while poor design can actively deter attendance. To maximize accessibility and utility, the website must feature a mobile-responsive design, a streamlined registration process, and a searchable speaker directory.

### **Selecting the Conference Location**

The choice of conference location can significantly influence attendance. Attendees prefer metropolitan areas over smaller towns (Cavusoglu et al., 2023), and a destination's attractiveness can increase participation (Veloutsou & Chreppas, 2011; Witt et al., 1995). Unique locations and entertainment options are increasingly important (Cassar et al., 2020; Cieřlikowski & Brusokas, 2020). Conference organizers can further enhance satisfaction by partnering with local tourism operators to provide cultural experiences and opportunities for local exploration, which can be highly valued by attendees and their partners (Wang, 2020).

Growing concern over the environmental impact of academic travel—particularly air travel, which comprises up to 90% of a researcher's carbon footprint—has prompted calls for virtual and hybrid conference models (Hall, 2007; Parker et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2022; Sarabipour et al., 2020). Long-distance flights remain the dominant source of emissions, conflicting with institutional sustainability goals (Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024; van Ewijk & Hoekman, 2021). Multi-hub and hybrid formats offer a viable solution, preserving conference prestige while reducing travel burdens and accommodating diverse logistical needs (Page & Mosen, 2024; Parncutt et al., 2019).

### **Using Email Marketing**

Email marketing for academic conferences hinges on precise audience segmentation and tailored messaging. Compelling subject lines increase responses to email messages (Stupar-Rutenfrans et al., 2019). Doctoral candidates prioritize critical-feedback sessions while postdocs seek career-identity workshops (Hauss, 2021). Emails to candidates could have subject lines like “PhD Critique Workshop: Submit Your Abstract”, and postdoc emails could lead with “Leadership Panel for Emerging Scholars”. Both groups could respond to subject lines mentioning journal

publication opportunities. Beyond segmentation, emails need clear calls to action. Emails that include direct links to actions (e.g., “Click here to register”) have higher click-through and response rates (O’Connell, 2008).

### **Collaborating with Academic Institutions**

Collaborations between academic conferences and universities can significantly increase attendance by leveraging institutional networks and credibility. Conferences organized by universities or academic associations are viewed as more trustworthy than those hosted by publishers or unknown entities (Cavusoglu et al., 2023). Universities provide a built-in audience and can offer logistical support, such as discounted venue space and financial incentives like travel grants, which lower costs and barriers for attendees (Cavusoglu et al., 2023; Doğan, 2023).

Beyond logistics, such partnerships lend intellectual legitimacy to the conference itself. It is more likely to be perceived as rigorous and worthwhile. The university can help secure keynote speakers, panelists, and sponsors, further increasing visibility and attendance.

### **Utilizing Content Marketing**

Content marketing effectively promotes academic conferences by raising awareness and fostering engagement before registration. Sharing blog posts, interviews, planning updates, and thought leadership positions the event as essential, boosting attendance when the content highlights relevant research or key disciplinary issues (Świeczak, 2012).

It also fosters ongoing connection. Instead of relying solely on one-time announcements, content marketing creates a narrative around the event: content of the research, who is involved, and how it contributes to the academic community. This storytelling can be distributed through multiple channels, including email and social platforms.

### **Engaging Influential Scholars**

Featuring prominent scholars in visible roles enhances conference credibility and attracts attendees, who view expert talks as key indicators of program quality. Attendees rank “hearing respected experts speak” among their top intangible benefits, using these talks as a barometer for overall program quality (Edelheim et al., 2018). Beyond their formal roles, prominent scholars possess extensive networks of colleagues, collaborators, and students. When a well-known researcher promotes their

participation through social media or personal emails, it significantly cuts through promotional noise. This direct engagement is effective because academics often follow the cues of established figures when deciding where to allocate limited travel resources (Sanders et al., 2022). Early career researchers will benefit from increased access to mentoring and networking opportunities.

### **Offering Early-bird and Other Discounts**

Offering discounts directly tackles the financial hurdles that may keep some scholars from attending a conference (Eke, 2011; Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024). Early bird rates also dovetail with the academic calendar’s planning needs (Sanders et al., 2022). To maximize impact, early bird discounts work best when paired with targeted, time-sensitive outreach. “Save the Date” campaigns launched six to eight weeks ahead, followed by tiered reminders, dramatically increase engagement (Albertson & Rogers, 2023).

Early-career researchers face pressure to publish, yet many struggle to afford conference participation (Kiesler & Schiffner, 2024). Offering discounts for recent graduates can increase their chances of career success, and lead to repeat attendance (Cavusoglu et al., 2023; Johnson & Chin, 2020; Sarabipour et al., 2020).

Discounts could also be offered to researchers from low-income countries (Doğan, 2023), which would simultaneously increase the international character of the conference.

### **Family-friendly policies**

Family-friendly policies can promote academic conference attendance by making events more accessible and appealing to a broader range of participants, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. Potential measures include on-site childcare and breastfeeding accommodations (Bos et al., 2019; Calisi & Working Group of Mothers in Science, 2018; Cardel et al., 2022; Corona-Sobrino et al., 2020).

### **Using Paid Advertising**

Strategic use of paid advertising—via professional journals and digital platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Google Ads—can enhance conference registration. Tracking key performance metrics (Click-through Rate, Conversion Rate, and Cost per Acquisition) enables data-driven budget allocation and optimization (Sampath, 2024).



### Virtual and Hybrid Conferences

While eco-friendly practices are viewed positively, they are not yet a primary motivator (Cassar et al., 2020). Traditional face to face conferences are superior with regard to networking, relationship-building and knowledge exchange, especially tacit knowledge shared in informal settings (Edwards et al., 2022). After the pandemic, the use of virtual and hybrid formats declined again. 67% of organizers chose for in-person conferences only, only 20% offered hybrid formats, and just 13% remained fully virtual (Falk & Hagsten, 2023). The best format to offer may be the hybrid format, however. Attendees of a conference virtualized due to Covid preferred hybrid conferences by a margin of 59.6%, compared with 32.0% for in-person and 11.1% for pure virtual (Ram et al., 2024).

Online participation addresses key barriers to in-person attendance by enhancing affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity, especially for underrepresented scholars (Dumbell & Haddow, 2024; Edwards et al., 2022; Raby & Madden, 2021). Hybrid formats, particularly multi-hub models, mitigate travel and visa constraints while accommodating diverse time zones (Parncutt et al., 2019). Features like on-demand content and asynchronous discussion boards further support flexible engagement.

### Use of Technology

Proper use of technology includes both dealing with potential problems and taking advantage of opportunities. Technical issues such as poor internet connectivity and sound quality detract from participation (Edwards et al., 2022).

Online tools for academic conferences fall into three categories: event management, submission handling, and virtual engagement platforms (Oruc, 2021). Features such as personalized schedules, calendar visualization, and session access enhance usability (Brusilovsky et al., 2017). Social media integration—e.g., live Twitter feeds and hashtags—can boost engagement, though empirical validation remains limited (Albertson & Rogers, 2023; Spilker et al., 2020).

At the conference, QR codes can enhance research dissemination and networking (Meloro et al., 2013; Paludo, 2024). They also enable surveys and participant feedback which are increasingly important (Lewis & Kerr, 2012), and tracking attendee satisfaction in real-time provides valuable insights for future events (Godovykh & Hahm, 2020). It also reduces reliance on printed materials which supports sustainability (Paludo, 2024; Snapsight, 2025).

This is especially attractive for younger generations (Pavluković et al., 2023). Finally, post-event engagement through electronic word of mouth is especially important for virtual conferences (Jeong et al., 2023).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Year	Location	HAI	TI	LAI	CAI
2025	Louisville, KY	53%	65%	15%	44%
2024	Baltimore, MD	59%	70%	16%	48%
2023	Albuquerque, NM	52%	81%	17%	50%
2022	Clearwater, FL	15%	49%	6%	23%
2021	Washington, DC	60%	90%	14%	55%
2019	Cleveland, Ohio	52%	69%	49%	57%
2018	Norfolk, VA	62%	84%	13%	53%
2017	Austin, TX	64%	90%	34%	62%
2016	Las Vegas, NV	58%	83%	35%	59%
2015	Wilmington, NC	43%	74%	13%	43%
2014	Baltimore, MD	59%	70%	16%	48%
2013	San Antonio, TX	43%	79%	51%	58%
2012	New Orleans, LA	23%	69%	28%	40%
2011	Wilmington, NC	43%	74%	13%	43%
2010	Nashville, TN	32%	77%	40%	50%
2009	Washington, DC	44%	90%	52%	62%
2008	Phoenix, AZ	19%	85%	35%	46%
2007	Pittsburgh, PA	0%	67%	23%	30%
2006	Dallas, TX	41%	92%	34%	56%
2005	Columbus, OH	70%	85%	42%	66%
2004	Newport, RI	10%	0%	14%	8%
2003	San Diego, CA	46%	94%	24%	55%
2002	San Antonio, TX	54%	79%	63%	65%
2001	Cincinnati, OH	66%	78%	30%	58%
2000	Philadelphia, PA	48%	78%	55%	60%
1999	Chicago, IL	70%	97%	2%	56%
1998	San Antonio, TX	54%	79%	63%	65%

Table 1- Overall Results

We used the ISCAP website to find hotels and number of presentations for each year. We had to exclude 2020 (virtual conference), and 1991/1989/1984 (not held). Other conferences before 1998 were excluded due to lack of information. In total, we used 27 (near) consecutive conferences for our analysis.

Lodging costs were estimated using the lowest available double-occupancy rates via Google Maps and Expedia, with substitutions for closed

hotels. Travel costs were standardized using flight data from a central U.S. location. Location attractiveness was assessed through cultural and dining amenities and walkability within a five-mile radius. These metrics informed three ad hoc indices: Travel (TI), Hotel Affordability (HAI), and Location Attractiveness (LAI), which were averaged to produce a Conference Attractiveness Index (CAI).

For the travel index, we multiplied the percentile distance from airport to conference hotel and multiplied this with the percentile airfare. For instance, if the airfare was \$169 in a range of \$101-407, the percentile would be 169/407 or 34%. All other percentiles were calculated likewise as a fraction of actual and maximum. This product was deducted from 100% so the hotel with the highest score for proximity to the hotel and the lowest rate would be rated highest.

The hotel affordability index was calculated by deducting the percentile rank of the room charges from 100%, so the most affordable hotel would be rated highest.

Then, we calculated the location attractiveness index by calculating percentile ranks for each type of attraction, averaging these percentiles, and multiplying this with the percentile rank for the walkability score. The number of attractions in a category can vary widely, for instance the number of restaurants is much greater than the number of museums. Since most attendees will fly to the conference, we considered the walkability round the hotel of equal weight.

Overall results are shown in Table 1.

#### 4. Results and Analysis

When we sort the conferences by the overall score, the results are very uniform. The average CAI is 50.4%, and the standard deviation is 13.3% (Table 2). Using two standard deviations, we excluded all CAIs below 23.8% and above 77.0%. Only Clearwater, FL and Newport, RI fell outside the range, indicating that the conference locations had a consistent combination of travel, hotel cost, and location attractiveness (Table 3). Even 1999 Chicago, which was held at the Holiday Inn O'Hare International hotel, made up for a score of 2% for location attractiveness with a 97% travel score.

CAI	
Mean	0.504169
Standard Error	0.025607
Median	0.546485
Mode	0.651912
Standard Deviation	0.133057
Sample Variance	0.017704
Kurtosis	3.028765
Skewness	-1.58443
Range	0.575253
Minimum	0.081761
Maximum	0.657014
Sum	13.61257
Count	27
Confidence Level(95.0%)	0.052636

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic conferences face challenges attracting researchers to attend. For the ISCAP conference, we found that conference location and cost do not significantly affect attendance. The conference has a good track record, and there may be opportunities for improvement of non-tangible factors. Based on the literature, combined with personal experience, opportunities for the conference will be discussed at the conference.

Limitations of the study include the use of a single conference, and the use of CoPilot and Google Maps to collect some of the data. Only some tangible factors are considered. The study could be followed by a survey of conference attendees and interviews with past presidents and other key conference organizers to formulate strategies to reverse the decline.

Year	Location	CAI
2005	Columbus, OH	66%
2002	San Antonio, TX	65%
1998	San Antonio, TX	65%
2017	Austin, TX	62%
2009	Washington, DC	62%
2000	Philadelphia, PA	60%
2016	Las Vegas, NV	59%
2001	Cincinnati, OH	58%
2013	San Antonio, TX	58%
2019	Cleveland, Ohio	57%
1999	Chicago, IL	56%
2006	Dallas, TX	56%
2021	Washington, DC	55%
2003	San Diego, CA	55%
2018	Norfolk, VA	53%
2023	Albuquerque, NM	50%
2010	Nashville, TN	50%
2024	Baltimore, MD	48%
2014	Baltimore, MD	48%
2008	Phoenix, AZ	46%
2025	Louisville, KY	44%
2015	Wilmington, NC	43%
2011	Wilmington, NC	43%
2012	New Orleans, LA	40%
2007	Pittsburgh, PA	30%
2022	Clearwater, FL	23%
2004	Newport, RI	8%

Table 3 - Conference Attractiveness Scores

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