

# ADDING VALUE TO THE ACADEMIC CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE FOR MARKETING DOCTORAL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the Study:** *This study ascertains how marketing doctoral students perceive attending annual academic conferences offered by marketing professional organizations.*

**Method, Design, and Sample:** *A survey was made available via an AMA ELMAR post announcing its availability in May 2021. The number of doctoral students who completed the survey was 57. A second round of data collection took place in March 2023 resulting in an additional 71 completed surveys. Both instruments were designed to provide greater detail on perceived favorable, unfavorable, and missing academic conference features.*

**Results:** *When it came to attending a conference in general, respondents indicated that hearing advancements in the discipline, informal conversation, and social enjoyment were most valuable. When it came to attending a particular conference, respondents indicated that networking opportunities, peer feedback, maintaining friendships, and social enjoyment were most valuable. Features that could enhance the academic conference experience for marketing doctoral students include a session on navigating the job market process, structured networking, presentations from industry representatives, and a scheduled social time for just doctoral students.*

**Value to Marketing Educators:** *This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by enhancing our understanding of the marketing doctoral student conference experience. Providing value for them to participate in academic marketing conferences can maintain attendance numbers as seasoned faculty retire from the profession. The focus on value to encourage doctoral student attendance can also grow the membership of the sponsoring professional organizations.*

**Keywords:** marketing education; doctoral students; academic conferences; professional development

## INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators and doctoral students often attend academic marketing conferences. Doctoral students are unique because they represent future academic conference attendees, however they have limited funding to participate while still in school. Thus, it is important for conference planners to know how to make the academic conference experience valuable for doctoral students for current attendance and future retention. The objective of this study is to ascertain how marketing doctoral students perceive attending annual academic conferences offered by marketing professional organizations. This study makes a valuable contribution to the literature by enhancing our understanding of the marketing doctoral student conference experience.

Research on academic conferences is common in many disciplines including criminology (Neuilly & Stohr, 2016), human resources (Sanders et al., 2022), and education (Fakunle et al., 2019) to name a few. Lists or guides regarding the benefits for doctoral students to attend an academic conference are common as well (George, 2022; studycatch, 2020; T&F Author Services, n.d.). Marketing scholars, however, have not published studies examining the efficacy and experiences of academic marketing conferences, with the exception of Swift et al. (1998) and Vander Schee and DeLong (2022). Moreover, to date no published studies have investigated the value sought by marketing doctoral students in attending academic conferences.

Academic conferences fall under the umbrella of academic events, which also include conventions, meetings, symposia, colloquia, seminars, workshops, and congresses (Hansen & Pedersen, 2018). Many times, these terms are used interchangeably. Based on the concepts developed by Hansen et al. (2020),

we define academic marketing conferences as “consecutive multi-day events planned in advance with attendees from various institutions of higher education to exchange research findings or pedagogically-based marketing scholarship.” Marketing doctoral students are sensitive to the time and financial resource obligation associated with academic conference participation. The results of this study should provide meaningful insights for conference planners considering the high level of resources and time invested in their preparation and execution (Hansen & Pedersen, 2018).

Academic conferences complement doctoral training from the outset. A significant factor in choosing to pursue a doctoral degree in marketing beyond intellectual challenge is having lifestyle flexibility (Davis & McCarthy, 2005). The academic conference experience addresses both factors in that doctoral students have the time available to engage in scholarship and socialization with doctoral student colleagues and seasoned academics at these events. However, the cost of attending a national conference, on average, is between \$1,500 and \$2,000, which is equivalent to one or more months of salary or research funding for many doctoral students (Sarabipour et al., 2021). The financial investment is compounded by having significantly less funding available for conference attendance for doctoral students compared to tenure-track faculty (Vander Schee & DeLong, 2022). This financial situation highlights the need to understand what marketing doctoral students hope to gain from academic conferences.

The remainder of this manuscript is organized as follows. First, we provide a review of the relevant literature related to doctoral student training, early career professional development, academic conference format, and the academic conference experience regarding scholarship and socialization. Second, we discuss the method, including sample, data collection, and measures used in this study. Third, we present the data analysis and results. Lastly, we include a discussion based on the findings and address the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Doctoral Student Training

For many students, conference attendance is a mandatory part of the doctoral program (Fakunle et al., 2019). Advantages of academic conference paper presentation and participation include timeliness, informal collaboration, and reputation building. One can gain exposure to new research in the academic conference setting for studies that are delayed by lengthy peer reviews and production schedules for journal publication. Access to early developments in new studies may influence the direction of methods used or research conducted by doctoral students (Storme et al., 2017). At the same time, motivated doctoral students can present their findings to date at an academic conference for expedited peer review (Obilo & Alford, 2015). Regarding informal collaboration, spontaneous information surfaces that may be instrumental in future endeavors including vacant jobs, tenure requirements, and new research group formation to name a few. Reputation building is established through nonredundant connections (Burt, 2001). The degree to which doctoral students interact with faculty and doctoral students from other institutions develops their social network and social capital.

Networking is a fundamental component of training for doctoral students (McAlpine, 2012). However, survey research representing over 40,000 post-graduate researchers indicated the lowest satisfaction from their program of study was with developing contacts or professional networks (Pitkin, 2021). Networking for doctoral students outside of their home institution is critical and merits further research (Wakefield & Dismore, 2015). Such networking can take place at an academic conference where doctoral students can interact and learn from a global audience of scholars in their discipline (Fakunle et al., 2019).

### Early Career Professional Development

From a professional perspective, early career academics are expected to present their research findings at academic conferences to address an audience beyond institutional colleagues (Neuilly & Stohr, 2016). Participation in academic conferences may enhance job prospects with faculty from hiring institutions attending the conference or seasoned scholars who are looking for new talent to further enhance their research stream. Junior scholars can access content to revise a current course or prepare for a new course (Reinhard et al., 2021). Other faculty as well as textbook publishers, simulation vendors, and online content providers attending as exhibitors are valuable resources. Professional development, such as workshops or roundtables, enhance the conference experience with topics not necessarily addressed outside of the conference setting.

Annual academic conference attendance may foster forming working groups for early career scholars

that develop around a common research agenda, life stage, or personal interest area (Logue-Conroy et al., 2021). Academic conferences provide the context for interactions that may be spawned during social gatherings or hallway conversations in between sessions that build into a more formal arrangement of annual discussions or during the time in between conferences. These professional associations that grow into personal friendships provide social and emotional support from an objective and personalized perspective. Starting the process at the outset of one's academic career can be beneficial from doctoral training to full professor.

### **Academic Conference Format**

Academic conferences can be offered completely in-person, fully online, or utilize a hybrid approach with some attendees face-to-face and others participating virtually. Researchers have questioned the necessity for corporeal mobility (i.e., meeting in-person) given the high financial costs (Rowe, 2019), negative environmental impact associated with air travel (Fraser et al., 2017), relationship disruption (Viglione, 2020), and potential gender and race discrimination due to inequitable access to resources (Tulloch, 2020). Moreover, virtual conferences are not limited by capacity in the same way that in-person conferences have space restrictions with guest and meeting room facilities (Parncutt & Seither-Preisler, 2019).

Although virtual conferences provide greater access (Sen et al., 2022), a study by Raby and Madden (2021) found reduced social integration compared to an in-person academic conference experience. Temporary proximity, such as gathering in-person for an academic conference, fosters future collaboration, most notably among junior researchers who have a prior mutual affiliation or continued relationship from the same annual event (Chai & Freeman, 2019). Although doctoral students benefit from the networking opportunities experienced with in-person conference attendance, it has been suggested that the virtual format is more equitable and sustainable (Sarabipour et al., 2021).

### **Academic Conference Experience**

Academic conferences can be studied as subjects, objects, stages, or experiences (Edelheim et al., 2018). Attending an academic conference as an experience involves research on creating valuable scholarship and community participation (Reinhard et al., 2021). The academic conference encompasses both formal and informal engagement. The formal aspect involves presentations and programmed events whereas the informal interaction fosters recruitment for new positions and job seeking for new doctoral graduates (Reychav & Te'eni, 2009). Some academic marketing conferences capitalize on both forms of engagement by offering an academic placement service where hiring institutions can interview prospective candidates in an official capacity and then follow up with more casual conversations between meetings or at social events.

Prior research has relied on personal perspectives regarding the importance of social interactions (Kordts-Freudinger et al., 2017) and professional development (Sanders et al., 2022) associated with academic conferences. Doctoral student voices were heard in the study by Edelheim et al. (2018) which qualitatively assessed the return on investment for academic conference attendance, highlighting the value of experiences shared with other conference attendees and those gained from personal engagement and reflection. These studies have focused on socialization and scholarship as relevant elements of the academic conference experience.

### **Academic Conference Socialization**

Conferences facilitate academic socialization for doctoral students (Hottenrott & Menter, 2020). Hauss (2021) describes four stages of socialization in the context of academic conference participation based on the work of Weidman et al. (2001) regarding graduate student socialization. Doctoral students mostly observe and listen as they are confronted with new rules and roles in the first stage (anticipatory). The second stage (formal) is characterized by learning the disciplinary rules whereas the third stage (informal) is exemplified by developing confidence from connections with scholars. Doctoral students internalize their new role as a scholar and establish a professional identity in the fourth stage (personal). Socialization increases with the number of academic conferences attended (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018).

Ghosh and Githens (2009) posited that conference organizers bear some responsibility for eliminating barriers for doctoral students to engage with conference attendees. One barrier is manifested as unidirectional communication where experienced scholars share information but do not aspire to collaborate with doctoral students. Another barrier is related to social ties where there is a lack of resources

exchanged between experienced scholars and doctoral students. Doctoral students may optimistically assume that they will be sought out by experienced scholars and resource providers. Conference organizers should attempt to connect long-time attendees with doctoral students and managing expectations for both groups. Even weak, unidimensional social ties may prove instrumental for future research projects (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

### **Academic Conference Scholarship**

Prior research regarding the value of attending academic conferences for its scholarly content is limited (Rowe, 2018). The academic impact of conferences is called into question when one considers less than 2% of all citations in academic journal publications are from conference proceedings. The number drops to less than 1% when considering the administration and management discipline (Lisée et al., 2008). The diminished influence is further compromised when one considers that citation-based metrics used to assess the scholarly impact of doctoral programs are based solely on journal articles (Elbeck & Vander Schee, 2014).

A central tenet of academic conferences is to foster scholarship by sharing knowledge and future research ideas (Chapman et al., 2013). However, research by Graham and Kormanik (2004) posited that no substantial exchanges take place in the academic conference setting. Not much has changed in that most presentation sessions focus on delivering research background to establish expertise, with limited attention to open dialog about the implications of research findings and future collaboration opportunities. Disappointment may ensue as prior research suggests that doctoral students expect to make connections and participate in constructive research dialog as a part of the academic conference experience (Dallaire et al., 2018).

Another primary function for academic gatherings in-person or online is for network development (Storme et al., 2017). Sparse networking takes place at larger events where attendees may seek to connect with high profile researchers or editors. Dense networking is more common at smaller events where most attendees know each other in advance with a focus on future collaboration. Networking plays an important role for junior scholars as the size of one's collaborative academic network is directly related to research productivity level during doctoral studies and early career academic appointment (Lindahl et al., 2021).

Extant research provides a wealth of knowledge regarding academic conferences. One missing element is whether doctoral students find value in attending such events, most notably academic marketing conferences. Moreover, the literature does not provide any guidance regarding the features that marketing doctoral students find beneficial and the features they view as cursory or unimportant. Knowing those features and then implementing or enhancing the constructive ones in future academic conferences should make attending professional gatherings more attractive. Given the financial constraints involved, the viability of future academic marketing conferences depends on it.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample and Data Collection**

The survey was made available via an AMA ELMAR post announcing its availability in May 2021. In addition, the doctoral student consortium coordinators for each of the American Marketing Association (AMA), Academy of Marketing Science (AMS), and Society for Marketing Advances (SMA) assisted with survey distribution by emailing consortium attendees to participate in the survey. The AMA Doctoral Student Special Interest Group (Doc SIG) leadership also notified its members by email that the survey was available. The number of doctoral students who completed the survey was 57. A second round of data collection took place in March 2023, using the same mechanisms as the first round, resulting in an additional 71 completed surveys. Overall, individual email invitations were sent to 457 doctoral students with 128 completed surveys for a response rate of 28%.

### **Measures**

The content for survey construction began with reaching out to a convenience sample of 19 marketing educators asking them open-ended questions about their conference format preference and motivation to attend academic conferences. The survey was then administered to a convenience sample of eight marketing educators who provided feedback regarding the face validity of the instrument. The final version consisted of three Likert scale questions, each with several sub items for a total of 28 sub items, 12 objective response questions, four open-ended questions, and four demographic questions. Likert-type survey items

were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Those survey items collected information on conference attendance motivation and perceived value. Additional survey items addressed demographic, institutional, and funding data.

## RESULTS

Of the 128 survey respondents, 65 (51%) identified as female. Half (50%) of survey respondents self-identified as 30 to 39 with an additional 38% reported in the 20 to 29 age range. Respondent race was represented by 65 (51%) White, 46 (36%) Asian, and 4 (3%) African American. Regarding ethnicity, 9 (7%) of survey respondents identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. Most (83%) of survey respondents were students at institutions with Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation.

The cost to attend an academic marketing conference is a consideration. The conference websites for five academic marketing annual conferences were accessed for 2022 conference financial information. The conference registration fee varied from \$200 to \$775 with the average discount for doctoral students at 35%. The estimated average cost of attendance for doctoral students, assuming on-time registration, no consortium, and a three-night stay at the conference hotel ranged from \$1,400 to \$2,100 with an average of \$1,750. The median allocation for conference travel funding was \$2,350 for new marketing faculty hires in 2021, down from \$3,000 in 2020, and up slightly from \$2,250 in 2019 (AMA, 2022).

Regarding institutional funding for conference attendance, 16 (13%) of the survey respondents in this study reported having no institutional support, 92 (72%) indicated less than \$2,500 per year, and 20 (15%) reported between \$2,500 and \$7,500 per year. Regarding personal funding for conference attendance, 44 (34%) reported not using personal funds, 79 (62%) indicated contributing less than \$2,500, and 5 (4%) reported contributing between \$2,500 and \$5,000 per year. The percentage of doctoral students who indicated using personal funds for conference attendance (66%) is higher than for marketing educators (61%) reported by Vander Schee and DeLong (2022). Of the doctoral students who contributed personal funding for conference attendance, most somewhat or strongly agreed with the contribution for career opportunities (80%) and an investment in professional development (78%). See Table 1.

**TABLE 1. Personal Funding Contribution for Conference Attendance Rationale**

Rationale Statement	Agree*	Neutral	Disagree*
Career Opportunities	80%	10%	10%
Investment in Professional Development	78%	11%	11%
Social Engagement	64%	17%	19%
Chance to Get Away	40%	25%	35%
Travel to Specific Destination	39%	26%	35%

\*Somewhat or strongly.

When it came to the value respondents found in attending a conference in general, on a Likert scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), respondents indicated that hearing advancements in the discipline ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), informal conversation ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), and social enjoyment ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) were highest. See Table 2. The results of paired samples t-tests showed that the means for level of agreement for both hearing advancements in the field and for informal conversation were higher than the other value statements,  $t(127) = 4.526$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 2. Value in Attending Conferences in General**

Value Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Hearing advancements in the discipline	4.39	0.69
Informal conversation	4.38	0.79
Social enjoyment	4.06	0.95
Constructive feedback on my research	3.91	0.89
Career advancement opportunities	3.87	0.94
Attending practical workshops	3.74	0.88
Finding research collaborators	3.64	1.05
Time away from home and office	3.60	1.15

Resume development	3.40	1.14
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Note. Items measured with Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*),  $n = 128$ .

When it came to the value respondents found in attending a particular conference, on a Likert scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), respondents indicated that networking opportunities ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ), peer feedback ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), maintaining friendships ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), and social enjoyment (i.e., pleasure from interacting with others;  $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) were highest. See Table 3. The results of paired samples t-tests showed that the means for level of agreement for networking opportunities was higher than the other value statements,  $t(127) = 5.181$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 3. Value in Attending a Particular Conference**

Value Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Networking opportunities	4.50	0.70
Peer feedback	3.98	0.97
Maintaining friendships	3.92	1.00
Social enjoyment	3.83	1.02
The total low cost	3.80	1.12
Practical workshops	3.55	1.11
Resume development	3.48	1.14
The location	3.46	1.24
The time of year	3.28	1.21
Smaller size	3.23	0.97
Pedagogical improvement	3.05	1.22

Note. Items measured with Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*),  $n = 128$ .

Open ended responses provided insights regarding valuable features not currently offered at academic conferences. Suggested valuable features include structured networking, presentations from industry representatives, a session for navigating the job market, and a scheduled social time for doctoral students only.

## DISCUSSION

The value sought by doctoral students to attend academic conferences is not the same as for seasoned scholars in the discipline (Reinhard et al., 2021). This is partially due to the different funding level provided to doctoral students and tenure track faculty. Doctoral students must discern the benefits gleaned from each academic event based on the requisite investment of time and resources. Another consideration is for the lack of state supported travel funding for public university employees. For example, the California state government only provides travel funding to 27 other states for public university faculty to attend academic conferences (University of California, 2022). In-person conferences were cancelled in the latter half of 2022 due to travel restrictions and health and safety concerns associated with COVID-19 while virtual conferences flourished in their place in 2021. A mix of conference formats were offered in 2022 with many organizations reverting back to mainly in-person conferences in 2023 (American Express, 2022). Research by Vander Schee and DeLong (2022) provides a comprehensive set of recommendations for each format with cost considerations in mind.

Doctoral students suggested offsetting the cost of attendance by providing them with conference service opportunities in exchange for a conference registration fee waiver or discount. Roles could include proceedings editor, on-site check-in greeter, technology assistant, and social media monitor to name a few. Those students who have served in these and other roles expressed appreciation for the added benefit of interacting with more conference attendees by virtue of having official conference responsibilities. Although some conferences already offer service opportunities, it is not a ubiquitous feature among all academic marketing conferences.

Survey results highlight the value marketing doctoral students associate with hearing advancements in the discipline. New research methods, theory development, and marketing implications are already part of the academic conference format. Conference planners often schedule keynote speakers to share new research insights; however, a special session or panel may benefit doctoral students with multiple perspectives on new disciplinary developments. Some survey respondents also mentioned having

presentations from industry representatives would provide practical and contemporary developments.

The results of this study indicate doctoral students anticipate receiving valuable feedback from their peers. Although peer feedback is already well-established in the academic conference experience, the quality of written reviews may vary in length and depth. Indicating that a conference paper submission was made by a doctoral student with the instruction to reviewers to provide comprehensive comments could help address the value sought by doctoral students in participating in an academic conference. This approach can be extended to the conference sessions by indicating doctoral student status on the program and noting that enhanced feedback after the presentation would provide added value for the doctoral student presenters.

Marketing doctoral students noted the importance of social enjoyment, informal conversation, and maintaining friendships associated with attending an academic conference. Having a session at the outset of the conference for first-time attendees can provide information about how to best navigate the conference and get involved in the sponsoring professional organization. This approach might alleviate the potential social anxiety associated with being in a new academic environment by meeting other doctoral students early in the conference and increasing attendee engagement. Doctoral students may sense being on the fringe of the conference environment as they observe seasoned scholars ensconced with their own research agenda and their well-established social networks. The first-time or doctoral student orientation session can help novice scholars develop their own community by making research and social connections with others who may also perceive themselves to be on the periphery.

Conference planners should provide social opportunities for doctoral students to meet scholars from other institutions in addition to other doctoral students. Structured networking, where attendees with a common research interest or works in progress are introduced to each other, can make connecting with potential future collaborators more natural and constructive. Another way to facilitate connecting seasoned scholars with doctoral students is by pre-arranged seating for meals where scholars in the same research subdiscipline at varying stages in their academic careers are assigned to the same table. It may be a challenge to get long-time attendees to participate because they cherish socializing with their friends. Therefore, pre-arranged seating may have to be offered on a voluntary basis.

\*Conference planners can take advantage of technology by forming online discussion groups among attendees with similar interests to engage attendees before the conference. During the conference, these same groups can meet in-person to form working groups based on common research interest or career stage. The same mechanism can be used after the in-person event for continued engagement over time. However, doctoral students noted that some set up private social networks post-conference to share, sometimes anonymously, details regarding job search and placement. While formal online groups may not be necessary for hiring information, such working groups can provide personal and professional support from colleagues at various institutions at a similar career stage (Logue-Conroy et al., 2021).

The doctoral consortium was mentioned as a positive experience and a great mechanism to address the value expectations highlighted in the results of this study. The focused cohort approach makes for an intimate setting where doctoral students can connect with each other for extensive networking. Career advancement was not highly rated as an area offering value for doctoral students in attending academic conferences. Although a long-standing function at some academic marketing conferences is the academic placement service, the AMA Academic Council recommended discontinuing the practice in favor of videoconferencing for initial interviews (Gerhardt, 2022). The rationale was to provide greater flexibility in scheduling, to alleviate discomfort with the hotel room interview setting, and to enhance equity and inclusion regarding travel limitations.

Finally, given the importance and influence of faculty advisors on career preparation for doctoral students (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018), promotion of academic conferences with an emphasis on doctoral student attendance should include reaching out to seasoned scholars who currently advise doctoral students. Bringing attention to practical sessions such as meeting journal editors, navigating the job market, and conducting a paper review can highlight the benefits to doctoral students. Such communication can also include service and leadership opportunities for doctoral students at the conference. An advisor-endorsed suggestion to get involved in academic conferences would strongly encourage doctoral student participation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Survey responses with marketing doctoral students highlighted that the doctoral consortium associated with an academic marketing conference is greatly valued. It provides a context for follow up discussions with faculty presenters and fellow doctoral students. Pre-meal gathering time is valued as an informal social opportunity for research collaboration and teaching discussions. More structured networking sessions provide a common task where conversation can naturally flow among those with similar interests or experiences. Of all the sessions offered on the conference program, the session for meeting the editors was specifically mentioned as being valuable for a first-hand sense of journal expectations.

Although conference organizers may see value in all aspects of the academic marketing conference, doctoral students mentioned a few features that provide minimal benefits for them. Doctoral students mentioned that the virtual portion of a hybrid conference is only utilized when the doctoral student or classmate is making a presentation. The value for conference attendance is networking and should continue after the conference with connections via LinkedIn or following via Google Scholar or Research Gate.

\*Doctoral students are told it might be intimidating for faculty to approach a group of doctoral students. If doctoral students had a scheduled social time just for themselves, they might feel less pressure about having to choose between networking with other doctoral students and conversing with senior colleagues. Any mechanism that encourages seasoned faculty to interact with doctoral students and not just get reacquaint with their own friends will add to the sense that all attendees are valued and can make a valid contribution to the conference community.

\*Doctoral students represent the future of marketing education. Providing them with reasons to participate in academic marketing conferences can sustain attendance numbers as seasoned faculty retire from the profession. The focus on value to encourage doctoral student attendance can also grow the membership of the sponsoring professional organizations. Conference planners can apply the results and implications of this study to attract and retain marketing doctoral student attendees who may otherwise be deterred by limited funding and travel restrictions.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the survey was made widely available through the AMA ELMAR service and the AMA Doc SIG leadership team, additional emails were sent to doctoral students who attended a consortium offered by the AMA, AMS, and SMA. These consortia are offered in association with the conference of the sponsoring organization. Thus, there may be greater representation from those who have, or are more likely to attend an academic conference. A certain level of self-selection bias may be present in this study. A larger sample size may also provide results that are more representative of the marketing doctoral student population. Results gleaned from the first survey data collection may have been skewed by the COVID-19 global health situation which limited travel and in-person interaction for the prior year. Although the second data collection period took place two years later, it is possible that some health and safety concerns remain.

Future research could be expanded to include a survey of doctoral student advisors. Marketing faculty provide instruction, work as co-authors, and mentor students for future employment. Thus, they may have unique perspectives that could assist conference planners in knowing appropriate elements to highlight at academic conferences. Studies in the future should consider surveying doctoral students by year of study to gain more targeted insights that might provide greater specificity and relevance in programming for academic conferences and doctoral student consortia.

International marketing doctoral students may differ in their perceived value associated with academic conference attendance. Their perspective may be focused on virtual conference programming given recent changes in funding for professional development and travel restrictions that limit in-person experiences. Differences in expectations and values based on culture may be uncovered. Future studies using online surveys or video conferencing focus groups for international marketing doctoral students may shed light in this regard.

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