

# **SPOTLIGHT ON THE NEXT GENERATION DECISION MAKERS' POV ON EXHIBITIONS**

**GLOBAL STUDY, STARTING POINT  
TO RE-WRITING MARKETING STRATEGIES.  
OR IS IT?**

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## **Introduction**

The exhibition industry is undergoing dynamic shifts in response to evolving global trends. We are committed to understanding these changes deeply and preparing for the future effectively. As organizers of events and exhibitions, we create memorable experiences across various spectacles, including shows, concerts, and festivals. Additionally, we facilitate events where businesses thrive, evolve, and foster valuable connections. Our expertise encompasses exhibition halls, stand construction, multimedia, and logistics. We aim to be an integral part of the professional environment embraced by the new generation of decision-makers.

The purpose of this study was to ask professionals in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s, who currently hold or aspire to hold decision-making positions, to share their perspectives on the exhibition industry's role as a traditional meeting platform in an increasingly digital world. Understanding the industry's significance in the professional sphere is key to shaping future marketing strategies, enhancing experiences, and adapting to the changing landscape.

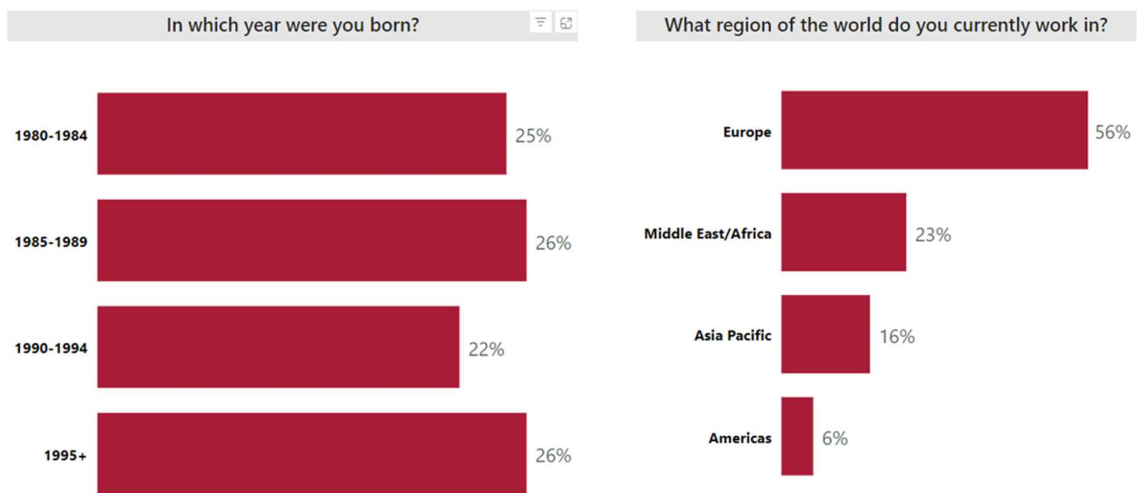
## **Methodology and Respondent Profile**

The survey was conducted globally in the third quarter of 2023, available in seven languages, and gathered 249 responses. Participants born before 1980 were excluded and received a thank-you note with a request to share the survey link with Millennial and Gen Z colleagues and friends. The survey was promoted by members of the UFI Marketing Working Group through their personal and professional networks, using various communication channels.

The survey first aimed to determine if respondents were industry insiders (event professionals) or outsiders. Only 17% were from outside the industry. The survey results highlight key topics, wishes, and perspectives of new decision-makers in executive positions, serving as guidelines rather than definitive instructions for building marketing strategies. We encourage close attention to the newcomers.

## Profile of the Respondents

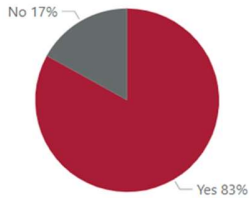
Respondents were divided into the following age groups: 1980-1984, 1985-1989, 1990-1994, and 1995+. The geographic representation aligned with UFI membership, with the least active presence in the Americas at the time of the survey.



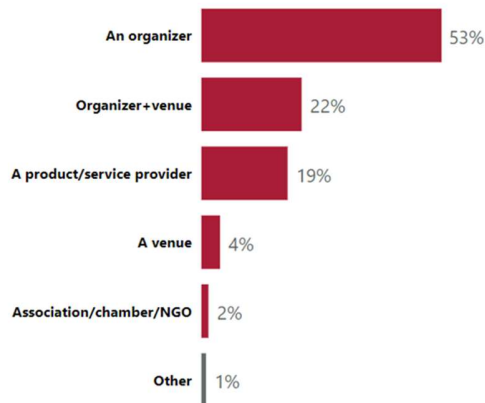
83% of respondents were event professionals, while only 17% were from outside the industry. The promotion by UFI members within their own networks suggests a close-knit, possibly hermetic industry environment. Respondents' years of experience were equally divided, reflecting generational differences and position levels within companies. Only 19% of Millennial and Gen Z respondents hold high-management and C-level positions, with 81% on their way up the ladder. Their voices are crucial for mid- and long-term strategy planning.

# UFI MARKETING WORKING GROUP WHITEPAPER

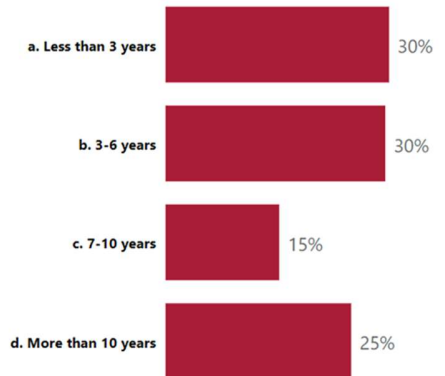
Are you an Eventprof?



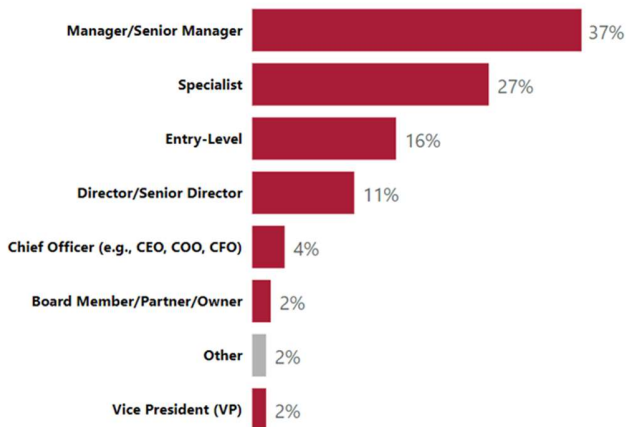
What is your company's nature of business?



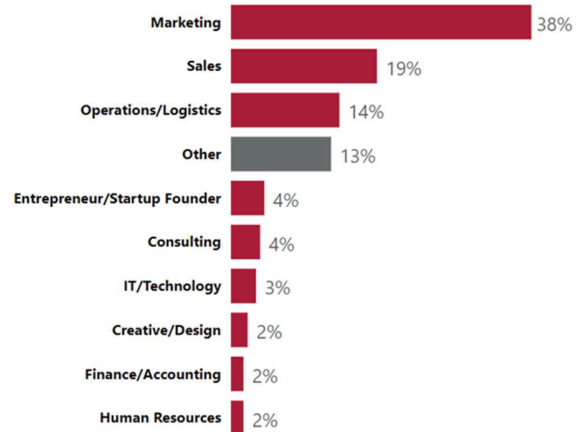
How long have you been working in the industry?



What is your seniority within your company?



Which of the following best describes your current job function?



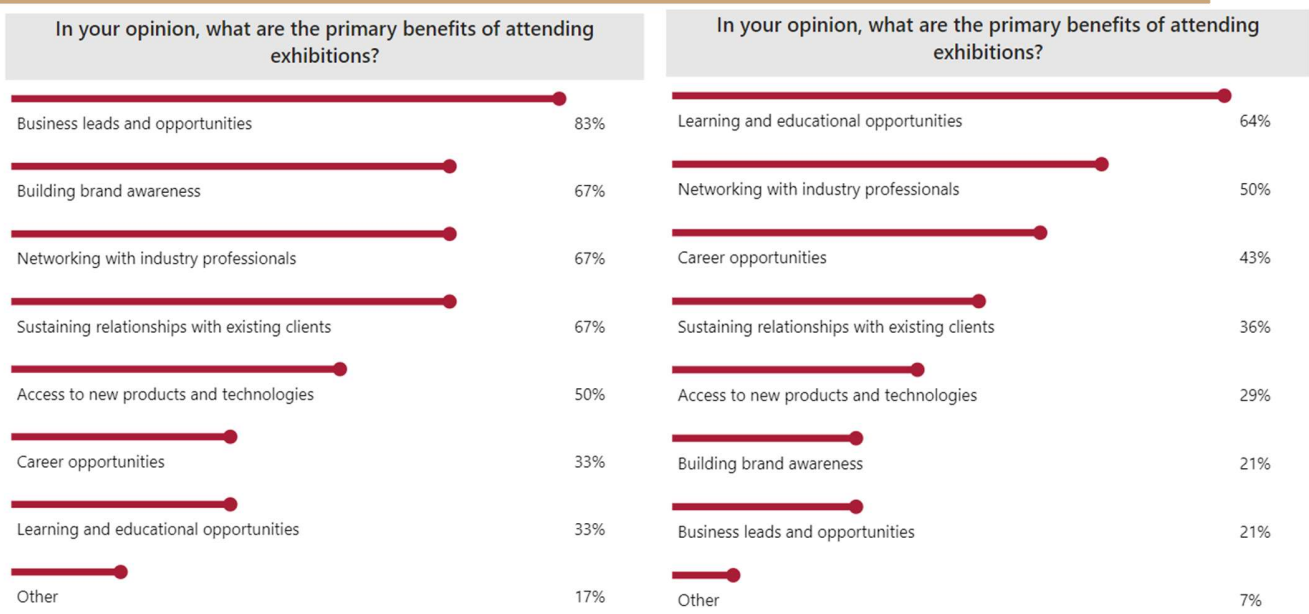
## Key Insights from the Survey

**Primary Benefits of Exhibitions:** Early Millennials prioritise business leads and brand awareness, while Gen Z values learning and networking.

Millennials

Gen Z

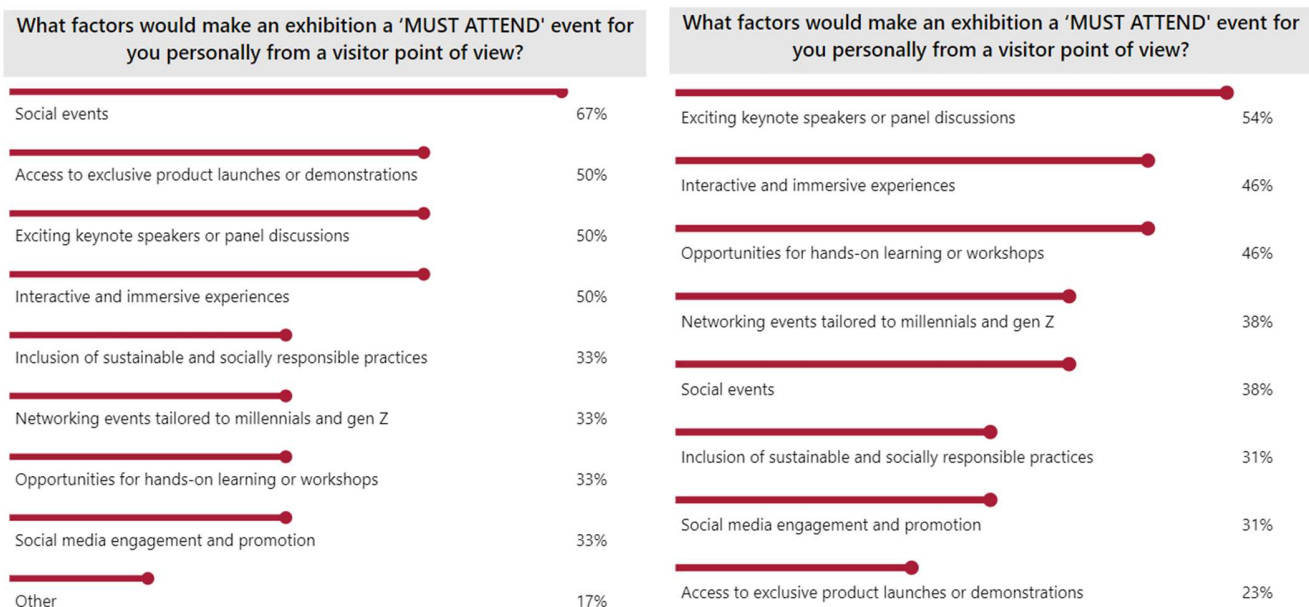
# UFI MARKETING WORKING GROUP WHITEPAPER



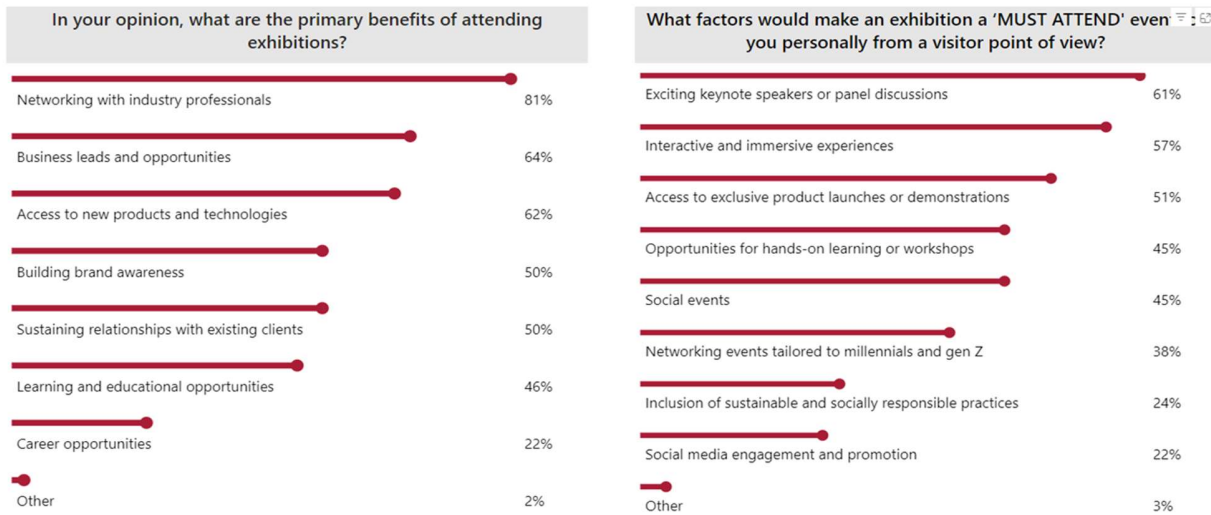
**Making exhibitions a "Must Attend":** Millennials prefer social and prestigious events, whereas Gen Z seeks cutting-edge knowledge and deep experiences. Social media engagement is less relevant than expected.

## Millennials

## Gen Z



**Changing perspectives with age:** Will Gen Z value social events more in the future? Overall, the survey highlights diverse opinions on the value of trade shows, sustainability, and the need for experiential elements.



### Regional and age group analysis

Detailed data on the importance of exhibitions and trade fairs, categorised by region and age group, reveal varying perspectives. For example, the Americas had too few responses to divide by age groups, resulting in aggregated data.

We sought opinions on statements that are important for the exhibition industry:

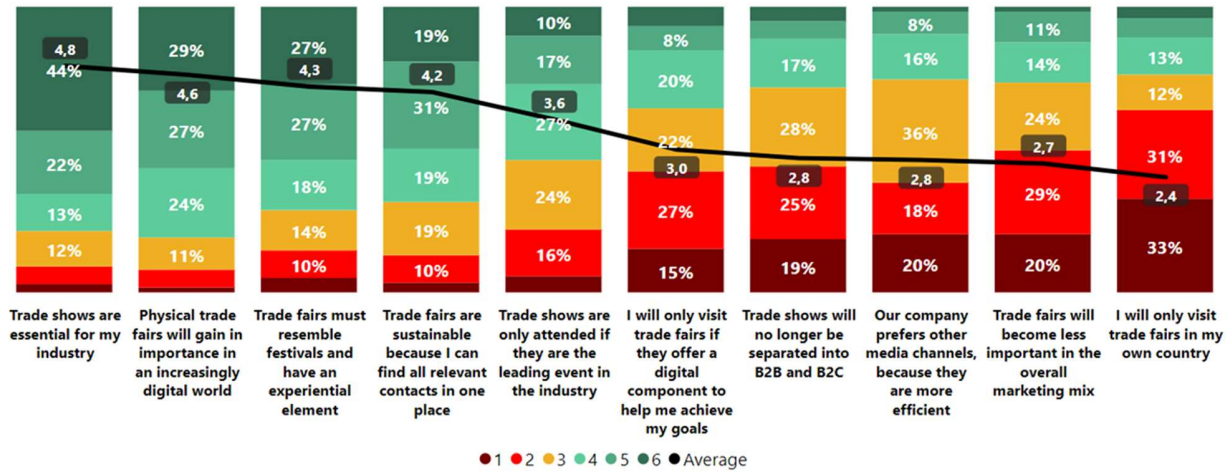
#### On a scale 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements?

- Trade shows are essential for my industry
- Trade fairs are sustainable because I can find all relevant contacts in one place
- Trade fairs must resemble festivals and have an experiential element
- Trade shows are only attended if they are the leading event in the industry
- Physical trade fairs will gain in importance in an increasingly digital world
- I will only visit trade fairs if they offer a digital component to help me achieve my goals
- Trade fairs will become less important in the overall marketing mix

# UFI MARKETING WORKING GROUP WHITEPAPER

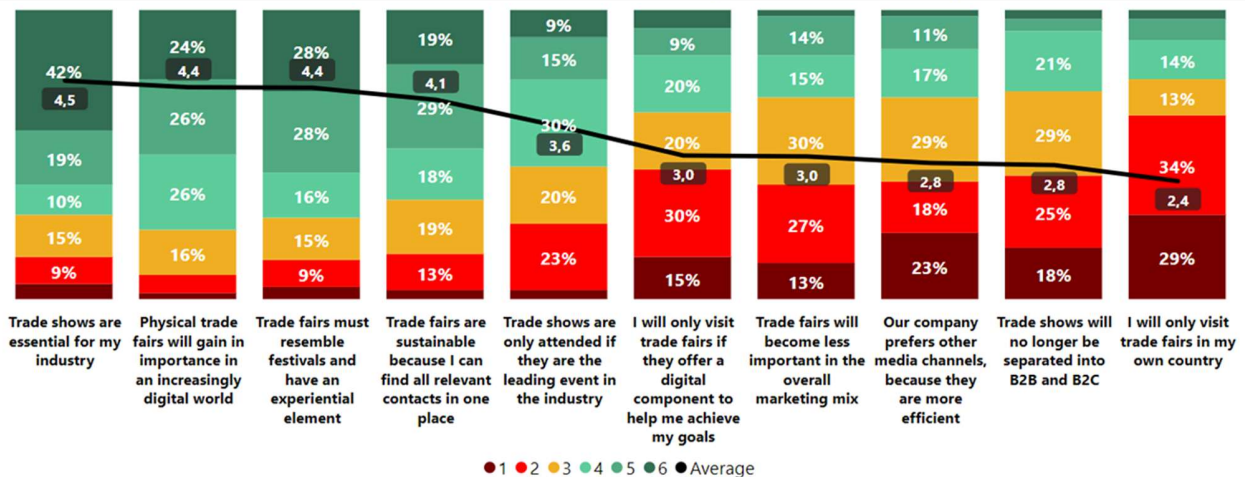
- Our company prefers other media channels, because they are more efficient
- Trade shows will no longer be separated into B2B and B2C
- I will only visit trade fairs in my own country

On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?

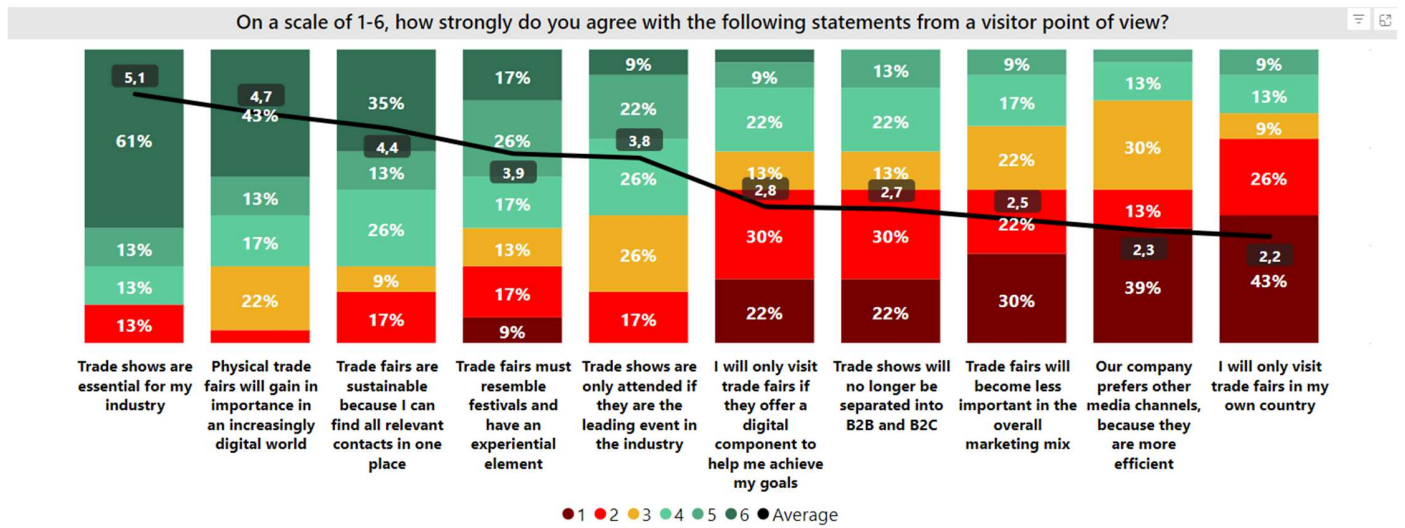


## EUROPE

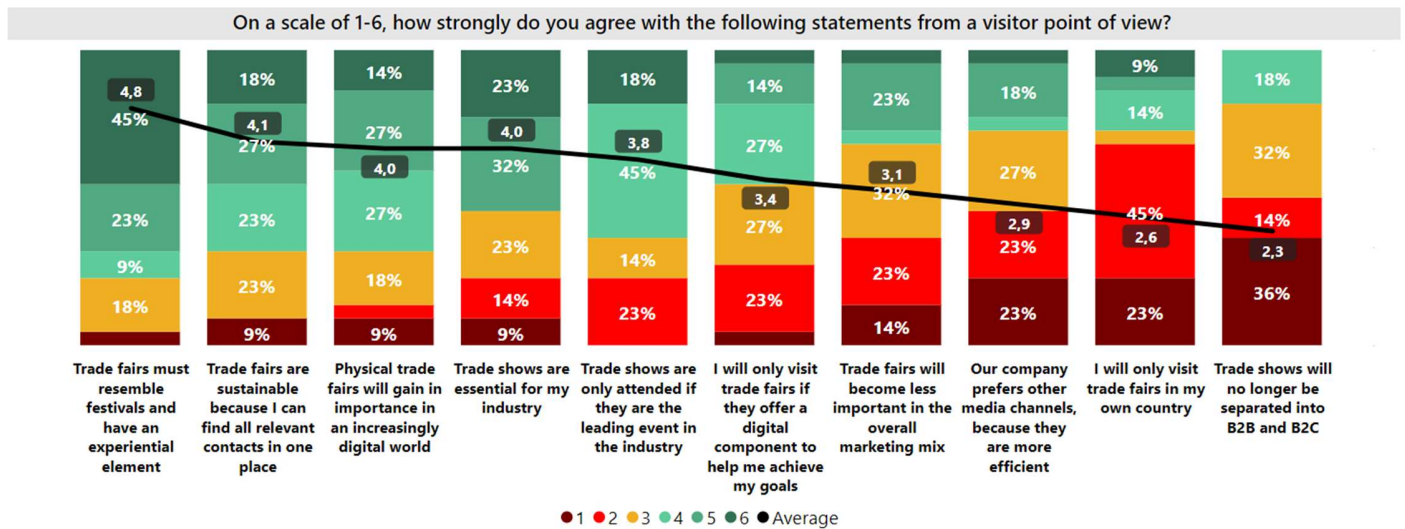
On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?



1980-1984:



1985-1989:

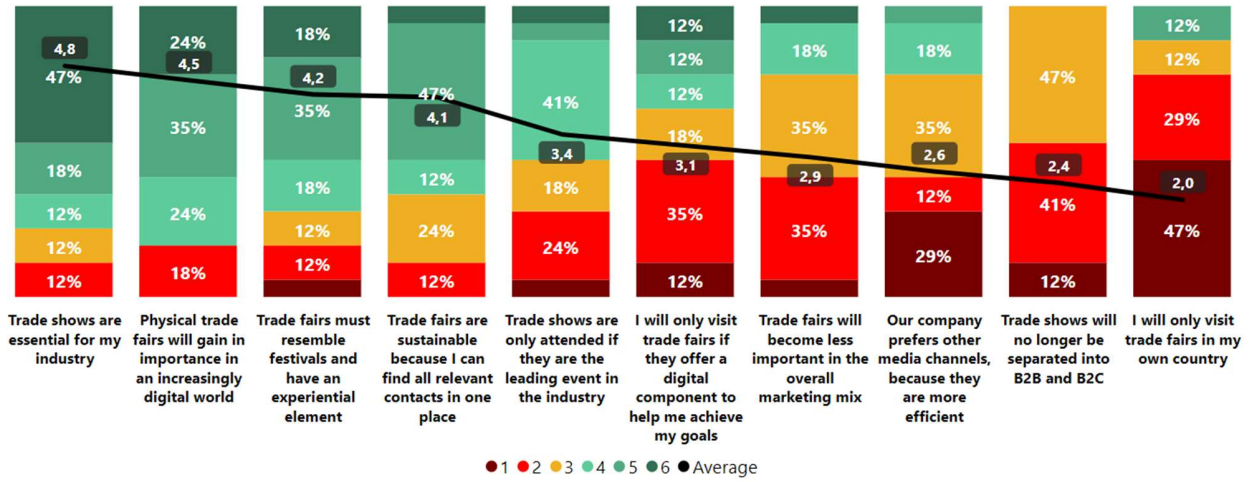


1990-1994:



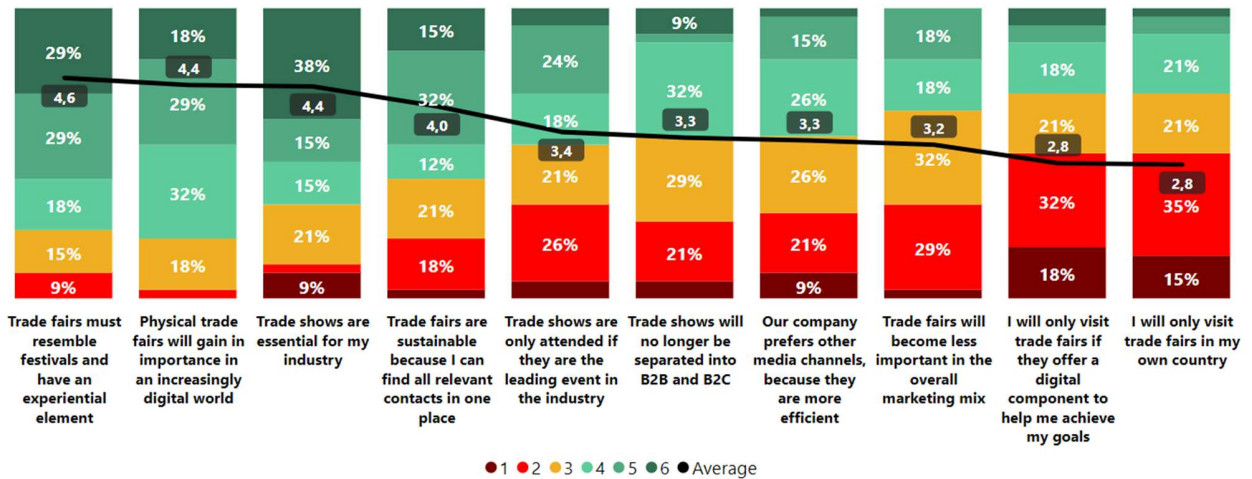
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On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?



1995+:

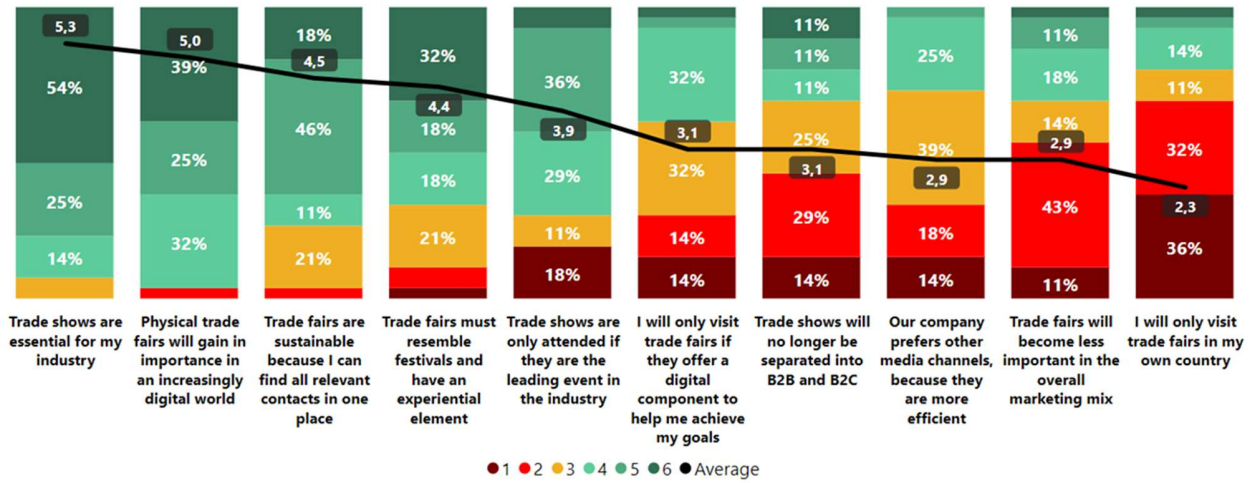
On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?



## ASIA / PACIFIC

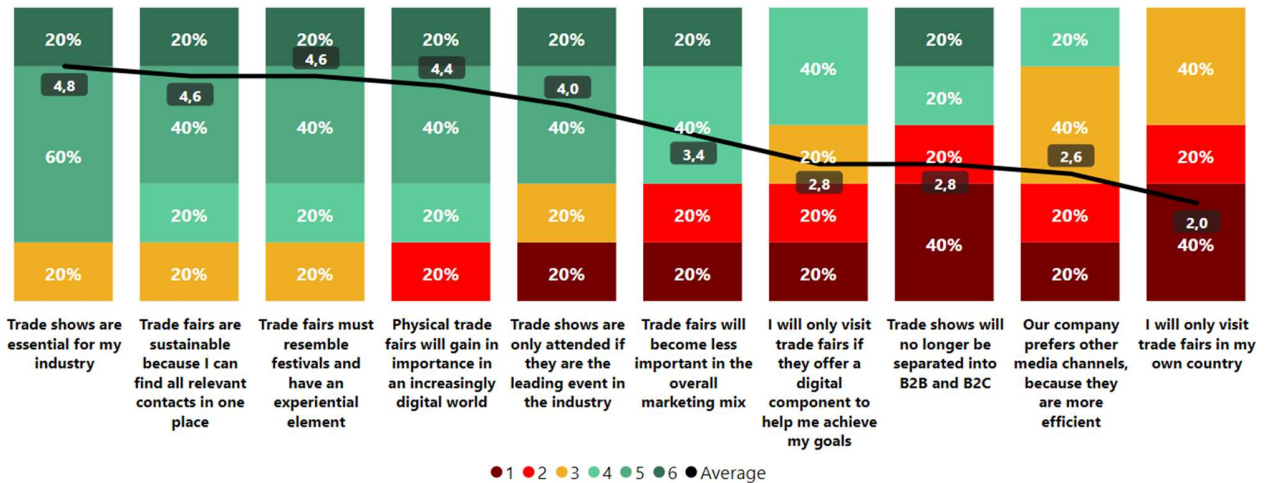
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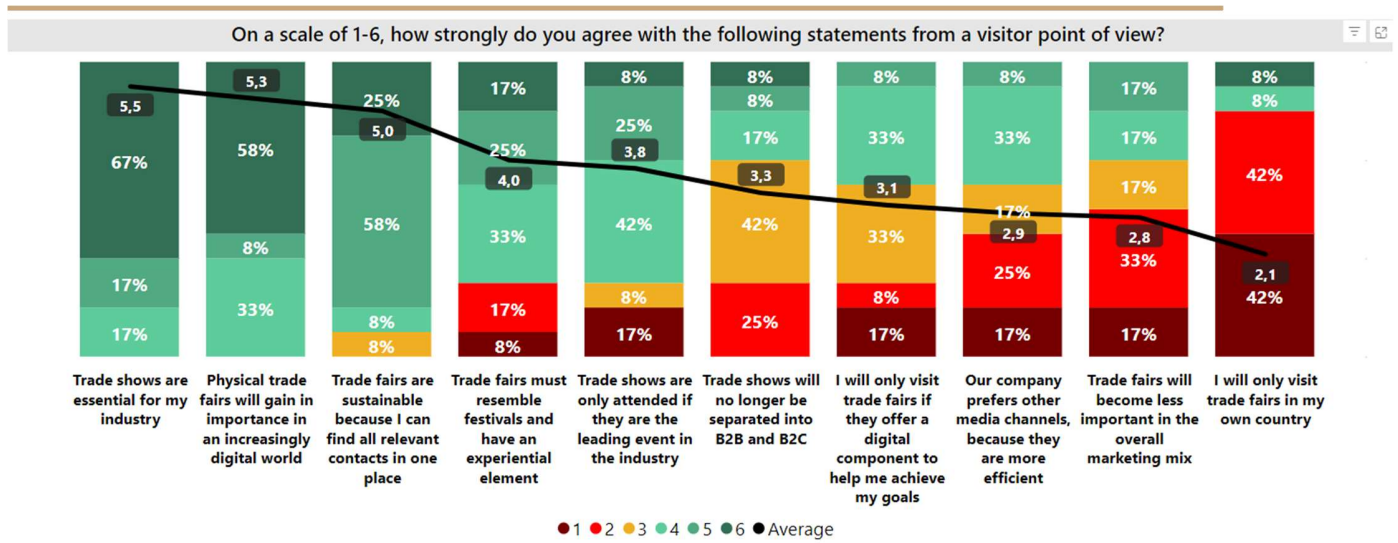
1980-1984:

On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?

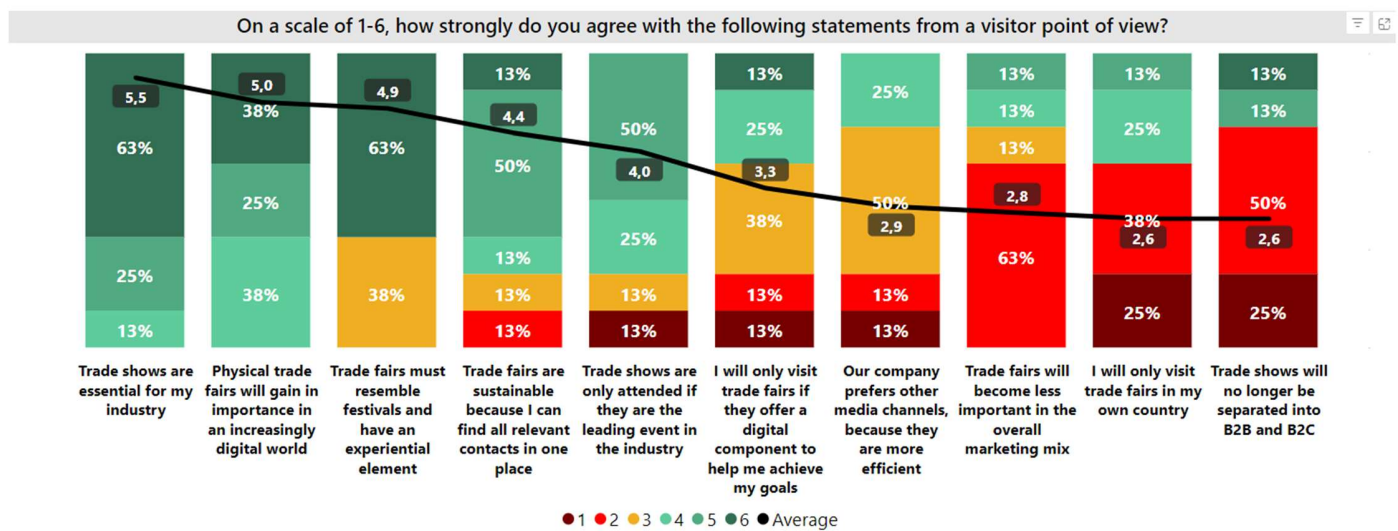


1985-1989:

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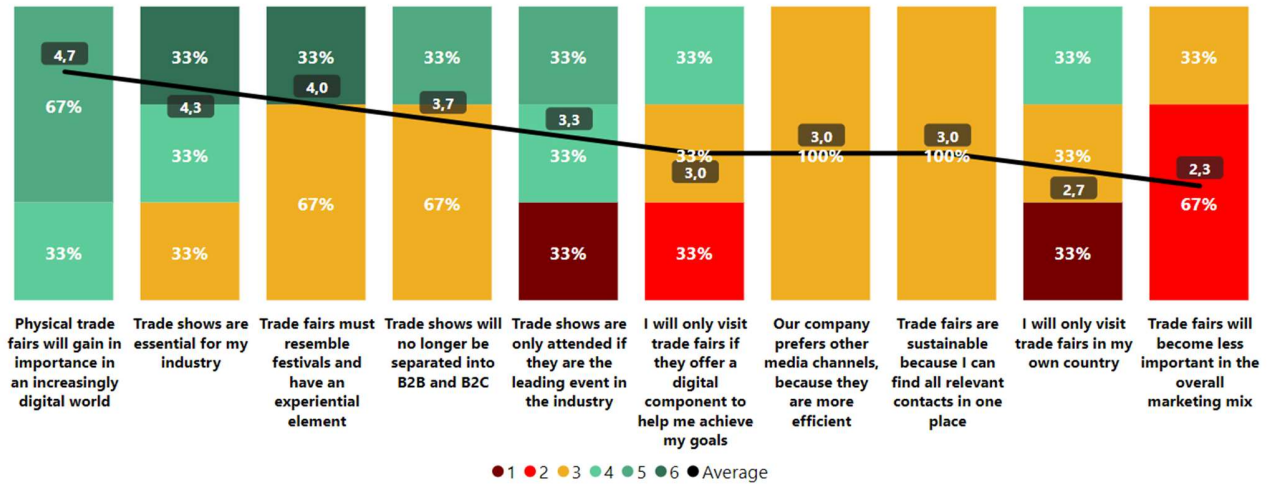
1990-1994:



1995+:

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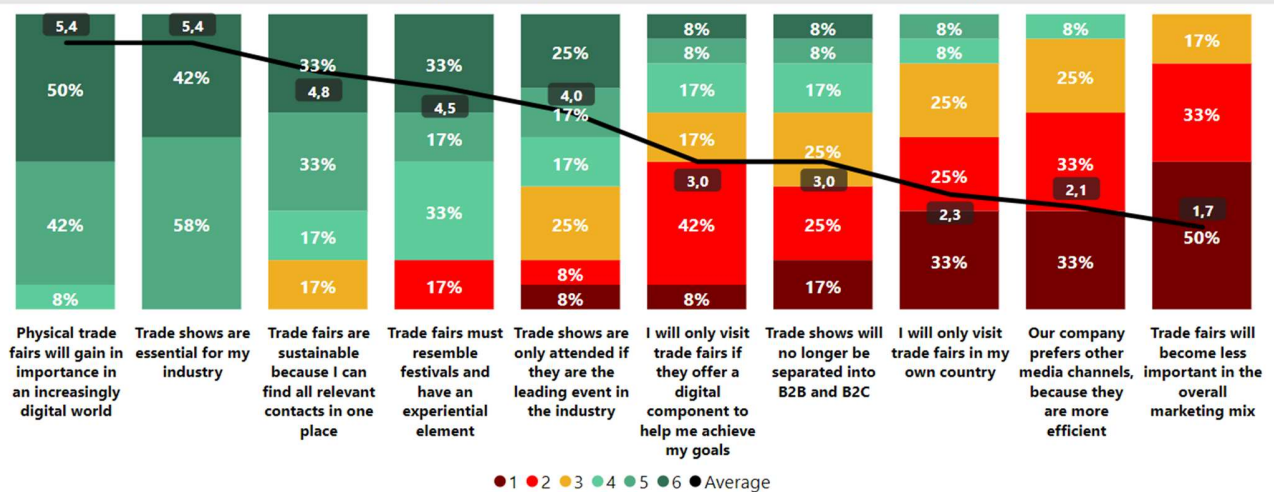
On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?



## MEA

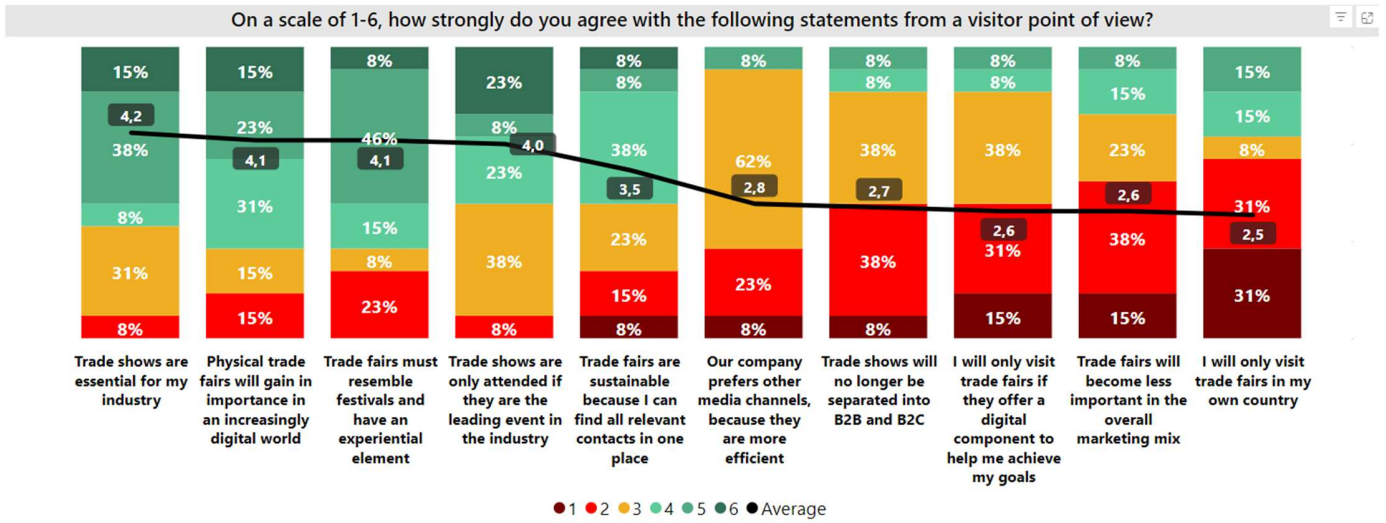
1980-1984:

On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?

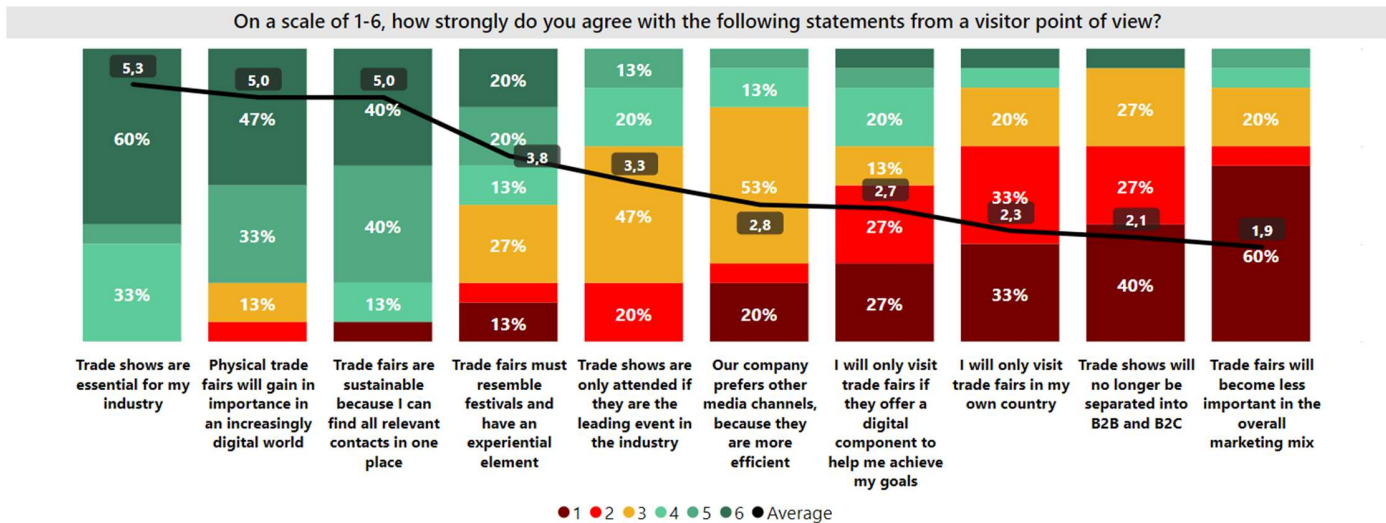


# UFI MARKETING WORKING GROUP WHITEPAPER

1985-1989:



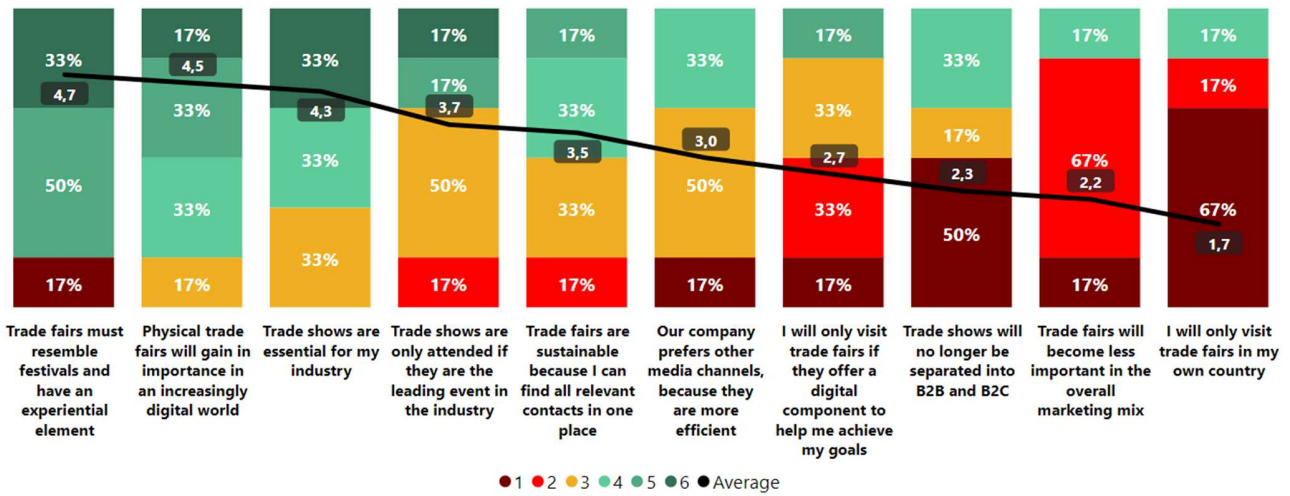
1990-1994:



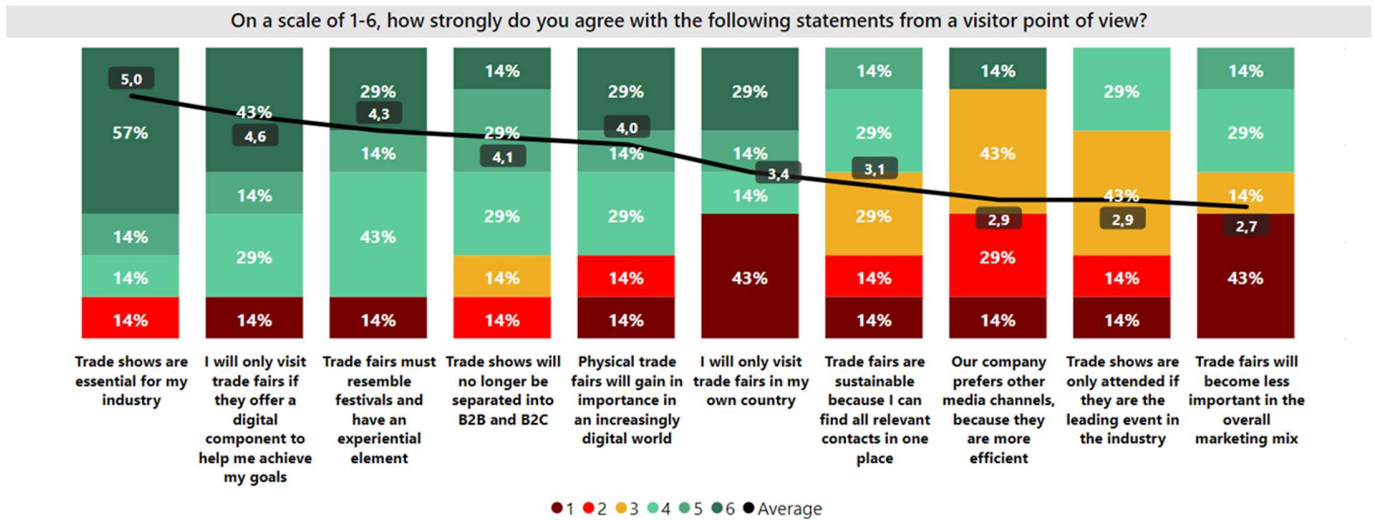
1995+:

# UFI MARKETING WORKING GROUP WHITEPAPER

On a scale of 1-6, how strongly do you agree with the following statements from a visitor point of view?



## AMERICAS\*



\* The overall number of responses from the Americas was too small to divide into age groups, as this would result in many single answers. Therefore, we present only the aggregated data.

### Three words to describe exhibition goals

As the Millennials and GenZ are very outspoken and since the objective of the survey was to get to know their feelings and opinions, we asked: *In 3 words, how do you want to feel and what do you hope to gain after attending exhibitions?*

Respondents' word clouds reveal a desire for new business opportunities, information, and network building, alongside a strong need for inspiration, excitement, and inclusivity.





industry and it should not be reflected just with the products but with the entire experience as an exhibition too.”

- “Inclusive activities - something that would make the attendees engage and not be bored like sitting for hours listening to seminar talks.”
- “More mutual interaction.”
- “Experiential element.”
- “More activities together.”
- “More inclusive atmosphere for people from all different backgrounds. Seeing more diversity in speaker panels.”
- “Make it entertaining/music/performers/cultural.”
- “Giving more opportunities to the young professionals and if the youth take the lead.”
- “Higher focus on attendee integration opportunities.”

### Key takeaways

The survey analysis suggests that exhibitions should focus on **individual experiences**, making them essential and **FOMO-worthy** for attendees. Future clients want to express themselves, be heard, and feel a sense of belonging. Exhibitions must adapt to these needs by creating **socially responsible** and **sustainable** events.

The analysis of the survey data and respondent opinions highlights a few key conclusions that centre around the individual, emphasising that exhibitions and events are created for people, not companies. Exhibitions should be **tailored** to be personal experiences, **essential** and **FOMO-worthy**. As an industry as old as the world itself, we must adapt our trade shows to the changing perspectives of our future clients. While making a concert experiential and FOMO-worthy for Gen Z is straightforward, making a CNC machinery trade show equally appealing to a Head of Marketing presents a challenge.

We must ask basic marketing questions about exhibitions as a tool: What is the product? How can we package it? What exactly are we delivering? How do we deliver it so that clients hear us and want to attend, and come back for more?

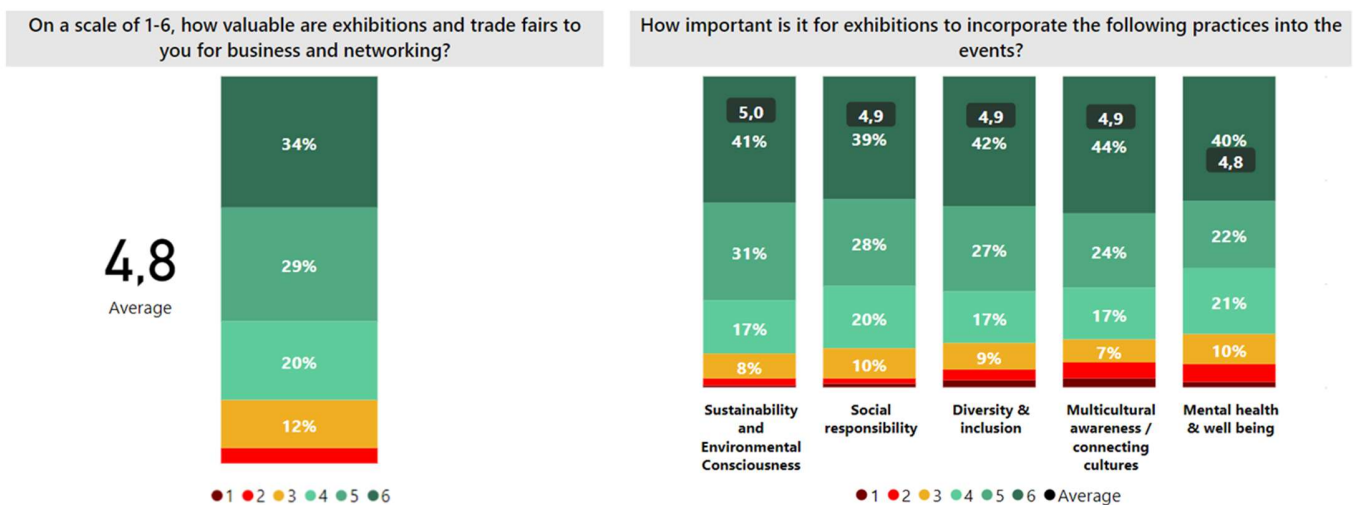
Our future clients want to **express themselves** and have their voices **heard** in a diverse and inclusive crowd. They want to feel a **sense of purpose and belonging**, to be part of something that delivers on its promises and is **socially responsible and sustainable**.

75% of them are willing to travel internationally for an event, highlighting the sustainability of exhibitions, where many business partners can meet in one place at one time. This makes a strong case for the sustainability of exhibitions, despite potential carbon footprints.

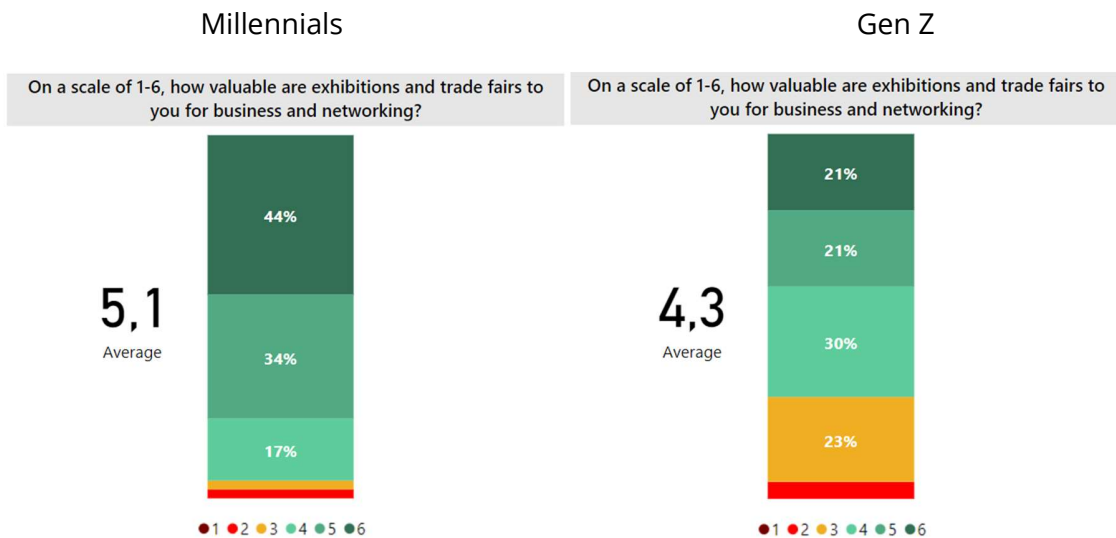
Although digitalisation has been a topic of discussion for many years, survey respondents do not find digital components to be a significant factor in deciding to visit a trade show. However, this raises the question of whether digital elements are simply expected. In the MEA region, face-to-face interactions are most highly valued.

Finally, the statement "Trade shows are essential to my industry" varies across age groups, reflecting different perceptions of value and importance. Notably, younger respondents seem to view trade shows as less critical, which is somewhat alarming for the future of the exhibition industry.

On a scale 1-6, **how valuable are exhibitions** to your business? And **what is important** for you?



The value of exhibitions and trade fairs:



The UFI Global Congress session on next generations perspectives on exhibitions involved roundtable discussions, here are some key takeaways regarding the practical approach to this relevant topic.

## ROUNDTABLES TOPICS

**1/ We are talking about "interactive and immersive experience tailored to millennials and Gen Z" - What is the experience, feeling they are looking for / expecting?**

**2/ "I want to be noticed", "I want to be heard" - how do you make sure your attendees feel included at your events?**

- when showcasing robotics, technology, go out of the booths, put robots in action
- run live demonstration, talk to clients during workshops
- physical location of the event is very IMPORTANT. Who said there has to be booths?
- deliver something that allows a client to be the ambassador of the exhibition (e.g. at the entrance hall - "print your own t-shirt for the show!" action), that means you can use the venue for interaction with clients and at the same time your brand activation
- pop-ups with unexpected interactive activities, merchandise

- make your trade show a career portal and mentorship / apprenticeship space
- find a connecting factor for people (e.g. first-timers marked at the badges - breaks barriers and conversation starter)
- peer to peer invitation
- cross-media show - pre, during and after; with live broadcasting from the stage as well as the audience
- work with schools and universities
- find media personas among youtubers, influencers - feed them with knowledge about what matters to you in regards to ESG topics, address this in your communication - show your clients that you care and deliver the cause.

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### **Marketing Working Group - who we are**

We are experienced events and exhibitions enthusiasts with a marketing and business development professional background. We explore the future of exhibitions by closely examining technology, communication channels, trends, and business models. We seek out success stories of transforming marketing strategies into profitable businesses. We work in an international and multicultural team, which allows us to have a wide perspective on what we all love the most about our jobs - bringing people together.

We are:

**Okay Basbug** Marketing and Foreign Affairs Deputy Manager; **Istanbul Expo Center**

**Faye Black** Vice President – Marketing; **dmg events**

**Javier Blanquer** Director of Marketing and Digital Strategy; **IFEMA**

**Björn Delin** CEO; **Nice Events Scandinavia**

**Michael Dreyer** Managing Director; **Trade Show Experts Pte Ltd**

**Christian Glasmacher** Senior Vice President; **Koelnmesse GmbH**

**Panadda Kongma** Director Operations; **VNU Exhibitions Asia Pacific Co.**

**Silvana Kürschner** Executive Director Business Development; **Leipziger Messe GmbH**

**Justine Rabel** Key Account Manager; **Eventmaker**

**Emilia Shih** Executive Director, Exhibition Department; **TAITRA**

**Raymond Siliakus** Director Europort, Manager Exhibitions; **Rotterdam Ahoy**

**Dorota Wallusch, chair of the MWG** Business Development, International Affairs; **Grupa MTP**

Special thanks to **Andrea Piccin**, Data Scientist and Wizard of GRS (no longer with the company) for your invaluable contribution to this survey.