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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · ATTENDEE BEHAVIOUR

Context Picks the Driver

Which experience dimensions drive satisfaction?

Event organizers judge success mainly by relationships and revenue, while the attendee experience rarely appears among their measures. Surveys of more than 10,000 attendees show that the experience behind satisfaction depends on the type of event: emotion leads at festivals, organization and challenge at sport events.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Worldwide, Norway, Sweden, Australia

4 studies · 2 industry sources

event experience · attendee satisfaction · event success measures · emotional engagement · event quality · service quality · festival satisfaction · sport events · audience segmentation · repeat attendance

EDITION	Evidence brief · Published 12 November 2026
DOI	https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378092
CITE AS	Eventamin. (2026). Context Picks the Driver: Which Experience Dimensions Drive Satisfaction? [Evidence brief]. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24378092
WEB EDITION	eventamin.com/evidence/attendee-behaviour/which-experience-dimensions-drive-satisfaction, with interactive charts, chart data and the corrections log
LICENCE	Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) · © 2026 Eventamin

KEY FINDING

There is no universal driver of event satisfaction. Emotion matters most where audiences come to feel, and once operations are good, the experience an event creates outweighs how well it is run.

Four studies, 10,765 attendees, 2004–2022; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **Organizers measure relationships, not experience.** In 2026, 53 percent of organizations worldwide measured event success by relationship management, 43 percent by awareness and 42 percent by new customers[1].
- **Emotion matters at festivals, not at sport events.** In Norway, the weight of emotional engagement in visitor satisfaction at a sport event was around a fifth of its weight at a music festival[2].
- **Thinking scores higher than feeling at cultural events.** Visitors of seven cultural events rated cognitive engagement at 5.34 and emotional engagement at 5.11 on a seven-point scale[3].
- **The felt experience outweighs operations.** Among 7,554 participants of Swedish sport events, emotional event quality accounted for nearly twice as much of perceived value as service quality[4].
- **Audiences agree on the verdict, not on the details.** Five value-based audience segments at an Australian theatre event rated seven of eight event attributes differently but reported the same overall satisfaction[5].

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FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Each event type has its own lead dimension: emotion and novelty at festivals, organization and challenge at participation sport events, learning at congresses. Measuring that dimension in post-event surveys shows more than an overall satisfaction score.
Venues & destinations	Service quality is a threshold rather than a differentiator. Venues compete on enabling the experience the event exists to create.
Academia	None of the studies covers trade fairs or congresses, where relationships rather than emotions are the product. The experience scale used at cultural events has not yet been tested in business events.

How the industry measures event success

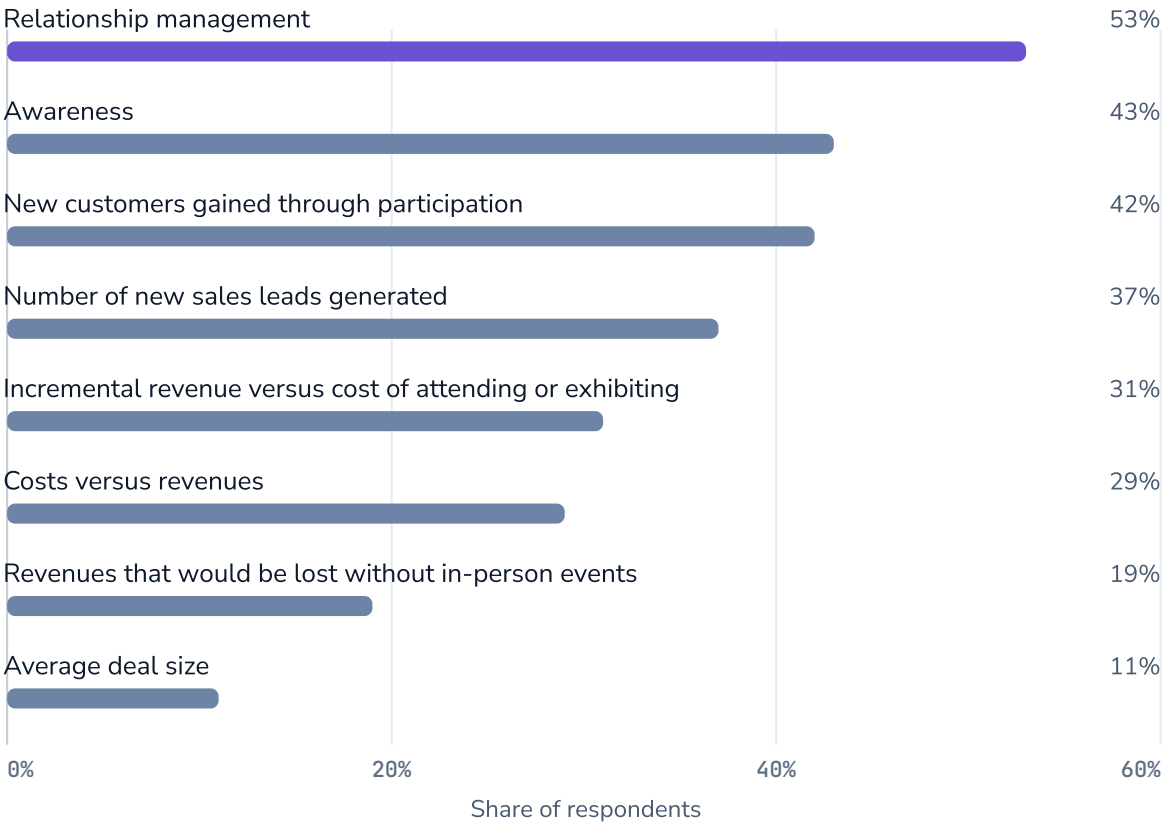
Event organizers rarely measure the attendee experience directly. According to a 2026 survey of 1,605 organizations by the Events Industry Council and Oxford Economics, the most common measures of event success were relationship management, named by 53 percent of respondents, awareness (43 percent) and new customers gained (42 percent)[1]. Attendee experience was not among the listed measures[1].

Planners name engagement as their main success measure: 63 percent did so in Cvent's 2026 Planner Sourcing Report[6]. Attendee research divides engagement into at least four dimensions: thinking and learning, emotion, physical activity and

novelty[3]. Which of them drives satisfaction determines where design budgets go, from content and speakers to staging and operations.

Most common measures of event success among organizations worldwide in 2026

Share of respondents.



Source: Events Industry Council; Oxford Economics · Release date: May 2026 · Region: Worldwide · Survey period: March to April 2026 · Number of respondents: 1,605

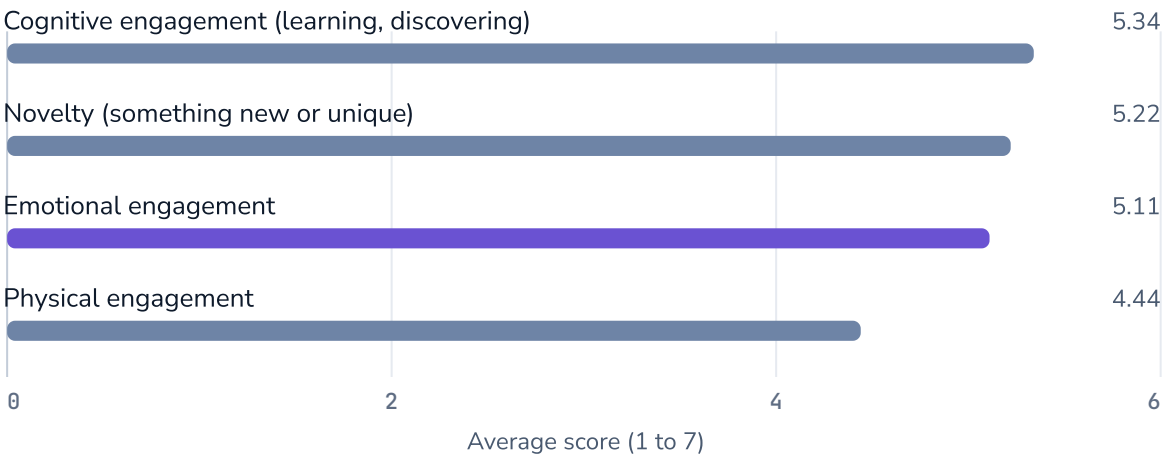
Experience dimensions at cultural events

At cultural events, visitors rate learning higher than emotion. Visitors of seven cultural events in Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom and the United States rated cognitive engagement at an average of 5.34 on a seven-point scale, novelty at 5.22 and emotional engagement at 5.11[3]. Physical engagement ranked last at 4.44, as expected at mostly seated events[3].

All four dimensions differed by event and by visitors' age, gender and education[3]. Repeat visitors rated novelty higher than first-time visitors, which indicates that well-run events renew themselves for loyal audiences rather than wearing out[3].

Average rating of event experience dimensions among visitors of cultural events worldwide

Average score on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest).



Source: Richards · Release date: 2020 · Region: Worldwide (seven countries) · Number of respondents: 1,258

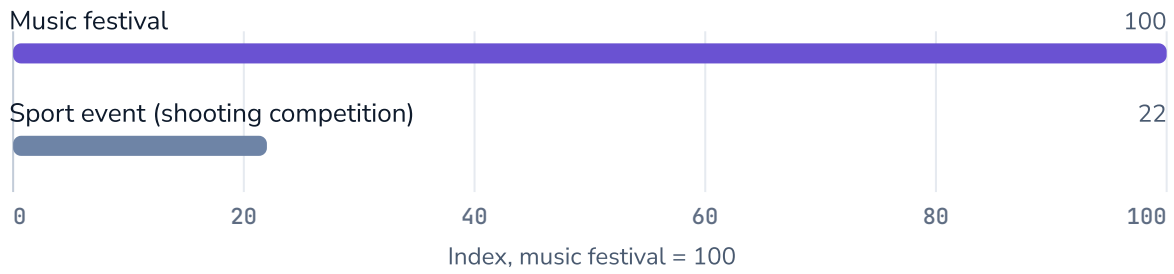
Festival and sport event compared

The same dimensions carry different weight at different events. In Norway, a survey of 273 music festival visitors and 1,326 participants of a shooting competition found that emotional engagement was the main driver of satisfaction at the festival[2]. At the sport event, its weight fell to around a fifth of the festival level, and cognitive engagement mattered instead[2].

Sport participants were more satisfied overall, with an average score of 6.21 on a seven-point scale compared with 5.00 at the festival, but the four experience dimensions explained only a small part of their satisfaction[2]. Participants who compete judge an event on organization and their own performance; audiences who come for the experience judge it on how it feels.

Weight of emotional engagement in visitor satisfaction in Norway, by event type

Index: music festival = 100.



Source: Oklevik et al. · Release date: 2022 · Region: Norway · Number of respondents: 1,599 (273 festival visitors; 1,326 sport participants)

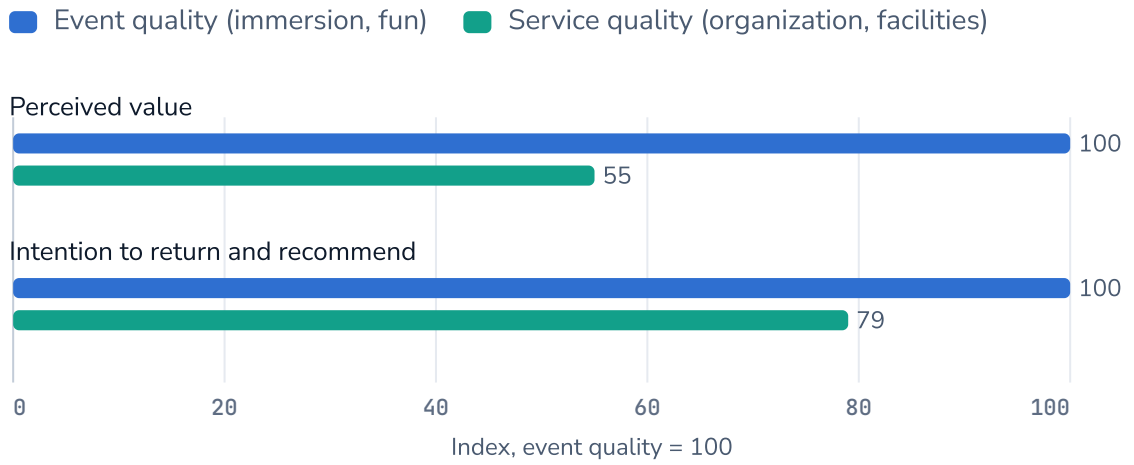
Event quality and service quality

Once operations are good, the felt experience makes the difference. Among 7,554 participants of five Swedish running, cycling, swimming and skiing events, service quality, covering organization, facilities and staff, scored high everywhere, at an average of 8.02 on a nine-point scale[4]. Event quality, covering immersion, fun and enjoyment, accounted for nearly twice as much of participants' perceived value and had a stronger influence on their intention to return and recommend[4].

The advantage is clear but moderate. Satisfaction remained the strongest single predictor of whether participants intended to return[4]. Operations have to be right; once they are, they no longer separate good events from great ones.

Influence of event quality and service quality on participant outcomes at sport events in Sweden

Index: event quality = 100 for each outcome.



Source: Armbrecht · Release date: 2021 · Region: Sweden · Number of respondents: 7,554

Audience segments and overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction scores can hide what different audiences value. At an Australian theatre event, five audience segments defined by personal values rated seven of eight event attributes differently[5]. The differences ran through social values such as belonging, respect and relationships[5]. All five segments nevertheless reported the same overall satisfaction and the same intention to recommend the event[5].

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four attendee studies published between 2004 and 2022, covering 1,258 visitors of seven cultural events, 1,599 visitors and participants of two Norwegian events, 7,554 participants of five Swedish sport events and 354 visitors of an Australian theatre event[2–5]. Index values compare the strength of influences within each study and cannot be compared across studies. All studies measure intentions rather than actual repeat attendance. None

covers trade fairs or congresses. The Cvent figure is taken from the publisher's summary.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Events Industry Council and Oxford Economics. (2026, May). 2026 Global Economic Significance of Business Events [Report]. Retrieved November 9, 2026, from news.eventscouncil.org — First-hand

2 Oklevik, O., Kwiatkowski, G., Preuss, H., & Kurdyś-Kujawska, A. (2022). Contextual engagement in event visitors' experience and satisfaction [Journal article]. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 22(1), 58–79*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2021.1927829 — First-hand

3 Richards, G. (2020). Measuring the dimensions of event experiences: Applying the Event Experience Scale to cultural events [Journal article]. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events, 12(3), 422–436*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2019.1701800 — First-hand

4 Armbrecht, J. (2021). Event quality, perceived value, satisfaction and behavioural intentions in an event context [Journal article]. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, 21(2), 169–191*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2021.1877191 — First-hand

5 Hede, A.-M., Jago, L., & Deery, M. (2004). Segmentation of special event attendees using personal values: Relationships with satisfaction and behavioural intentions [Journal article]. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism, 5(2/3/4), 33–55*. https://doi.org/10.1300/J162v05n02_03 — First-hand

6 Cvent. (2026). 2026 Planner Sourcing Report [Survey report]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from cvent.com — Reported

The evidence

4 studies · 2 industry sources

SAMPLE

Four attendee studies with 10,765 respondents; two industry surveys

YEARS

2004–2022 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Attendee surveys at cultural events, festivals and sport events in ten countries

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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