Evaluating Transparency and Fairness in Booth Registration and Curation Decision-Making at Comic Frontier: A Multi-Method Approach

*Penina Annais[1]
Institut Teknologi Bandung,
Indonesia

Utomo Sarjono Putro[2]
Institut Teknologi Bandung,
Indonesia

*Corresponding author:
Penina Annais, Institut Teknologi Bandung,
Indonesia. ✉penina.annais@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: The rapid growth of pop culture conventions has intensified competition and heightened expectations for transparent and efficient exhibitor registration systems. Comic Frontier, one of Indonesia's largest pop culture events, has faced recurring exhibitor dissatisfaction concerning booth registration and curation processes.

Objective: This study seeks to identify gaps between exhibitor expectations and experiences, determine root causes of complaints, examine best practices from comparable events, and propose strategic improvements for a more effective system.

Methods: A mixed-method approach was applied. Quantitative data from 120 respondents were analyzed using gap analysis, ANOVA, and descriptive statistics. Qualitative insights were obtained through 12 semi-structured interviews and two Focus Group Discussions (14 participants), structured using the Kepner-Tregoe method and prioritized via Pareto analysis. Instrument reliability exceeded Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. A weighting matrix assessed the relative impact of root causes.

Results: Significant perception gaps were identified, particularly in transparency of curation criteria (mean gap = 1.42) and clarity of registration timelines (mean gap = 1.31). ANOVA revealed significant differences in satisfaction across experience levels ($F(2, 117) = 8.74$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$), indicating disproportionate disadvantages for newcomers. Structural constraints—rapid applicant growth versus limited organizational capacity—were identified as primary causes. Benchmarking emphasized structured timelines and clear criteria as critical trust-building mechanisms.

Conclusion: The study proposes a structured transparent registration framework as a short-term solution and an integrated digital platform as a long-term strategy. These measures are expected to enhance fairness, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen governance in large-scale cultural event management.

INTRODUCTION

Comic Frontier, affectionately known as Comifuro by its community, is one of Indonesia's most influential pop culture conventions. Held biannually, it provides a vital meeting ground for independent artists, illustrators, writers, and musicians to showcase their creations, interact with audiences, and build professional networks. Being able to secure a booth is both a milestone and a stepping-stone to greater recognition for many participants. The convention has gained a well-deserved reputation over the years for its inclusiveness, its nurturing of emerging talents, and its advocacy of grassroots creativity. Nevertheless, the growing number of people seeking booth

spaces, combined with the event's adherence to a diverse and high-quality curatorial threshold, creates serious challenges in the booth registration and artist selection process, particularly because artistic evaluation is inherently subjective and the risk of perceived bias remains a genuine concern (Kusumorasri et al., 2020).

However, over recent years there has been a notable rise in participant dissatisfaction at Comic Frontier. Most complaints centered on an unclear registration process, inconsistency in booth selection, and a lack of communication regarding application outcomes. Many participants were left confused and disappointed, and numerous exhibitors received no guidance on how to strengthen future applications. Though these may appear as mere operational shortcomings, they are indicative of a deeper problem: the erosion of trust between organizers and participants. Such erosion of trust threatens the community-based spirit of Comic Frontier and its long-term sustainability and reputation within the creative community (Imbernon et al., 2024).

In event management, trust is vital, especially within creative communities where relationships and credibility underpin long-term engagement. Exhibitors may lose motivation and a sense of belonging when an opaque and inconsistent process undermines their considerable investment of time, effort, and financial resources in event preparation. Research shows that trust and fairness are key factors in participant satisfaction and loyalty, influencing their desire to remain engaged or seek alternatives elsewhere (Abdul Gapor et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant in a setting such as Comic Frontier, where a decentralized curatorial process frequently depends on the quality of relationships between organizers and participants (Choi et al., 2019). Therefore, clear and transparent communication and decision-making structures are essential to maintaining stakeholder trust and sustaining a successful and equitable creative community (Overney et al., 2025).

This study, therefore, examines the decision-making mechanisms used in booth registration and curation at Comic Frontier, seeking improvements in transparency, fairness, and communication to re-establish trust within its thriving community (Bakas et al., 2019). This space is further complicated by the growing application of generative artificial intelligence to art and design, which introduces novel ethical challenges in the creative domain — such as the concepts of artistic originality and intellectual property, and the possibility of algorithmic bias in curatorial decision-making — which require responsible AI design considerations to prevent harm and preserve trust (de Berardinis et al., 2025; Lovato et al., 2024).

The urgency of addressing these issues is heightened by the fact that the Indonesian convention landscape is increasingly competitive. Comic Frontier is no longer the only large platform for independent creators; new events such as Comipara in Yogyakarta, and Comicon, which has expanded from Surabaya to Jakarta, now offer appealing alternatives. These conventions draw the same exhibitors and visitors and, in most cases, operate with more open and organized procedures. Even an established event such as Comic Frontier must adapt and evolve to remain relevant and to preserve its audience in this competitive landscape.

This escalating competition underscores the urgency with which Comic Frontier must reform its booth registration and curation process, making it transparent, fair, and trust-building rather than trust-eroding within the community (Alfassi et al., 2025). With this aim, the present paper critically evaluates the methodologies currently applied by Comic Frontier in its booth registration and curation processes, with a view to identifying the areas generating dissatisfaction and loss of trust among participants.

Without meaningful improvement to its registration and curation processes, Comic Frontier risks losing participant trust and market share to emerging competitors. These issues are therefore not merely an operational challenge but a strategic necessity for maintaining the event's role as an important hub within Indonesia's pop culture ecosystem in terms of creative expression, collaboration, and cultural exchange. Indonesian event management scholarship has documented similar challenges in community-driven creative events. Auliamarsi (2022) identified organizational complexity as a key constraint in Indonesian running events, while Mansur (2022) highlighted how community trust is central to the sustainability of culturally significant events.

Dellyana, Arina, and Fauzan (2023) further note that governance transparency is a recurring challenge in the digitalization of Indonesia's creative economy. These studies

underscore that the challenges faced by Comic Frontier reflect broader governance gaps in Indonesia's creative event landscape. This study therefore attempts to offer a practical path toward improving transparency, fairness, and communication, in order to safeguard the trust Comic Frontier has built with its community and to ensure its continued relevance in a rapidly evolving event landscape.

Although exhibitor satisfaction in cultural and trade events has been studied in earlier research Huang (2020) & Abdul Gapol (2024), the experience of exhibitors in Indonesia's pop culture convention sector — which is the focus of this study — has not been addressed in the scholarly literature. Minimal research has been conducted on how registration and booth curation strategies influence fairness, trust, and return intentions. This identified research gap offers an opportunity to study Comic Frontier as a case study, generating insights that could prove useful for similar events operating in competitive environments. In particular, the available literature tends to concentrate on exhibitor motivation and event satisfaction overall, or on visitor motivations and the creative economy in general, without addressing the underlying dynamics at play between organizers and exhibitors in sustaining participation within high-competition, community-based settings (Erhan & Bangun, 2024; Wahyudi & Dellyana, 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

The research gap identified in this study is specific: while event management literature has extensively explored exhibitor satisfaction, service quality, and visitor experience in trade shows and cultural festivals Kourkouridis (2024), no peer-reviewed study has examined the governance and procedural transparency of booth registration and curation systems in the Indonesian pop culture convention sector (Abdul Gapor et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2020). Moreover, existing studies on Indonesian community-based creative events have not employed systematic analytical frameworks such as gap analysis, Kepner-Tregoe (KT) problem analysis, or ANOVA to diagnose and prioritize institutional weaknesses. This study addresses that gap by providing an empirical and diagnostic account of exhibitor dissatisfaction at Comic Frontier (Auliamarsia et al., 2022; Wahyudi & Dellyana, 2024). The novelty of this study lies in its integration of structured decision-analysis tools (KT and Pareto), statistical comparison across exhibitor segments (ANOVA), and stakeholder validation (FGD) into a unified evaluative framework applicable to community-based cultural events.

METHOD

This study followed a multi-method research design that was structured in order to thoroughly study the booth registration procedure at Comic Frontier. The data were collected using questionnaires and interviews with the exhibitors, potential exhibitors, and event organizers, as well as seeking gaps between expectations and experiences, identifying the core of the exhibitor complaints, and discussing the best practices of similar events. To achieve systematic and consistent analysis, the data collection process was done in a series of steps: identification of the respondents, development of the instruments, and collection of the data.

This methodology enhances the validity of the results and provides a strong empirical base for further analysis and strategic suggestions by combining the quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to registered exhibitors and booth applicants using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who had participated in at least one Comic Frontier registration cycle. Of the 120 respondents, 68 were accepted exhibitors and 52 were rejected applicants; 74 (61.7%) were individual exhibitors and 46 (38.3%) were group exhibitors, spanning three experience-level categories: first-time applicants (n = 41), applicants with 2–4 prior participations (n = 49), and veteran exhibitors with five or more participations (n = 30). In addition, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted (organizers n = 5; exhibitors n = 7), and two focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were held involving a total of 14 participants. The questionnaire instrument (28 items across five dimensions: registration clarity, curation transparency, communication responsiveness, feedback adequacy, and process fairness) was adapted from validated scales (Alharbi et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2020). Content validity was established through expert review; reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.81, 0.78, 0.76, 0.79, 0.82 respectively), all above 0.70. ANOVA assumptions were verified using the Shapiro–Wilk normality test (all $p > 0.05$) and Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ($p > 0.05$). Post hoc comparisons used Tukey's HSD.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis in this study followed a sequential multi-method approach, combining structured problem-solving tools, statistical testing, and participatory validation. This strategy was chosen to ensure that the findings were both evidence-based and grounded in the lived experiences of those directly involved in Comic Frontier. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a multi-method design enables researchers to balance numerical rigor with contextual understanding, making it particularly suitable for complex social phenomena such as community-driven events.

Gap Analysis

The first step in the data analysis process was a gap analysis that led to the realization that there were differences between the expectations of the exhibitors and the complaints that were made during or after registering and curating the exhibition. The most widespread diagnostic tool in service and event management studies is the gap analysis, which determines the differences between what the stakeholders expect to experience and what they experience in reality (Alharbi et al., 2022). This comparison has shown some contextual flaws in the transparency and procedural fairness of creative conventions like Comic Frontier to be systemic, through a step-by-step mapping of collected survey responses to survey question segments against pre-established benchmarks in the event management literature (Aol, 2024).

The analysis of these discrepancies took a systematic interpretive form of a four-quadrant structure with respect to the relative frequency of both expectations and complaints. This model classifies problems into four quadrants: high expectation–high complaint, high expectation–low complaint, low expectation–high complaint, and low expectation–low complaint.

The problems of the high expectation–high complaint quadrant are the most critical gaps, which means that the expectations of the exhibitors are high, and organizational performance is observed as poor. Issues in this study in this quadrant were those of clarity of curation criteria, transparency of the decision to accept or reject, and uniformity of communication of the registration timeline. Such gaps are warning signs of lapses in the system that translate into dissatisfaction and thus represent managerial issues that should be addressed immediately.

The high expectation–low complaint quadrant takes into consideration the areas where the expectations of exhibitors are high and they are highly satisfied, such as the overall reputation of the event and the perceived value of participation. These considerations are also performance strengths that must be maintained to avoid losing the trust and loyalty of the exhibitors.

On the other hand, the low expectation–high complaint quadrant issues represent concealed problems that exhibitors may not immediately prioritize but that end up causing dissatisfaction when they are not adequately delivered. These can include things such as application system usability and a lack of real-time status updates. Even though the expectations were moderate in the beginning, frequent exposure to such inadequacies increased exhibitor frustration, suggesting that strategies in these areas could be improved.

Lastly, the low expectation–low complaint category encompasses items that at the moment do not significantly influence exhibitor satisfaction, such as minor administrative processes or optional information channels. Although these areas do not demand urgent measures, they must remain under observation to avoid such issues becoming more significant concerns in the future.

Kepner-Tregoe (KT) Problem Analysis

The next step was to organize the varied exhibitor complaints into a coherent problem structure using the Kepner-Tregoe (KT) method. The KT method emphasizes distinguishing "what is" from "what is not," locating when and where issues occur, and identifying deviations from expected standards (Kepner & Tregoe, 1981). In this study, concerns such as vague rejection reasons were reframed as gaps in the feedback loop, while exhibitor anxiety around registration timelines was categorized as a communication breakdown. This structured approach helped reduce ambiguity and ensured that anecdotal grievances were translated into actionable problem

statements.

Pareto Analysis

A Pareto analysis was conducted after identifying two issues to prioritize them. Pareto analysis, based on the idea that a small percentage of causes can and frequently do create the majority of issues, is an effective tool for focusing on the areas most ideal for creating the greatest influence. Using it here, the Pareto chart revealed that the majority of dissatisfaction is caused by a small number of problems, specifically troublesome registration communication and imperfect curation criteria. The focus of the analysis was limited to these high-impact areas; this choice aligns with recent findings in event management research, which stresses prioritizing dominant service gaps to achieve the highest level of improvement.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

In order to analyze the question of varying dissatisfaction by exhibitor groups, an analysis of variance was performed. In particular, comparisons were made of the perceptions of first-time and repeat applicants, accepted and rejected applicants, and individual and group applicants. This was an essential step since it was understood that targeted remedies were needed to meet the specific interests of varied exhibitor segments rather than applying them uniformly across all segments. The need to tailor improvements to subgroup needs, as pointed out by Abdul Gapor (2024) is crucial toward developing inclusive and sustainable community events.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The last phase of analysis was to use Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with the organizers and the representatives of exhibitors. FGDs are also prevalent in participatory inquiry when it comes to validating research and producing contextually rooted solutions (O. Nyumba et al., 2018). This was the first session in which the participants received the KT findings, Pareto prioritization, benchmarking insights, and ANOVA results. The discussion enabled the stakeholders to come up with viable solutions that were co-developed as the statistical results made sense in the lived reality of the community. This form of participatory validation particularly served the purpose of restoring trust in the collaborative process, where conflict may also be transformed into a healthy and constructive communication strategy.

The synthesis of structured problem-solving (KT and Pareto), external reference points (benchmarking), quantitative rigor (ANOVA), and peer validation resulted in a panoramic view of the problems of Comic Frontier. This multi-dimensional approach resulted in the identification of what elements were adverse, alongside the identification of a course of action through which change could be implemented in a way that is not only evidence-based but also empathetic and exhibitor-centered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Gap Analysis Results

Table 1 presents the gap analysis results across five service dimensions. Gap scores are calculated as Gap = Mean Expectation – Mean Experience. Higher positive values indicate dimensions where exhibitor expectations most significantly exceeded their actual experience, representing critical service gaps requiring priority attention.

Table 1. Gap Analysis Results by Service Dimension (N = 120)

Service Dimension	Mean Exp.	Mean Exp. (actual)	Gap Score	Quadrant
Curation Criteria Transparency	4.32	2.90	**1.42**	High E – High C
Registration Timeline Clarity	4.18	2.87	**1.31**	High E – High C
Communication Responsiveness	4.05	2.89	**1.16**	High E – High C
Feedback Adequacy	3.89	2.97	0.92	Low E – High C

Process Fairness	4.11	3.21	0.90	High E – Low C

As shown in Table 1, two dimensions fall into the High Expectation–High Complaint quadrant (curation criteria transparency with a gap of 1.42, and registration timeline clarity with a gap of 1.31), indicating the most critical service gaps requiring immediate intervention. Communication responsiveness also shows a notable gap (1.16, High E–High C). The ANOVA summary is presented below in Table 2.

Table 2. ANOVA Summary — Satisfaction by Exhibitor Experience Group

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups (Experience Level)	24.76	2	12.38	8.74	< 0.01**
Within Groups (Error)	165.89	117	1.42		
Total	190.65	119			

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; $\eta^2 = 0.13$ (medium-to-large effect). Post-hoc Tukey HSD: first-time vs. veterans (mean difference = 1.18, $p < 0.01$); first-time vs. mid-experience (mean difference = 0.72, $p = 0.03$).

Focus Group Discussion

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also carried out with the aim of authenticating and contextualizing the results of the quantitative analysis and diagnostic frameworks used in the present research. The interviews were conducted with the organizers of Comic Frontier, the members of the organizing team of the event, as well as the representatives of the selected exhibitors. The main task involved delving into the specifics of the identified pain points, especially those associated with transparency, unclear criteria, and feedback mechanisms that were highlighted by the results of the Pareto, ANOVA, and KT analyses.

The organizers emphasized that the number of applications always exceeds the number of booth spaces. The rigorous limit placed on the number of exhibitors, due to constraints in terms of venue capacity, safety, and spatial arrangements, requires a selection process for admission. To this extent, the most important factor is the recognition of spatial viability and logistical balance over artistic worthiness in making curation determinations. However, these restrictions are mostly veiled from the exhibitors, thus creating misinformation and inadequate explanations.

One of the key observations is associated with the tacit nature of the assessment criteria. Organizers confirmed that existing internal curation criteria are used consistently across submissions and include aspects such as visual consistency, content suitability, originality, and alignment with the thematic vision of the event. Nonetheless, as the interviews revealed, these standards are rarely written down or explicitly communicated to applicants. Such dependence on unspoken final decisions, at the expense of transparent guidelines, creates a disconnect between the decision-making procedures and external stakeholders. Organizers acknowledged that exhibitors typically view such judgments as capricious, even though they are based on experiential judgments accumulated over repeated iterations of the event.

The interviews also revealed administrative burdens and infrastructural constraints to be major hindrances to effective communication. Organizers cited the high volume of applications as well as the limited size of the team, which renders individualized feedback unfeasible. Moreover, manual review processes, aggravated by tight schedules, prioritize operational efficiency over thorough communication. Even though this approach ensures the smooth running of the event, it leads to delayed or absent responses, particularly for rejected applicants. Organizers acknowledged that this silence is often misunderstood as a lack of concern, although it is explained by resource constraints rather than intentional neglect.

This is an organizational challenge rooted in the evolutionary history of Comic Frontier. It began as a community project organized informally, by trust and shared norms. As it grew, however, these mechanisms proved insufficient. The transition to a more formalized system is still ongoing, and the organization remains in a transitional phase in which expectations of professionalism have not yet been met by internal development. The organizers acknowledge that this growth has increased scrutiny, rendering previous practices inadequate for the present scale and competition.

The interviews also demonstrate a growing organizational awareness of reputational risks. Organizers have recognized that exhibitor dissatisfaction can pose a long-term threat to community trust and the sustainability of the event. As they reoriented their focus on fairness and inclusiveness, they also identified the need for more clearly articulated processes, improved expectation management, and more robust communication systems. Importantly, these discussions underscore that organizational resistance is not the primary obstacle to improvement, but rather the absence of sufficiently formalized structures and processes.

Table 3. Justification on KT Root Cause Using Insight from Interview with Organizer

No	KT Root cause	Interview confirmation
1	Absence of a Structured and Transparent Registration & Curation System	Organizer acknowledged structural and operational limitations
		Website functioned only as a submission tool, not a management system
		No integrated workflow or visibility for exhibitors
2	One-Size-Fits-All Process Design Amid Rapid Application Growth	Rapid growth in applicant numbers increased complexity
		Internal criteria existed but were not consistently communicated
		Feedback delivery depended on time and manpower availability
3	Over-Reliance on Manual and Fragmented Communication Channels	Communication relied on manual processes
		No differentiated workflow despite different exhibitor needs
		Curation conducted under tight time and manpower constraints

The information gained during the interview with the Comic Frontier organizer was used as a critical validation tool for the root causes that were determined using the Kepner-Tregoe (KT) analysis. Although the questionnaire and exhibitor feedback at the outset showed trends of dissatisfaction, those views alone might have introduced an element of subjectivity or sentiment. Such triangulation of the exhibitors' views with the organizer's point of view enabled this study to draw a distinction between preconceived assumptions and structurally grounded causes. This was necessary to ensure that the root causes identified did not merely serve as interpretive constructions, but rather mirrored the real organizational and operational bottlenecks.

The FGD results also provided an intermediate understanding between the quantitative findings and the managerial realities. They revealed that the issue is not confined to discrete technical problems but is rather firmly embedded within structural and organizational challenges and the realities of scaling a community-based operation into a professional one — including procedural ambiguity, reliance on manual communication, and the lack of differentiated workflows for various exhibitor profiles. Such systemic complexity necessitates a shift toward a more transparent evaluation rubric, consistently applicable throughout the application pool.

Based on the above analyses, this paper will assess the weight of each identified factor according to its relative importance, to be used as a basis for prioritizing intervention strategies. This systematic process of perception–diagnosis–prioritization provides a firm analytical foundation for developing solutions that are operationally viable and empirically grounded with regard to Comic Frontier.

Weight Analysis

Table 4. Weight Analysis

KT Root Cause	Frequency (Pareto)	Impact on Satisfaction (ANOVA)	Urgency (FGD)	Total Score	Priority Level
Absence of structured and transparent registration and curation system	3	3	3	9	High Priority

One-size-fits-all process design	2	2	2	6	Medium Priority
Over-Reliance on Manual and Fragmented Communication Channels	2	2	2	6	Medium Priority

The quantitative weight analysis was carried out in order to prioritize the root causes identified via the Kepner-Tregoe (KT) technique, through a combination of three analytical dimensions, i.e., (1) frequency of occurrence obtained through Pareto analysis, (2) impact on exhibitor satisfaction obtained through ANOVA, and (3) level of urgency determined through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview results. Every root cause was assessed on a three-point numerical scale, with 3 being the highest significance, 2 being medium significance, and 1 being low significance. The total score was the aggregate of the scores across these three dimensions.

The scoring framework was defined as follows:

1) Frequency (Pareto Analysis)

The scoring criteria are defined as follows. Score 3 (High) is assigned when the root cause appears in the top Pareto category and contributes approximately 30–40% of the total complaints, indicating a dominant and highly influential factor. Score 2 (Moderate) is given when the root cause appears within secondary Pareto categories, showing a noticeable but not dominant frequency in contributing to complaints. Meanwhile, Score 1 (Low) is assigned when the root cause appears only sporadically and contributes minimally to the overall number of complaints, indicating a relatively minor impact.

2) Impact on Satisfaction (ANOVA Results)

The scoring criteria are structured as follows. Score 3 (High) is assigned when the root cause is associated with statistically significant differences in satisfaction across exhibitor groups ($p < 0.01$) and demonstrates a strong impact on perceived difficulty and fairness. Score 2 (Moderate) is given when the root cause influences satisfaction levels but does not exhibit the strongest statistical significance or experiential impact. Meanwhile, Score 1 (Low) is assigned when the root cause shows only limited or indirect influence on overall satisfaction levels.

3) Urgency (FGD and Interview Findings)

The scoring criteria are defined as follows. Score 3 (High) is assigned when both exhibitors and organizers explicitly identify the issue as critical and in need of immediate improvement, indicating a shared perception of urgency and high priority. Score 2 (Moderate) is given when the issue is acknowledged as problematic but is not considered the most pressing concern compared to other matters. Meanwhile, Score 1 (Low) is assigned when the issue is recognized by stakeholders but is perceived as tolerable, manageable, or secondary in importance.

The findings imply that the lack of a coherent and clear registration and curation framework is the most problematic root cause, which obtained the highest score across all three analytical dimensions. According to the Pareto analysis, this root cause accounted for the largest percentage of exhibitor grievances, while the ANOVA results provided significant support for the negative impact of this factor on overall satisfaction levels. Furthermore, the FGD demonstrated high urgency, as both exhibitors and organizers noted that the absence of a system created persistent confusion, ineffectiveness, and erosion of trust.

The one-size-fits-all process design and the excessive use of manual and disjointed communication outlets, on the other hand, were categorized as medium-priority root causes and received an overall score of 6 each. Despite both issues being frequently cited by exhibitors in their feedback and reinforced by organizers in interviews, their effect on satisfaction was relatively milder than that of the primary root cause. These findings imply that process uniformity and manual communication do not predetermine dissatisfaction, but are, to a significant extent, driven by the underlying structural issue. That is to say, these challenges are indirect rather than direct causes of exhibitor dissatisfaction.

Overall, the weight analysis indicates that exhibitor dissatisfaction is not based on

individual technical or operational deficiencies, but rather on a hierarchical model of correlated causes. The primary root cause lies in the lack of an institutionalized and transparent registration and curation system, which in turn breeds secondary problems in process design and communication practices. This prioritization offers a strategic basis for the proposed solutions below, on the basis that managerial interventions may focus on the most impactful and systemic issues rather than on superficial symptoms.

Practices from Similar Events

To inform the formation of a high-quality registration and curation system, this section analyzes the operational experiences of similar trade shows and fan conventions in aspects such as how the organizers approach exhibitor selection and stakeholder satisfaction. This was benchmarked against the selection criteria and workflow management through a conversation with organizers of Comic Paradise (Comipara), which revealed that established events may make use of weighted scoring rubrics to balance commercial viability with artistic merit, and that the literature can support the notion that structured evaluation dimensions may be important predictors of exhibitor satisfaction and fulfillment of goals. Being among the direct competitors of Comic Frontier in the domestic industry of doujinshi and the creative event ecosystem, the two events are often compared to each other. Although both events have a large number of applicants, they differ greatly in relation to their selection criteria, transparency, and the structure of the process, which affects exhibitors' perception of fairness, accessibility, and clarity of the process.

Selection Logic and Entry Standards

Comipara uses a strictly merit-based system of selection where exhibitors must be able to create original comic works as one of the requirements to gain entry to the event. This system places greater importance on the quality of content and professionalism, which enhances the curatorial identity of the event. On the other hand, it also increases barriers to entry for novice creators.

Comifuro, on the contrary, encompasses a more open-minded and adaptable selection strategy, enabling large-scale involvement across different categories of creativity. Although such inclusivity is beneficial to the development of the community, the lack of clearly defined selection criteria creates a sense of ambiguity during the acceptance process and a low degree of perceived procedural legitimacy.

Process Structure and Timeline Transparency

The Comipara system is fixed and publicly disclosed, i.e., at such a moment, registration closes and acceptance is announced at once. This hierarchical timeline eliminates ambiguity and dependency on informal sources of information. Consequently, there is a rational means of interpreting outcomes that is not accompanied by the anxious moments spent by exhibitors when determining the status of their applications.

On the other hand, the registration schedule of Comifuro is comparatively flexible and internally reactive, being influenced by operational preparedness, shortage of manpower, and technical restrictions. It is true that such flexibility affords better internal operational control; however, exhibitors do not feel secure due to the uncertainty it creates. This condition supports the view that Comipara has a more trustworthy and open system, as reflected in comparative discourse within the community.

Governance Orientation and Competitive Implications

Comipara is indicative of a standard-oriented governance model in which clarity of procedure and quality control are given excessive priority over inclusivity. Comifuro, on the other hand, has a priority-based system of governance where organizational resources are allocated to accepted exhibitors as one of the main stakeholders. This model is a logical reaction to the high influx of applicants and the inability of some institutions to cope with the workload. Nevertheless, within a competitive environment in which Comipara is viewed as having more explicit procedural frameworks, such governance logic becomes a source of comparative disadvantage when it comes to exhibitors' perception.

Although the Comipara structure is strict yet transparent, thus creating procedural legitimacy, the Comifuro structure creates an apparent transparency gap because of its inclusive but structurally constrained system. This means that the transparency of scheduling and process design at Comipara serves as a subjective point of reference, putting further pressure on exhibitors' expectations of the registration system at Comifuro.

Proposed Solution

Table 5. Integration of Benchmarking, Gap Identification, Root Causes, and Strategic Solutions in Comic Frontier's Registration System

Benchmark (Best Practices from Comparable Events)	Identified Gap in Comic Frontier	Root Cause (KT & Weight Analysis)	Proposed Solution (Existing)	Expected Impact
Clear and standardized registration timelines with publicly announced phases	Exhibitors experience uncertainty regarding registration stages and deadlines	Absence of a structured and transparent registration framework	Building a structured and transparent registration framework with defined phases (pre-announcement, registration, curation, announcement, confirmation)	Reduced uncertainty, improved alignment between exhibitor expectations and organizational processes, increased perceived fairness
Explicit and publicly accessible evaluation and curation criteria	Exhibitors perceive curation decisions as vague and difficult to understand	Implicit and undocumented curation logic within the organization	Translating internal curation criteria into explicit public guidelines (originality, relevance, quality, compliance)	Improved transparency, clearer understanding of acceptance standards, reduced dissatisfaction among novice exhibitors
Consistent procedural communication throughout the registration process	Exhibitors report fragmented information and inconsistent communication	Over-reliance on manual communication and informal information channels	Development of an integrated digital registration platform with centralized information and automated notifications	More consistent communication, reduced information asymmetry, enhanced trust in the registration process
Real-time application tracking and feedback mechanisms	Exhibitors lack visibility regarding application status and evaluation progress	Limited digital infrastructure and manual workflow management	Integrated digital platform with application status tracking and standardized feedback templates	Increased process visibility, reduced anxiety, improved learning opportunities for exhibitors
Digitalized registration workflow integrated with organizational capacity	Registration process perceived as inefficient and overly competitive	Imbalance between rapid growth of applicants and limited organizational capacity	Sequential implementation: structured framework (short-term) followed by digital platform	More scalable and sustainable registration system, improved organizational efficiency and exhibitor

management	(long-term)	satisfaction

The mapping of benchmark practices, identified gaps, root causes, and expected impacts in Table 3 demonstrates that exhibitor dissatisfaction at Comic Frontier is rooted in systemic misalignment between organizational processes and stakeholder expectations. Best practices from comparable events emphasize procedural clarity, transparent criteria, integrated communication, and digitized workflows, whereas Comic Frontier exhibits structural weaknesses in these areas. The KT and weighted analysis further indicate that the most critical issue lies in the absence of a structured and transparent registration framework, followed by limitations in digital integration and communication infrastructure.

This trend indicates that there is no possibility of bringing about improvement in an ad hoc manner, but rather through a sequential strategic approach in which governance reform should precede technological transformation. Based on this, the research proposes two interdependent solutions: on the one hand, the creation of a systematic and transparent registration framework as an immediate intervention with high impact; on the other hand, the creation of an integrated digital registration platform as a long-term strategic intervention for institutionalizing and scaling procedural improvements.

Building a structured and transparent registration framework

The most critical solution is the establishment of a structured and transparent registration framework, as this directly addresses the highest-priority root cause identified in the weight analysis: the absence of a coherent and publicly articulated registration and curation system. From a benchmark perspective, comparable events demonstrate that clearly defined procedural stages and explicit evaluation standards are fundamental to perceived fairness and organizational legitimacy. However, the gap analysis indicates that Comic Frontier lacks such institutionalized structures, resulting in uncertainty, perceived inequity, and dissatisfaction among exhibitors.

To close this gap, Comic Frontier ought to formalize a uniform registration architecture comprising transparent phases such as pre-announcement, registration opening, curation and evaluation, simultaneous acceptance announcement, confirmation, and payment. Making these steps official and publicly disclosed may go a long way toward minimizing ambiguity and aligning exhibitor expectations with organizational procedures. Moreover, the internal curation standards need to be converted into explicit criteria — such as originality, thematic relevance, technical quality, and regulatory compliance — so that exhibitors can better understand the evaluation standards and improve their submissions accordingly.

Strategically, this solution represents a governance-level reform rather than a purely operational adjustment. The ANOVA results show that differences in satisfaction across exhibitor experience levels are partly rooted in unequal access to procedural knowledge, with experienced exhibitors better able to navigate implicit rules. By stabilizing timelines and clarifying evaluation logic, a structured framework directly mitigates this experiential gap. This argument is further supported by empirical evidence from Comic Frontier 22: the introduction of a more organized schedule produced positive responses from exhibitors, demonstrating that procedural clarity can go a long way toward increasing perceived fairness and trust without significant technological improvements. This solution is therefore prioritized as a high-impact intervention that can be realized in the short term within current organizational limitations, as it addresses the most critical structural weakness identified in the analysis.

Developing an integrated digital registration platform

The second solution is designing a unified online registration system that gives real-time insight into the registration and curation process. This solution addresses the secondary root causes identified in the KT analysis, namely the reliance on manual communication and fragmented information channels. Even though these problems were rated as medium in the weight analysis, they are structurally important insofar as they increase uncertainty and inefficiency in the current system.

From a benchmark perspective, comparable events utilize digital platforms not merely as submission tools but as comprehensive management systems that centralize information,

automate communication, and provide real-time feedback. Gap analysis shows that Comic Frontier's existing platform functions more as a submission interface with no clear view of application status or evaluation results for exhibitors. In order to bridge this gap, such features as application status tracking, automated notifications, standard feedback templates, centralized information repositories, and segmented communication flows based on various types of exhibitors should be incorporated into an integrated platform. The process of digitizing the registration workflow will allow Comic Frontier to reduce reliance on manual processes, minimize delays, and ensure uniformity of information flow.

Unlike the former solution, such an initiative involves significant technological investment, organizational preparation, as well as cooperation with external digital partners. The sheer increase in the number of applicants within a short period, coupled with a limited workforce as acknowledged by the organizers, necessitates prioritizing accepted exhibitors, which limits the feasibility of an immediate, full-scale digital transformation. Consequently, the solution is positioned as a long-term strategic initiative rather than a short-term operational solution. The introduction of a systematic procedural framework initially ensures that future digitalization efforts are grounded in a consistent governance framework and, as a result, will not replicate pre-existing inefficiencies.

Combined, the two solutions represent a sequential strategic rationale grounded in empirical analysis. The systematic and open registration system serves as a governance reform tool that directly responds to the most severe gaps and root causes highlighted during the gap, KT, and weight analyses. The integrated digital platform, in turn, represents a technological advancement that institutionalizes and scales these improvements. This sequencing is supported by the weight analysis, which demonstrates that structural transparency most significantly affects exhibitor satisfaction and urgency, while digital integration, though significant, serves as a complement to it.

Consequently, Comic Frontier's improvement strategy should prioritize institutional clarity before pursuing digital sophistication. This sequencing ensures that organizational growth is supported by both procedural legitimacy and technological capability, thereby reducing the expectation–experience gap, improving exhibitor trust, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of Comic Frontier's registration system.

CONCLUSION

Significant gaps exist between exhibitor expectations and actual registration experiences. Exhibitors anticipate clear schedules, open standards, and open communication, but all too often are faced with uncertainty, lack of communication, and incomplete information in the registration and curation process. Gap analysis identified the highest discrepancies in curation criteria transparency (mean gap = 1.42) and registration timeline clarity (mean gap = 1.31). Dissatisfaction is uneven across exhibitor segments. ANOVA results confirm statistically significant differences in satisfaction across experience groups (F(2, 117) = 8.74, p < 0.01, η^2 = 0.13), with Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis revealing the sharpest divergence between first-time and veteran exhibitors (mean difference = 1.18, p < 0.01).

The primary root cause lies in structural and governance limitations rather than technical failures. The KT and weight analysis demonstrates that the lack of a structured and transparent registration framework is the most prevalent root cause, followed by the lack of a one-size-fits-all process design and the use of manual and fragmented communication channels. Such problems are exacerbated by the rapidly increasing volume of applications and limited organizational capacity. Benchmarking shows that procedural clarity is a critical determinant of exhibitor trust and perceived fairness. Comparison with similar large-scale events demonstrates that clear timelines, explicit criteria, and standardized communication practices significantly improve exhibitor confidence, even without sophisticated technological systems.

Theoretically, this study contributes to event management literature by demonstrating that a multi-method diagnostic framework — integrating gap analysis, KT problem analysis, ANOVA, Pareto prioritization, and FGD validation — provides a more comprehensive understanding of exhibitor dissatisfaction than single-method approaches. The findings extend the service gap model Alharbi (2022) to community-driven pop culture events, and demonstrate

the relevance of organizational transparency theories Imbernon (2024) in non-commercial creative settings.

Practically, Comic Frontier should prioritize governance reform through a structured and transparent registration framework as a short-term intervention, followed by the development of an integrated digital platform as a long-term initiative. This study has several limitations: (1) it is limited to a single event context (Comic Frontier), which may restrict generalizability; (2) purposive sampling may introduce selection bias; (3) FGD data may be subject to social desirability bias; and (4) the cross-sectional design does not capture longitudinal changes in exhibitor perceptions. Future research should (1) employ longitudinal designs to track exhibitor satisfaction before and after governance reforms, (2) conduct comparative studies across multiple Indonesian pop culture events, and (3) explore the role of digital platform adoption in mediating the relationship between procedural transparency and exhibitor trust.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Penina Annais conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, conducted data collection and quantitative–qualitative analysis (Gap Analysis, KT, Pareto, ANOVA), and prepared the original manuscript draft. Utomo Sarjono Putro contributed to research supervision, methodological refinement, critical review of theoretical foundations, validation of analytical interpretation, and final manuscript revision. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript and are accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the research.

REFERENCES

Abdul Gapor, S., Chin, C. H., Ngian, E. T., Wong, W. P. M., Kiew, J. P., & Toh, T. L. (2024). Cultural events' service quality, satisfaction and loyalty: a case on an annual cultural diversity event in Borneo. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, *15*(2), 191–212. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-07-2023-0054

Alfassi, R., Cooper, A., Mitchell, Z., Calabro, M., Shaer, O., & Mokryn, O. (2025). Fanfiction in the Age of AI: Community Perspectives on Creativity, Authenticity and Adoption. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2025.2531272

Alharbi, A. M., Alshammari, A. A., & Naqvi, H. A. (2022). The gap between the perceptions and expectations of quality of services delivered to the participants at the scientific conferences using the University of Hafr Al Batin as a model. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 909489.

Aol, L. (2024). Role of arts and cultural events in community development and social cohesion. *International Journal of Arts, Recreation and Sports*, *3*(3), 39–51.

Auliamarsia, A. R., Meisyahritaa, T. D., Jayawardhana, I., & Dewantara, M. H. (2022). *Penggunaan Multi Metodologi dalam Peningkatan Event Running*.

Bakas, F. E., Duxbury, N., Remoaldo, P. C., & Matos, O. (2019). The social utility of small-scale art festivals with creative tourism in Portugal. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, *10*(3), 248–266. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-02-2019-0009

Choi, J. O., Herbsleb, J., & Forlizzi, J. (2019). Trust-building across networks through festival organizing. *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Communities & Technologies-Transforming Communities*, 300–305.

de Berardinis, J., Porcaro, L., Merono-Penuela, A., Cangelosi, A., & Buckley, T. (2025). Towards responsible AI Music: An investigation of trustworthy features for creative systems. *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2503.18814*. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2503.18814

Dellyana, D., Arina, N., & Fauzan, T. R. (2023). Digital innovative governance of the Indonesian creative economy: A governmental perspective. *Sustainability*, *15*(23), 16234.

Erhan, T. P., & Bangun, C. R. A. (2024). Investigating the Impact of Event Experience on Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention of Music Event Audiences. *Matrik: Jurnal Manajemen, Strategi Bisnis Dan Kewirausahaan*, *18*(1), 55–70. https://doi.org/10.24843/MATRIK:JMBK.2024.v18.i01.p05

Huang, S., Yang, Y., Zhou, Y., & Ju, P. (2020). A study on exhibition evaluation system from the perspective of exhibitor. *J. Serv. Sci. Manag*, *13*, 420–434.

Imbernon, U., del Mar Casanovas-Rubio, M., Monteiro, C., & Armengou, J. (2024). Towards transparent decision-making processes within museums: Case study of Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC). *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *103*, 102405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2024.102405

Kourkouridis, D., Frangopoulos, I., & Salepaki, A. (2024). Post-Pandemic Trade Fair Dynamics: A Longitudinal Study Of Exhibitors'views On Digital And Hybrid Trade Fairs. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, *55*(3), 1174–1185.

Kusumorasri, I., Prihartini, N. S., & Sunarto, B. (2020). Optimizing Curatorial Rules in Performing Arts Festival: Strategy to Sustain Cultural Values in Disruptive Era. *KnE Social Sciences*, 557–564. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i12.7630

Lovato, J., Zimmerman, J. W., Smith, I., Dodds, P., & Karson, J. L. (2024). Foregrounding artist opinions: A survey study on transparency, ownership, and fairness in AI generative art. *Proceedings of the AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, *7*(1), 905–916. https://doi.org/10.1609/aies.v7i1.31691

Mansur, S., Saragih, N., Novianti, W., Istiyanto, S. B., & Mahligai, U. (2022). Commodification of Betawi culture of Palang Pintu festival. *Informasi*, *52*(1), 97–118.

O. Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C. J., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, *9*(1), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210X.12860

Overney, C., Moe, C., Chang, A., & Gillani, N. (2025). BoundarEase: Fostering Constructive Community Engagement to Inform More Equitable Student Assignment Policies. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *9*(2), 1–37.

Wahyudi, M. E. A., & Dellyana, D. (2024). Redefining General Public Segment In Kustomfest: A Research On Visitor Motives In Attending A Kustom Kulture Festival. *Journal of Consumer Studies and Applied Marketing*, *2*(2), 156–164.

Wang, P., Liang, L., Pan, Y., Wang, Y., Li, L., Chen, Y., & Tian, Y. (2022). Relationship quality and exhibitors' sustainable willingness to participate in exhibitions: A sociocultural perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 949625.