



The Study of the Socio-Economic Impact of Songkhla MICE City's Digital MICE Events in the Covid-19 Outbreak

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Abstract

COVID-19 is a threat to the MICE sector. The format of MICE events has been changing for over two years. Despite the fact that the Covid-19 situation has improved, a virtual or hybrid event will continue. The influence of conducting digital MICE events on the socio-economic situation of Songkhla, one of the Southern provinces in Thailand during the coronavirus pandemic was investigated in this study. We gathered materials from literature reviews and pertinent research. In addition, questionnaires were completed by 40 MICE hosts and organizers in Songkhla, as well as 385 digital MICE event attendees, for a total of 425 participants. The findings revealed that MICE event owners and organizers are rather favourable about the benefits of digital MICE event management. Organizing online events, on the other contrary, resulted in some entrepreneurs losing more income and incurring more debt, according to both groups. All the specifics will be covered later in this article.

Introduction

The government has launched the Thailand 4.0 program, which aims to push Thailand out of the middle-income trap by guiding the nation toward concrete stability, prosperity, and sustainability by focusing on driving the economy with technology and innovation (Cesar Carreras and Federica Mancini, 2014). The MICE business may be propelled by campaigning for such policies because MICE events facilitate commerce, investment, and business matching, they can assist boost the country's designated sectors (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), 2020). It's also a place where people may share their expertise and technology in way to proceed up with new innovative ideas. The outcome of arranging MICE is a significant aspect in the Thai industry's strengthening and long-term growth (TCEB, 2020). Due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, Thailand's international MICE industry grew only 5% from 2019 to 2020, resulting in a variety of businesses, including the global MICE industry, being disrupted, with some businesses having to close, such as hotel businesses, tour businesses, event venues and organizers, and etc, according to the goals of TCEB (TCEB, 2019). The event must be postponed or delayed avoiding COVID-19 from spreading and causing numerous crucial occurrences (Upatum Nitisukcharoen, 2021). This can be noticed beginning in the first part of fiscal year 2020, meaning between October 2019 and March 2020. The whole MICE business earned 60,890 million Baht in income from attendance, a decline of 36,407 million Baht or 37.42 percent from the same period last year (TCEB, 2020). The domestic business was hammered significantly, with a revenue decline of 21,492 million Baht compared to a drop of 14,815 million Baht in the foreign MICE market (TCEB, 2020). However, MICE businesses in Thailand have reacted to the consequence of being unable to host onsite events by arranging events as MICE digital events. This is another key option for holding MICE events in the face of uncertainties about steps to prevent COVID-19 transmission and spread (Kriengkrai Karnchanapokin, 2020).

It is commonly recognized that, under normal conditions, arranging events is an essential instrument for stimulating the economy. Not only may organizing this event lead to a job and revenue for the organizer, but also for the venue owners, hotels, restaurants, electricians, publishers, and suppliers

(Yaowaluk Chaobanpho, Jetsalid Angsukanjanaku, Chaloeapol Somkiettikul, 2018). As such, revenues for each event can be spent directly on the community, such as local souvenirs and raw materials for food and beverages, among several other things. However, when the situation changes and digital MICE events are organized to replace the old format of events as mentioned above (Wacharakorn Mayuree, Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan, Santidhorn Pooripakdee, 2020). It is, therefore, interesting to study how digital MICE events have a tendency to expand and grow steadily. This format will reduce the travel of the attendees by having access to work from computers, mobile phones and tablets, how can it stimulate the economy including creating jobs and careers in what direction. As a result, the purpose of the study is to identify the influence of digital MICE events on the socio-economic situations of event organizers and participants. The relevant business and government entities will be able to utilize it to develop directions that will allow digital MICE events to be used to stimulate the economy while also creating long-term employment and professions.

Methods

The quantitative research approach was applied in this study. The research population consists of MICE owners and organizers in Songkhla province, digital MICE event attendees, for a total of 425. According to the recent data from Hat Yai Songkhla Hotel Association, and Event Management Association in Songkhla, the MICE owner samples, as well as the attendee samples were selected specifically from people who had direct experience regarding digital MICE events. Based on Sekaran and Bugie (2016), a minimum of 425 questionnaires would be needed to meet the minimum requirement of sample size at 85% confidence level. To compensate for possible unusable questionnaires, this research aims to conduct survey with approximately 500 respondents. In addition, the tools used in research is an online questionnaire consisting of 4 parts, which is related to demographic data, impact of digital MICE event management on economic and social conditions, and other suggestions. Based on related past literature from Chalida Nicharoen and Suraiya Niyomdech (2021), Wacharakorn Mayuree, Kaedsiri Jaroenwisan, Santidhorn Pooripakdee (2020), and Yaowalak Phovillagers (2017), the research questions were developed. The researcher informed the study's participants about the objectives, research method, and the rights of the voluntary sample, as well as the confidentiality of the sample, data retention, and dissemination, which included collecting data from a sample who gave oral consent or signed a consent to participate in the research, including the data obtained from the questionnaire. The researcher used the social science study software (Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS, Version 20.0)) to obtain statistical values in the data analysis, which included percentages and arithmetic means, which were then presented in the form of an explanatory table. Furthermore, in order to complete the data analysis, it includes both primary data gathered through surveys and observations and secondary data derived from a review of the relevant literature. To augment the data collected from the questionnaire, the researcher structured, classified, analysed, synthesized, and presented the results in explanatory form.

Results

The results of this research were carried out according to the following objectives:

1. Demographic data.

The study sample of whom were digital MICE event organizers, owners, and participants, 150 females and 275 males, with an average age of 30 years of age, where almost a third earning more than 15,001 to 20,000 baht (Table 1).

Table 1 Demographic data.

	MICE event organizers, owners, and participants (n = 425).	n (%)
1. Gender		
	Male	150(35.3)
	Female	275(64.7)
	S.D.	0.478
2. Age		
	Maximum age 64 years old	2(0.5)
	Minimum age 18 years old	3(0.7)
	Mode 30 years old	31(7.29)
	S.D.	9.394
3. Income		
	1) Less than 15,000 Baht	78(18.35)
	2) 15,001 – 20,000 Baht	140(32.94)
	3) 20,001 – 25,000 Baht	83(19.53)
	4) 25,001 – 30,000 Baht	50(11.76)
	5) 30,001 – 35,000 Baht	27(6.35)
	6) More than 35,001 Baht	47(11.07)
	S.D.	1.556

2. The impact of digital MICE event management on the socio-economic conditions.

Opinions on the influence of digital MICE event management on the socio-economic situation of 14 items based on the results of a survey: item-by-item assessment and aggregate score assessment. The findings revealed that organizers and MICE hosts had strong feelings regarding the influence of digital MICE event management. The average score of views on the topics was 3.69 points out of a possible 5 points, with participants agreeing that arranging an online event brings in new business such as equipment rental, a generator, operating system, light, sound, and internet signal system. Organizing online events could reduce attendees' costs on expenditures like travel, lodging, and food. Nevertheless, the online event has resulted in lack of income and more debt for equipment rentals and supplier operators in face-to-face, venues, hotels, and restaurants, MICE events. indicating that arranging an online event enhances the likelihood of investors engaging in the event more than face-to-face events. Organizing an online event can assist minimize road accidents because there is no need to drive to the location, as well as petty theft, stalking, and robbery rates when compared to a face-to-face event (Table 2).

Table 2 Impacts of online events on economic and social conditions.

Impacts of online events on economic and social conditions	MICE event organizers, owners, and participants (n = 425)
1. Do you agree that online events have promoted surrounding businesses such as restaurants, hotels, transports, etc. to grow even higher?	3.32
2. Do you think that organizing an online event result in a higher purchase of products in the community than an on-site event?	3.49
3. Do you think that organizing an event online will increase the chances of investors participating in the event higher than an on-site event?	3.60
4. The online event has created a new business in equipment rental, generator, operating system, light, sound, internet signal system for the event.	3.63
5. Hosting an online event result in a higher employment rate than an on-site event.	3.12
6. Organizing the event online creates an opportunity for people in the community to gain new experiences, knowledge that is simple and convenient.	3.75
7. Organizing an online event reduces attendees' expenses such as travel expenses, accommodation, meals, etc.	4.12
8. Every time an online event is organized, it makes the locals proud and contributes to the community's favorable image.	3.61
9. Attendees have a greater cost burden while attending an online event since they must spend in equipment to participate in the event, such as laptops, iPads, cellphones, tablets, internet, and etc.	3.77
10. Organizing an online event gives attendees even higher savings as travel and accommodation costs are not required.	3.84
11. The online event allows participants to spend time on the Internet, resulting in a lack of interaction between families.	3.63
12. The online event has resulted in a loss of revenue and increased debt for supplier operators and lenders of equipment for on-site MICE events.	3.96
13. Organizing an online event can help reduce road accidents as there is no need to travel to the venue.	3.99
14. Organizing online gatherings lowers the rates of petty theft, stalking, and robbery more than on-site activities.	3.93
Total average	3.69

Discussion

The re-emergence of the delta strain COVID-19 in the first half of 2021 has resulted in a rapid, wide, and severe spread of the coronavirus in many areas, affecting all sectors in Thailand, including the business sector, the service sector, and the MICE industry, all of which are likely to recover only to deteriorate further. Local MICE events had to be canceled or postponed, and partly shifted to hybrid and online formats. However, the two groups of samples in this study, which were organizers and MICE event

owners, as well as MICE participants, agreed on how digital MICE events may have a significant influence. In other words, even in the middle of the COVID-19 epidemic, arranging events using technology and innovation may enable the country to continue to organize MICE events. Although the government has taken strict measures to shut down the country to control the spread of the disease including the issuance of measures to prohibit group activities of more than 50 people, 20 people and 5 people, respectively, periodically.

According to a UFI report, 82 percent of people worldwide expect digital technology like as applications to be employed increasingly in MICE events. However, the two sample groups agreed that conducting an online MICE event would be beneficial to the economy in terms of creating new employment, extending job opportunities, and boosting the possibility of participation more than face-to-face events. However, according to research conducted by João Pedro Amorim and Luis Teixeira (2020), technology has recently been created to aid in the operation of trade fairs. However, the expense of employing technology to arrange events remains too expensive. Moreover, having to collect high-priced expenses from the attendees, no one will show up. Furthermore, when it comes to the social effect of digital MICE event management. Reduced travel had a good impact on both groups, helping to minimize traffic accidents. Furthermore, when individuals may participate in online activities from the comfort of their own homes. It will aid in the reduction of petty theft and robbery. However, in a study titled Online Conference – Towards a New (Virtual) Reality by Goedele Roos et.al. (2020), it stated that measuring the impact of human activities on the environment is an important dimension to which scholars and conservationists alike have intensified. But even if organizing an online event is in line with environmentally friendly practices, but organizing such events is no substitute for in-person events, as the benefits of meeting up at events can build networks in the future. The next trend in MICE events will be a mixture of online and face-to-face events that may promote sustainability, particularly the balance of both the environment and meeting values.

Conclusions and Implications

The MICE business is critical to Thailand's economic development. The MICE industry has been designated as part of the government's 20-year national strategy, with the purpose of providing appeal and incentives for Thailand as a business tourism destination. Despite the fact that the current COVID-19 has had a significant influence on the MICE business. As a result, businesses have been constantly adapting to create events in Virtual and Hybrid formats. According to the findings of this study, although arranging an online event delivers business and investment potential, it also increases opportunities for new careers. It is also consistent with a worldwide trend in which people recognize the significance of decreasing pollution and encouraging environmentally friendly activities. The operation of digital MICE events, on the other hand, has a significant influence on operators, organizers, and suppliers who are unable to adapt to the event's expansion in virtual and hybrid forms. As a result, the government should devise a management strategy to assist entrepreneurs who are struggling because they rely solely on revenue from face-to-face events in recovering from the uncertainty of COVID-19, both in terms of knowledge, innovation and technology required to organize hybrid events, as well as foster collaboration with networks to integrate knowledge between government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. The study reflects that as the growth of digital MICE events influence socio-economic in the MICE industry in Songkhla, event organiser participants in this study feel that an understanding of digital and technology used in events should be imparted to all event organisers due to attendees' mindset in terms of travel fear and public gathering.

As such, while recognising that event participants may feel fear of gathering more people from different places, the large-scale event operations in the future would be designed as a hybrid event, with a combination of traditional face-to-face one and online event.

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