



Stakeholders' Engagement of Domestic MICE Tourism during a Crisis: A Case Study of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected to tourism industry included MICE became the considered sign for academic to study more specific research for strengthening business and people who involved in MICE industry. Besides, there are a little attention is given to stakeholders' engagement of MICE tourism in Thailand particularly when they need to handle with a crisis. Therefore, this research objective is to study a stakeholders' engagement of domestic MICE tourism during a crisis of the COVID-19. A qualitative approach was conducted by using semi-structured interview with 12 stakeholders of domestic MICE in two MICE cities in the North: Chiang Mai and Phitsanulok. A template analysis was employed to explore the research findings. The key points of this study are about stakeholders engagement process; 1) scene-setting to enhance awareness during the COVID-19 crisis naturally and rapidly occurred that highly affected stakeholders to make decision and online communication was applied completely, 2) the governmental stakeholders played significant role to facilitate online communication for updating information and providing training courses, and 3) making the change real with sustainable new MICE business processes included MICE product diversification became a crucial business strategy and IT knowledge, skill and experience became a critical resources for domestic MICE.

Keywords: 1) Domestic MICE industry 2) Stakeholder engagement (SE) 3) The COVID-19 pandemic 4) Awareness 5) MICE product diversification

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Introduction

The acronym “MICE” stands for M-Meeting, I-Incentive, C-Conference+convention and E-Exhibition+special event (Schlentrach, 2008, pp.401-404). MICE tourism, therefore, refers to any organisations who work for delivering goods and services to fulfill these four tourist groups’ demands. This type of tourism is described as planned in advance and designed for large groups of people for particular purposes. It is the key area of growth for the tourism sector worldwide (Buathong and Lai 2017, pp.2-3). MICE tourists are labeled as a high-quality customer according to their expenses are double or triple from other tourist groups. MICE industry generated 559.84 billion Thai baht or 3.27% of GDP in 2019, a half of this amount came from a domestic MICE around 279.33 billion Thai baht (The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020). Basically, domestic MICE means domestic trip for MICE purposes for example incentive travel, training and seminar, team building, and company outing trip. Thailand convention and exhibition Bureau (TCEB) and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) have launched “Thai MICE connect”, the digital platform which is a source of MICE businesses to promote a domestic MICE market since 2018. It focuses on effective cooperation of stakeholders in order to deliver a quality service. Even stakeholders of domestic MICE tourism have mutual interest and aim to increase income, but they are from different organisational types such as government body, private sector, and local community. They, therefore, need to implement effective tool to achieve a successful cooperation and

eventually a mutual aim.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be a worldwide severe obstacle of MICE tourism since the first quarter of 2020 because of the seriousness of social (alternatively physical) distancing restrictions on business. Most countries strongly recommended their citizens to stay home and to avoid traveling for preventing further transmission of the virus, including Thailand. Stakeholders of domestic MICE tourism have been facing a double trouble to survive their organisations and maintain their effective cooperation. World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) stated that “tourism sector includes MICE is currently one of the hardest-hit by the outbreak of COVID-19, with impacts on both travel supply and demand and in which in 2020 global international tourist arrivals could decline between 20% to 30%, down from an estimated growth of 3% to 4% forecast in early January 2020” (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2020).

In a tourism management context, several researchers (Friedman and Miles, 2006, pp.160-164; Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins, 2013, pp.342-344) suggested that stakeholders’ engagement is a significant element for not only strengthening stakeholders’ cooperation but also sustaining critical resources providers for a productivity. Waligo, Clarke, and Hawkins (2013, p.349) suggested that identifying sustainable tourism stakeholders and analysing them, can aid the understanding of stakeholders’ different situations so that stakeholder engagement is targeted. Presenza, Del Chiappa and Sheehan (2013, p.24) noted the benefits of



effective stakeholder engagement. Residents' mutual interest makes communities' member engagement happens. This study found four different clusters of residents (activists, disenchanted, favourers and opposers) which vary support and concern to tourism destination development. To increase residents' engagement and sharing resources (Zahra, 2011, p.536), the local government need to improve internal marketing and communication.

However, a little attention is given to stakeholders' engagement of MICE tourism particularly when they need to handle with a crisis. Therefore, investigation of stakeholders' engagement of domestic MICE tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic will provide an useful guideline for MICE stakeholder management for a similar situation in a future. Significantly, this research will contribute to the stakeholder theory by adding an essential framework of domestic MICE stakeholders' engagement during a crisis.

Research question

How did stakeholders of domestic MICE in Thailand apply stakeholders' engagement for dealing with a crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Objectives

To study a stakeholders' engagement of domestic MICE tourism during a crisis of the COVID-19

Literature Review

1. MICE tourism

Schlenrich (2008, p.402) stated that MICE tourism industry is complex with many

parties such as participants, sponsors, planners, convention and visitor bureaus, meeting venues, accommodations, and suppliers generally being involved in the planning and execution. Getz and Page (2016, p.613) mentioned that MICE tourism, alternatively called business event, requires convention and exhibition centres, including numerous, smaller private parties and functions held in restaurants, hotels, or resorts. Sports also require special-purpose facilities including athletic parks, arenas and stadium. The fundamental "facts" are that international convention-goers spend more and are often accompanied by other tourist group in which the "yield" of event tourists is generally found to be higher than visitors with more general travel motives (Dwyer, 2002, pp.22-24). Research in the UK confirmed that 40% of business travelers and their families or colleagues return to the hosting destination as leisure visitors in the future.

The International Association of Professional Congress Organisers defines MICE as:

1. M-Meeting - any number of people coming together in one place for a particular activity, which can be a one-time event or recur regularly. Simply put, meeting travel refers to organising any number of people for such a meeting, which means it could also include a company sporting trip. There are several sub-types include workshop, panel discussion, international cooperate meeting, regional cooperate meeting, national offshore corporate meetings, local cooperate meeting, executive/management board meeting, shareholders' meeting, new product introduction meeting, and departmental meeting (The Thai-

land Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020)

2. C-Conference - a conference is similar to a meeting in that it is a gathering of people coming together in one place, but conferences usually have specific objectives and exchanges of information. Therefore, conference travel involves organizing itineraries, meetings, and events for people from the same profession or field.

3. I-Incentive - one of the harder components of MICE travel to understand since it doesn't necessarily deal with group events. Instead, incentive travel is typically given to employees as a reward. Incentive travel doesn't usually have a business or explicit educational component but instead is more of a non-business vacation with the aim of continued motivation for performance.

4. E-Exhibition - products or services are displayed, and they might be the primary focus of the event, which means that exhibition travel agents are those who organize such showcases. Exhibitions are often included in other conferences and meetings, though, meaning that there is often overlap between agents in these industries. Businesses court new clients and debut their latest offerings at these events.

2. MICE tourism in Thailand

MICE tourism sector in Thailand was focused by government bodies in last decades includes Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) established the International Convention Division and the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) for closely coordinating between government and private sectors and Thai government established the TCEB in 2002

(The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020). Sangpikul and Kim (2009, p.187) stated that these three-government organisation plays significant roles as a coordination and facilitation centre for Thai business operators by offering an integrated one-stop service and supporting different stakeholders who involved in MICE tourism in Thailand. They comprise Venue, Professional Conference Organizer (PCO), Travel Management Company (TMC), Destination Management Company (DMC), Accommodation, Logistics, and local community.

One of main developing policies for MICE tourism is to develop cities to be the MICE city in order to serve MICE tourists based on eight essential elements.

1. Accessibilities (city and venue); mass transportation, comfortable, and safe
2. Support by local stakeholders; municipality, local chamber for commerce, local TAT
3. Additional activities; creative tourism activities, gastronomy trip, local cultural and lifestyle workshop, cooking school, sport, and donation and green activities
4. Amenities; accommodations and other services
5. Venue and Facilities; Up to date, flexible, one-stop-service
6. Brand image; attraction, hospitality
7. Physical environment; landscape, location, atmosphere
8. Safe and Security; risk management, hospitality

With this regard, TCEB selected five MICE cities around Thailand; Bangkok, Pattaya



(east), Khon Kaen (north east), Chiang Mai (north), and Phuket (south) and additional nine second-tier MICE cities; Chiang Rai, Phitsanulok, Udon Thani, Hua Hin, Cha-am, Rayong, Songkhla, Nakhon Ratchasima and Surat Thani in order to promote to national and international levels (The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau, 2020).

3. Stakeholder engagement

Bruce and Shelley (2010, p.2) and Kumar, et al. (2010, p.298) defined the term stakeholder engagement as a “range of activities and interaction between the focal organisation and its internal and external stakeholders or human relationships in order to seek to supplant monologue with dialogue or two-way communication to enhance shared meaning, thus, and competencies”. In general, Romenti (2010, p.311) proposed that ad-hoc stakeholder meetings and multi-stakeholder workshops are important processes of engagement because they offer opportunities for sharing ideas and refining the choices available to the central organisation. This leads to partnership and collaborative problem solving in the long term. Furthermore, Carr, et al. (2009, pp.63-69) examined three steps to successful stakeholder engagement; (1) creating awareness which focuses on communications, (2) building support or targeting stakeholder outreach, and (3) making the change real with sustainable new business processes. In terms of tourism, Waligo, Clarke and Hawkins (2013, p.348) proposed that six stages are embedded within the three levels: scene-setting, recognition of stakeholder involvement capacity, stakeholder relationship management, pursuit of achiev-

able objectives, influencing implementation capacity and monitoring stakeholder involvement. These are supported by the overarching notion of ‘hand-holding’ and key actions (e.g. managing stakeholder adaptability) that enhance stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism. Lane and Devin (2018, p.273) also stated that the engagement process is composed of three phases. The first step of this process is the identification and the selection of the stakeholders with whom the company has to relate. The second step of this process is to reach the selected stakeholders with communication to ensure their intention to engage with the company. The last step in the engagement process is the implementation, characterised by an input strategy, a method of engaging and the output of engaging. The consequence of the stakeholder engagement in the digital era is “legitimation of the process of engagement itself; legitimation of the decisions reached via engagement; and/or legitimation of the organization itself”

Another interesting point, Iazzi, et al. (2020, p.1643) suggested that Good SE communication is useful for companies to demonstrate how much stakeholders are involved, the managers' ability to respond to their concerns, and the results achieved when stakeholders are engaged in the decision-making process. Additionally, Morsing and Schultz (2006, p.336) explained that stakeholders could adapted three strategies to communicate among them: information, listening and involvement. A stakeholder information strategy is a basis for a communication strategy as it has a unilateral approach;

the purpose is to inform stakeholders about the philanthropic activities implemented by a firm, to achieve their support. A stakeholder response strategy has a bilateral approach because a company communicates its intentions to stakeholders and then collects and considers their responses; its purpose is to convince stakeholders of the company's attractiveness (Ettinger, Grabner-Kräuter and Terlutter, 2018, p.95). A stakeholder involvement strategy involves engagement in a real dialog between a company and its stakeholders, which could be accomplished through discussion forums and social media (Ettinger, et al., 2018, p.95; Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo and Escobar-Rodriguez, 2015, p.773). This strategy aims to completely involve stakeholders, giving them the perception that their opinion counts and that their needs and demands are met (Golob and Podnar, 2014, p.250).

It can be seen that there are differing approaches to effectively engaging stakeholders but the key aim is to maximise opportunities for stakeholder involvement and sharing of ideas with others. Foster and Jonker (2005, pp.51-57), Carr, et al. (2009, pp.63-69), and Romenti (2010, p.311) stated that information management and communication linked to developing mutual understanding between stakeholders; therefore, this is seen as an effective means of stakeholder engagement as it provides positive outcomes for the industry. Significantly, this strategy provides opportunities to empower stakeholders which enables them to develop a sense of belonging to the industry. Garrod, et al. (2012, p.1161) supported the idea that the industry normally engages

stakeholders based on the varying degrees of their salience (power, legitimacy and urgency), principally power. As a result, stakeholders, then, pay more attention and provide more resources to support the industry.

4. Crisis management

According to Coombs (2019, p.137), there are three types of crises in the hospitality and tourism industry; natural disasters, technical error accidents and human error accidents, depending on the level of organisational responsibility. He also mentioned that limited organisational responsibility is clearly involved for natural disasters because those events are usually beyond operational control. Natural disasters are the most common type, and the other two are mainly related to complaints on social media. Faulkner (2001, p.137) and Prideaux, Laws and Faulkner (2007, p.359) defined that disaster term could be unpredictable or unprecedented crisis situations with great complexity and gravity, for example hurricanes, flooding and tsunami, earthquake, biosecurity and diseases alternatively health-related crisis (e.g. foot and mouth disease and SARS). Several tourism researchers agreed that health-related crisis (including COVID-19) caused revenue reduction in the hospitality and tourism industry (Baxter and Bowen, 2004, pp.263-264; Chien and Law, 2003, p.329; Tew, et al., 2008, p.332). Significant examples included the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015 caused 5% revenue reduction (Novelli, et al., 2018, p.77), and the Zika outbreak in 2016 impacted a loss of US\$3.5 billion (World Bank, 2016).

The crisis management framework of Ritchie (2004, p.674) applied on the tourism



industry: pre-crisis; crisis event and post-crisis. This 'one size fits all' approach might cater to all sudden events (Speakman and Sharpley, 2012, p.68). For the COVID-19 outbreak, several practical crisis recovery were revealed such as using a private dining room or table could be one of the solutions in restaurant industry (Kim and Lee, 2020, p.69). the Thai hospitality, bleisure (business and leisure) and international standard venues are key factors for resilience of the exhibition industry (Rittichainuwat, et al., 2020, p.1). Stakeholder collaboration also be considered for sharing the responsibility in risk and crisis management (Gstaettner, et al., 2019, p.377). Pennington-Gray, Schroeder and Gale (2014, p.295) stated that communication/ negotiation is the most effective one strategy to manage crisis because this approach combines resources from various stakeholders in the community for crisis management.

Methods

Refers a notion of data triangulation to decrease subjectivity of case study research, this section will explain three different methods or tools of data collection namely; semi-structured interview direct observation and document analysis

3.1 Semi-structured interview

Interview is the most widely employed method in qualitative research particularly in case study research (Brayman, 2012, p.210; Yin, 2014, p.115). Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012, p.235) define "the research interview as a purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer (the researcher) to establish rapport, to ask concise

and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewees (participants) is willing to respond, and to listen attentively".

In general, there are three types of interview; (1) structured or survey or standardised interviews; this type is often used for quantitative analysis and use pre-prepared questionnaires and standardised question, (2) semi-structured or non-standardise interviews; this type is often used in qualitative analysis, the interviewer (the researcher) regularly has a list of themes and possibly some key questions, and (3) unstructured or in-depth or non-standardised interviews; there is no predetermined list of questions, interviewer (the researcher) need to have a clear idea about the aspect that he or she want to explore (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012, p.254; Bryman, 2012, p.271).

Selecting interview types depends on research question, objectives and strategy that the researcher adopted (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012, p.217). Semi-structured interview is most appropriate interview type because this research aims to seek the of stakeholder's engagement of domestic MICE by applying stakeholder engagement. Semi-structured interview provides opportunity the researcher to ask the participations to response deep and specific information with a list of interview questions due to key concepts of domestic MICE stakeholders. This type of interview is also useful for acquiring additional issues with a list of open questions that emerge from literatures review.

In order to successfully semi-structured interview to adequately answer research

question and objectives, the researcher need a well-prepare list of interview questions. Robson (2011) recommends that good list of interview questions should cover four parts; (1) introductory comments, (2) list of topic headings and key questions, (3) set of associated prompts, and (4) closing comments. Table No. 1 shows a list of interview questions that focused on key step of stakeholders' engagement process included scene-setting, activities and communications, and monitoring stakeholder involvement.

For sample groups, at least 12 participants from three following groups will be interviewed. More participants will be added in case to enhance a data saturation.

1. Group 1 - Government body, such as local TAT offices, The Provincial committees of promoting a MICE city and municipalities

2. Group 2 - Private sector; MICE venues, accommodations, travel agencies, transportation businesses, a PCO (Professional Convention Organiser)

3. Group 3 - Local communities who involved in a domestic MICE industry

Additionally, potential participants will be listed from TCEB members' record, then they will be contacted by phone and/or email to ask a response with a consideration of research ethics.

Criteria to select key-infomants from those three groups.

1. Having experience to serve domestic MICE tourism

2. Having experience to cooperate with other stakeholders

3. Having experience to involve in stakeholder engagement during a crisis of the COVID-19

Data analysis is a systematic process for finding the meaning of data collected and draw conclusions in research. There are three concurrent flows of activity in data analysis as data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing were applied. This research has followed these three stages for the main case study that will be described below.

Table No. 1 List of interview questions

Part 1. Introductory comments
Q. 1 – Could you please tell me about your work background in a domestic MICE context?
Q. 2 – Did you experience stakeholders' engagement before? Could you please tell me?
Q. 3 – Could you tell me about your work experiences that affected by the Pandemic?
Part 2. Stakeholders' engagement during the Pandemic
Q. 1 - Did you experience stakeholders' engagement during the Pandemic (2020-2022), could you explain more details?
<i>Probing questions: i.e. How they involved? With whom? How long? What a specific purpose?</i>



Part 2. Stakeholders' engagement during the Pandemic (Cont.)

Q. 2 – Could you explain more details about activities and communications that you involved in that engagement?

Probing questions: i.e. What kind of platforms and/or channels and how? Any new activities that adapted for this pandemic? What the benefits and feedback that you get from these activities and communications?

Q. 3 – As you mentioned above, could you please tell me your awareness of the Pandemic before and after you involved those activities and communications?

Probing questions: i.e. degree of your awareness? Sub-issues of the Pandemic (i.e., teamwork for a crisis management, risk management, IT knowledge) that you focus?

Q. 4 – Could you please explain more detail about how did you adapt what you get from stakeholders' engagement activities and communications to pursue your work (at that time) to deal with the crisis?

Q. 5 – Could you please tell me about monitoring stakeholder involvement that you have experienced during the Pandemic? Any changes after you involved stakeholders' engagement?

Part 3. Suggestions

In your opinion, what are any suggestions for this research and others in the future?

Prior to reduce data from interviews, all transcriptions will be described then the researcher read and reread all transcriptions to familiarise content and draft an outline for creating initial nodes. Then, manual coding technique was applied to create initial set of codes. A code is a researcher-generated construct that captures a datum's primary content and essence. The first cycle coding will be employed to reduce all data with a consideration about categorising and labeling what data reveal into initial nodes that the researcher has drafted earlier. As the results, several nodes and sub nodes have emerged. Template analysis will be employed after finishing a coding in order to discuss research findings and propose an expected framework.

Findings and Discussion

Stakeholder engagement of domestic MICE tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic

The overall data were gathered from

16 participants following:

Group 1 - Government body: five participants comprised of Chiang Mai TAT officers, The Provincial committees of promoting a MICE city and representatives from municipality.

Group 2 - Private sector: seven participants comprised of local event organisers and their suppliers

Group 3 - Local communities: four participants who experienced to facilitate venues and incentive tour programs

As the results, stakeholders of domestic MICE in Thailand have applied "three-step of the process of stakeholders' engagement" for dealing with a crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic; 1) Creating awareness which focuses on communications, 2) Building support or targeting stakeholder outreach, and 3) Making the change real with sustainable new business processes.

1. Creating awareness which focuses on communications

The COVID-19 pandemic became a mutual interest that all stakeholders seriously concerned and focused on. Almost all participants mentioned that “...we are in the same team who face the mutual crisis now and no more competitors anymore.” Therefore, a scene-setting for stakeholders during the COVID-19 crisis naturally and rapidly occurred, all stakeholders had a strong intention to create and maintain collaboration. The main purpose was to enhance awareness and understanding mutual interests and concerns and develop communication strategies for achieve that. Online communication channel was applied completely at the very first stage of the pandemic in 2019 for dealing with different stakeholders i.e. customers’ demands, suppliers’ cancellation and resources pooling.

After that, online communication was applied to update current situations, rules and regulation and the second plan for coming events. Official online channels such as Line chatting and Facebook page were completely applied for demand and supply sides.

And on 11 March 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the virus had spread across 114 countries, and at this point, 85 destinations had issued travel restrictions (Ghebreyesus, 2020, p.129). The UNWTO recorded four (4) key categories of travel restrictions, which include and were implemented by various destinations: firstly, some issued full or partial border closures, where tourists were not allowed entry. Secondly, some destinations suspended flights, there-

by restricting tourists. Thirdly, differentiated measures where passengers who transited or had travelled from certain countries or regions were not allowed entry. The fourth category were destinations that allowed entry with the condition of self-isolation or quarantine upon arrival. In April 2020, the government of Thailand issued a lockdown, the lockdown meant that most economic activities, including tourism, would cease with immediate effect. Therefore, the online and hybrid event pattern was applied such as annual meeting, organisational seminar, new product launching, and workshops. Iazzi, et al. (2020, p.1649) proposed that right communication tools, significantly, online and hybrid training and workshop class were provided could be useful for stakeholder engagement. Svendsen and Laberge (2005, p. 100) confirmed that internet and social media technologies overcome many communication limitations previously attributed to time and distance, therefore enhancing communication potential within stakeholder engagement initiatives and afford DMO’s the possibility of building real-time interactive relationships between collaborating stakeholders within the destination.

As the results, stakeholder engagement of domestic MICE highly affected stakeholders to make decision to run businesses particularly for financial management and human resources management (HRM) during the crisis. Because involvement of different stakeholders from different organisations bring more opportunities to survive their own businesses, for example pooling information for pitching incentive group. This point probably



means resources sharing from various stakeholders in the community is useful for crisis management in tourism context. This finding is supported by to lazzi, et al. (2020, p.1642), they stated that good stakeholder engagement is useful to demonstrate how much stakeholders are involved, and the results achieved when stakeholders are engaged in the decision-making process. Pennington-Gray, Schroeder and Gale (2014, p.300) also confirmed that communication /negotiation is the most effective one strategy to combine resources from those stakeholders.

2. Building support or targeting stakeholder outreach,

Multi-stakeholder online workshops were found during the lockdown included Coach the coaches training program that arranged by TCEB or The Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, that lasted almost eight months for five courses. Gain additional potential stakeholders for their business such as new customer groups, alternative suppliers, and prospective employers. Moreover, this activity was mentioned that the great chance for higher educational institutes to engage in MICE industry. Training and workshop courses were not only for engaging stakeholders but also providing their themselves useful knowledge and skill for working in the next normal context after the pandemic ends. Workshops' topics focused on managing and operating in the next normal to create awareness of a risk and crisis management particularly a health-related crisis that significantly impacted to MICE tourism. Importantly, digital and technology knowledge and skill for communication were

contained in SOP in almost all stakeholders' organisations policy. This point was supported by Byrd (2007, p.8) and Yang, et al. (2011, pp.150-152), they explain that stakeholder engagement practices identified within the literature include public hearings, workshops, advisory committees, social contact events, negotiations, public engagement approaches including surveys, focus groups, invitation of written submissions, written comments could support stakeholder outreach.

The findings also showed that the governmental stakeholders play significant role during the pandemic such as TCEB and TAT (Thailand Authority of Thailand) to educational and private stakeholders. The main cause may be the businesses themselves had limitation to manage and deal with external business environment including stakeholder engagement during the pandemic. Sloan (2009, p.35) and Kavaratzis (2012, pp.16-17) confirmed that effective stakeholder engagement requires leaders with high levels of vision, courage and persistence so that stakeholder audiences are motivated and energized to become involved in destination activity. Additionally, D'angella, De Carlo and Sainaghi (2010, p.62) mentioned that decentralised decision-making adopts a consensus-building perspective which can in itself promote engagement from stakeholders but may pose challenges with regard to accountability.

3. Making the change real with sustainable new business processes.

Research findings showed that the significant change that happened during the Pandemic was stakeholders' mindset and

perception about risk management and the second plan for running their businesses. Several participants mentioned that they learned to set a flexible plan for resources management and product development. Essential resources for MICE industry could be classified into two types; physical materials and human resources for create ideas. They have been used available materials to produce new products such as exhibition organisers to rent aluminum booths to construct field hospitals. The Thai hospitality, bleisure (business and leisure) and international standard venues are key factors for resilience of the exhibition industry (Rittichainuwat, et al., 2020, pp.1-2). Stakeholder collaboration also be considered for sharing the responsibility in risk and crisis management (Gstaettner, et al., 2019, p.379). This point was supported by Kim and Lee (2020, p.73), they found that several practical crisis recoveries were revealed during COVID-19 outbreak such as using a private dining room or table could be one of the solutions in restaurant industry. The significant reason may be diversification of MICE products could reduce uncertainty during the pandemic. Gómez-Martín, et al., (2014, p.299) explained about diversification that diversification of tourism products could also reduce the seasonality of the tourism industry and expand the area available for tourism. Both of these factors would reduce the possible risks includes climate change for tourism. In this sense, it could be discussed that MICE products' diversification became the significant strategy of adaptation to sustainably survive MICE businesses.

Another interesting shift was technology became an essential element for online and hybrid M-meeting, C-conference, and E-exhibition. Participants said that the pandemic resulted the online and hybrid pattern became a normal pattern for not only supply side to invest in but also customers' expectations. Therefore, IT knowledge and experience were required to recruit new employees and to develop existing employees. The substantial reason may be MICE businesses realised that IT knowledge, skill and experience are critical resources for increasing resilience and adaptability to avoid a failure during the next crisis. Bartis, Hufkie and Moraladi, (2021, p.110) supported that some of the organisations in the business events-sub-sector also proved resilient and were able to innovate. These innovations included expanding their digital platforms to host virtual and hybrid events and upskilling their staff. Kwok and Koh (2021, pp.1937-1938) further suggested that tourism including MICE academia should focus on the urgent need for more research adaptation which incorporates application of new technologies.

To sum up, in order to successfully pursue all above stakeholders engagement process, the powerful stakeholders such as government organisation who provide a main financial support should simultaneously motivate different stakeholders to involve in engagement activities and facilitate system and device for online activities. For example, they could utilise conciliatory tactics such as convince the communities to realise advantages of the stakeholders' engagement and monitor-



ing feedback. Without performance feedback, this stakeholder set could develop and sustain their cooperation. These solutions would eliminate a problem of information and knowledge transferring and event production eventually.

Conclusion

The crisis of COVID-19 pandemic enormously affected tourism industry included MICE because of travel restrictions and a lockdown policy. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic crippled the world economy, such to an extent these effects exceeded that of the 9/11 attacks in the United States of America on 11 September 2001, the 2008 economic crisis, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) combined (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2020). Stakeholders' engagement was needed to handle with a crisis. Friedman and Miles, 2006, p.170; Waligo, Clarke and Hawkins, 2013, p.347) suggested that stakeholders' engagement is a significant element for strengthening stakeholders' cooperation and sustaining critical resources providers for a productivity. Stakeholder collaboration also be considered for sharing the responsibility in risk and crisis management (Gstaettner, et al., 2019, p.377).

Creating and enhancing awareness of mutual interest, in this case "the COVID-19 pandemic", among domestic MICE in Thailand naturally and rapidly occurred. This statement was mentioned by all three stakeholder groups; TAT officers, event organisers' owners, and local residents. Simultaneously, TCEB's members and the private sector included

event organisers' employers and their suppliers suggested that online communication channels became the most effective communication approach. It was highly focused and developed for not only dealing with their value chain but also providing information and knowledge for related stakeholders. These activities were mainly supported by the governmental stakeholders. Additionally, private businesses themselves explored that MICE product diversification became the essential business strategy and IT knowledge, skill and experience became a critical resource for domestic MICE. Consequently, stakeholders of domestic MICE industry highly focused on to maintain existing networking and to extent the new ones for dealing with the next disruption. Alternatively, stakeholders' engagement during the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic shaped a sustainable crisis management for domestic MICE in Thailand.

Contributions

This research contributes to not only academic perspective, but also practical viewpoint. In terms of academic part, research' results and discussions added specific elements of each step of stakeholders' engagement process that essential for the researcher to apply in the future research. In the meantime, related stakeholders of domestic MICE in Thailand in management and operation level could bring research to use as a guideline to survive during the crisis that may occur in the future.

Limitations and suggestions

Limitations of this research include
1) Several participants who focused on their

own work and updating information about the crisis during the Pandemic, it took a longer time than expected to collect data, 2) Information about the Pandemic was constantly updated that difficult to adapt into a part of findings and discussion.

At the same time, the researcher would like to suggest that data from specific stakeholder groups were needed to create mutual interest and perception during the crisis in order to strengthen the stakeholders engagement. Because there regularly are rules

and regulations and particularly organizational norms and cultures that highly affected to stakeholders' engagement.

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