


BUSINESS CAPABILITIES IN THAILAND'S LOWER-TIER CITIES: IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 04 October 2022</p> <p>Accepted 23 December 2022</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>MICE; MICE Cities; Thailand's Lower-Tier Cities; MICE City Capabilities; Importance-Performance; Analysis.</p> <div data-bbox="172 1064 480 1310" style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p>Purpose: Officially published on October 11th, 2021, Thailand government under Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) expanded the areas for MICE ((Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions Cities) cities development nationwide and took pride in its inclusive initiative in developing the lower-tier cities, regardless of the uncertain pandemic. Based on the report by TCEB Annual Report (2021), the 13 primary MICE to be developed under "MICE City Initiative" include the tier-one, tier-two and tier-three cities. This research aims to explore Thailand's lower tier cities' MICE attributes (the lower tier cities under MICE development) as to underpin an informed data for all scholars, MICE professionals and government</p> <p>Theoretical framework: This research recommends the development of dynamic and internal capabilities over their implications on MICE and destination level attributes</p> <p>Design/methodology/approach: By enabling the importance-performance (IP) analysis, and with 435 volunteers from the scholars and professionals in tourism, hospitality, MICE, travel businesses, this research has been able to serve the novelty within the study of lower-tier city development and capabilities.</p> <p>Findings: The finding of this study highlights (i) the first underpinning of the MICE capabilities analysis from the context of Thailand's lower-tier cities - the research area that is oftentimes overlooked and consequently lacking; (ii) the overarching exploration on MICE attributes; (iii) the responsive and in-depth informed-research for the development of the lower-cities in Thailand; (iv) the offer of fresh MICE capabilities benchmarks for other ASEAN regions. In specific, the study discovered two significant concerns in the current MICE business in Thailand's lower-tier cities; (i) the expected service standards in MICE facilities are still underperformed; (ii) whilst, the friendliness of tourism destinations is overperformed, hence, overkilled the importance.</p> <p>Research, Practical & Social implications: This research would serve a wide variety of travel and tourism and MICE professionals as well as scholars. Specifically for destination management; this research would navigate clear guidance for the holistic development of lower-tier cities in Thailand, and as a benchmark for other emerging countries.</p>

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Originality/value: This study takes a huge pride towards novel scholarship contribution of MICE business capabilities in the emerging economies. This research is able to further the application of previous research by J. Whitfield, et al. (2014) on MICE attributes, and the theories of dynamic and internal capabilities – while at the same time, offer benchmarks for other ASEAN's MICE destination development.

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CAPACIDADES DE NEGÓCIOS NAS CIDADES DE NÍVEL INFERIOR DA TAILÂNDIA: ANÁLISE DE IMPORTÂNCIA-DESEMPENHO

RESUMO

Objetivo: Publicado oficialmente em 11 de outubro de 2021, o governo da Tailândia sob o Departamento de Convenções e Exposições da Tailândia (TCEB) expandiu as áreas para o desenvolvimento de cidades MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions Cities) em todo o país e se orgulhava de sua iniciativa inclusiva no desenvolvimento das cidades de nível inferior, independentemente da pandemia incerta. Com base no relatório do Relatório Anual do TCEB (2021), as 13 principais cidades MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) a serem desenvolvidas sob a “Iniciativa MICE City” incluem as cidades de nível um, dois e três. Esta pesquisa visa explorar os atributos MICE das cidades de nível inferior da Tailândia (as cidades de nível inferior sob desenvolvimento do MICE) para sustentar dados informados para todos os acadêmicos, profissionais do MICE e governo

Referencial teórico: Esta pesquisa sustenta o desenvolvimento de capacidades dinâmicas e internas sobre suas implicações em MICE e atributos de nível de destino

Desenho/metodologia/abordagem: Ao permitir a análise de importância-desempenho (IP), e com 435 voluntários de acadêmicos e profissionais de turismo, hospitalidade, MICE, empresas de viagens, esta pesquisa foi capaz de atender à novidade no estudo do desenvolvimento e das capacidades de cidades de nível inferior.

Resultados: A descoberta deste estudo destaca (i) a primeira base da análise de capacidades MICE a partir do contexto das cidades de nível inferior da Tailândia - a área de pesquisa que muitas vezes é negligenciada e, conseqüentemente, carente; (ii) a exploração abrangente dos atributos MICE; (iii) a pesquisa informada e responsiva e aprofundada para o desenvolvimento das cidades mais baixas da Tailândia; (iv) a oferta de novos benchmarks de capacidades MICE para outras regiões da ASEAN. Especificamente, o estudo descobriu duas preocupações significativas no atual negócio de MICE nas cidades de nível inferior da Tailândia; (i) os padrões de serviço esperados nas instalações MICE ainda estão abaixo do desempenho; (ii) enquanto a simpatia dos destinos turísticos é superada, portanto, supera a importância.

Pesquisa, implicações práticas e sociais: Esta pesquisa serviria a uma ampla variedade de profissionais de viagens e turismo e MICE, bem como acadêmicos. Especificamente para o gerenciamento de destinos, esta pesquisa forneceria orientações claras para o desenvolvimento holístico de cidades de nível inferior na Tailândia e como referência para outros países emergentes.

Originalidade/valor: Este estudo tem muito orgulho da nova contribuição acadêmica das capacidades de negócios do MICE em economias emergentes. Esta pesquisa é capaz de promover a aplicação da pesquisa anterior de J. Whitfield, et al. (2014) sobre atributos MICE e as teorias de capacidades dinâmicas e internas – enquanto, ao mesmo tempo, oferece referências para o desenvolvimento de outros destinos MICE da ASEAN.

Palavras-chave: MICE, MICE Cities, Cidades de Nível Inferior da Tailândia, Capacidades de MICE City, Análise de Importância-Desempenho.

CAPACIDADES EMPRESARIALES EN LAS CIUDADES DE NIVEL INFERIOR DE TAILANDIA: ANÁLISIS DE LA IMPORTANCIA Y EL RENDIMIENTO

RESUMEN

Propósito: Publicado oficialmente el 11 de octubre de 2021, el gobierno de Tailandia bajo la Oficina de Exposiciones y Convenciones de Tailandia (TCEB) amplió las áreas para el desarrollo de ciudades MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, Exhibitions) en todo el país y se enorgulleció de su iniciativa inclusiva para desarrollar las ciudades de nivel inferior, independentemente de la pandemia incierta. Según el informe del Informe anual de TCEB (2021), las 13 ciudades MICE principales que se desarrollarán bajo la "Iniciativa de ciudad MICE" incluyen las ciudades de nivel uno, nivel dos y nivel tres. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar los atributos MICE de las ciudades de nivel inferior de Tailandia (las ciudades de nivel inferior bajo desarrollo MICE) para respaldar datos informados para todos los académicos, profesionales MICE y el gobierno.

Marco teórico: esta investigación sustenta el desarrollo de capacidades dinámicas e internas sobre sus implicaciones en MICE y atributos de nivel de destino.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: al permitir el análisis de importancia-desempeño (IP), y con 435 voluntarios de académicos y profesionales en turismo, hospitalidad, MICE, empresas de viajes, esta investigación ha sido capaz de servir la novedad dentro del estudio de menor -nivel de desarrollo y capacidades de la ciudad.

Hallazgos: El hallazgo de este estudio destaca (i) el primer fundamento del análisis de capacidades MICE del contexto de las ciudades de nivel inferior de Tailandia, el área de investigación que a menudo se pasa por alto y, en consecuencia, carece; (ii) la exploración general de los atributos MICE; (iii) la investigación informada receptiva y profunda para el desarrollo de las ciudades bajas en Tailandia; (iv) la oferta de nuevos puntos de referencia de capacidades MICE para otras regiones de la ASEAN. En concreto, el estudio descubrió dos preocupaciones importantes en el negocio MICE actual en las ciudades de nivel inferior de Tailandia; (i) los estándares de servicio esperados en las instalaciones MICE aún no se cumplen; (ii) mientras que la amabilidad de los destinos turísticos se supera, por lo tanto, se exagera la importancia.

Investigación, implicaciones prácticas y sociales: Esta investigación serviría a una amplia variedad de profesionales de viajes y turismo y MICE, así como a académicos. Específicamente para la gestión de destinos, esta investigación ofrecería una guía clara para el desarrollo holístico de las ciudades de nivel inferior en Tailandia y como punto de referencia para otros condados emergentes.

Originalidad/valor: Este estudio se enorgullece enormemente de la novedosa contribución de las becas de las capacidades empresariales MICE en las economías emergentes. Esta investigación puede promover la aplicación de investigaciones previas de J. Whitfield, et al. (2014) sobre los atributos MICE y las teorías de las capacidades internas y dinámicas, al tiempo que ofrece puntos de referencia para el desarrollo de otros destinos MICE de la ASEAN.

Palabras clave: MICE, Ciudades MICE, Ciudades de nivel inferior de Tailandia, Capacidades de la ciudad MICE, Análisis de Importancia y Rendimiento.

INTRODUCTION

The Current Standing of ASEAN and Thailand's Lower-Tier Cities & MICE Industry Growth

Southeast Asia is experiencing dynamism in second-tier and third-tier urban centers, as many major cities such as Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, and Jakarta have been dominating more than half of GDP compared to their supporting provinces in their respective countries (Rimmer and Dick, 2009; Padawangi, 2022). And thus, second-tier and lower-tier cities would now emerge to challenge more inclusive government attention on resources and private investments. For lower-tier cities to shine, developing strategies shall be put in order to close the gap, such as building airports, land and water logistics, public landscapes, etc (Padawangi, 2022). At the same time, they would also need to attract various investment schemes for development as burdens are always around lower-tier cities (Rimmer & Dick, 2009; Padawangi, 2022). And the characteristics of those cities are not similar to urban cities, when it comes to relying on their economic structures, geographic areas, and relation with surrounding cities (Padawangi, 2022).

Fast forward to Thailand, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TECB) Annual Report (2020) exhibited the crucial keys for economic and social advancement towards the Quality of Life (QOL) which focus on urban and regional development and inclusive prosperity

deployment (TCEB Annual Report, 2020). In the past, Thailand encompassed operational management - nowhere near international standards, and deficient & low-quality infrastructures and thus, those issues had obstructed the entire national development (The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017). That was when infrastructure and logistics strategies and regional, urban, & economic zone development strategies in the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan came to play. The campaign was to constantly: (i) expanding the capacity of infrastructure & logistics - both quality and quantity, led to the similar example as Thailand achieved the Eastern Seaboard growth, which is now an ASEAN's chosen leading economic area; (ii) building infrastructure networks - to support areas alongside economic corridors - whilst alleviating development focus in Bangkok which improving national competitiveness; (iii) upgrading management & regulation systems in all regions to corresponding with international standards - to increase safety & effective operations; (iv) infrastructure-induced industries & logistics entrepreneurship and organization will be supported - for internationally expand their businesses (The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017).

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Thailand's MICE Resilience

As a form of unyielding support, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau's three-year operational plan (2020 to 2022) was set after the declarations by the Cabinet on 12th March 2019, with the intent of advancement within the MICE sector in the kingdom of Thailand (TCEB Annual Report, 2020). The organization revised their strategy by looking at the actualization of 2017-2021 under the protocol set by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), as associations were obligated to alter their operations according to the three-year project and an additional main strategy that was later made public on 18th April 2019 (TCEB Annual Report, 2020b). Within this revised operational plan, the TCEB has established clear vision, goals and mission to support the promotion of MICE as an apparatus in Thailand's continual economic expansion through modernizations and encourage the increase in revenue and development with uniformity across the entirety of industries. As for the goals, the strategy was meant to create and distribute revenue and expansion within Thailand's economy, as well as innovate the nation's MICE sector. Furthermore, the mission of the three-year operational plan is to assist MICE event businesses in producing economic expansion and spread revenue, to become a delegate for international MICE events to be organized in Thailand, to use Thai virtues in quality goods and services to advocate the branding within Thailand's MICE sector, to advance the MICE sector and increase the skill of the

personnel within with further expertise, and to encourage sustainable event procedures to attain an international leverage (TCEB Annual Report 2020).

The fiscal year of 2020-2021 budget agreed for the operational strategy by the TCEB was THB 829.41 million, with THB 675.61 million or 81.46% for committals and assistance, while THB 24.23 million or 2.92% was used for the funds throughout the year. The residue of the budget was THB 129.57 million, or 15.62% of the initial total. However, with the emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020, there was a mandatory government ban of MICE-related activities and freedom of domestic as well as international movement. Thus, the TCEB operational goals were not accomplished, as most of the budget was used for crisis expenditure. As a form of recovering the situation, the TCEB revised the previous operational strategy for the year 2020, with either the amendment or abolishment of 55 schemes endorsed with a budget of THB 77.44 million, as well as the introduction of 15 additional schemes endorsed with a budget of THB 33.33 million. Table 1 presents the TCEB Budget Expenditure 2020.

Table 1: TCEB Budget Expenditure 2020 (Unit: Million Baht)

Programmes	Budget expenditure plan in fiscal year	Disbursements	Commitments (Plan for disbursement)	Subsidies and other expenses	Projects in the process of procurement	Balance
1. Programme on public sector personnel	141.67	141.62	-	0.05	-	-
2. Fundamental programme	47.55	41.98	4.02	0.17	1.26	0.13
3. Strategic programme	496.11	170.06	91.56	125.91	20.51	88.07
4. Integrated programme on generation of revenues from tourism	75.36	9.81	13.42	25.92	0.56	25.65
5. Integrated programme on EEC	19.45	3.08	10.42	0.09	0.33	5.53
6. Integrated programme on regional area development	49.26	9.29	24.13	4.08	1.57	10.19
Total	829.41	375.84	143.56	156.21	24.23	129.57

Source: TCEB Annual Report (2020)

Despite the pandemic, The TCEB has started an integrated program on regional areas to begin the MICE sector endorsement at a regional level, focusing mainly on northern, central, eastern and north-eastern parts of Thailand. The aim of this plan is to introduce commerce

opportunities and increase the capacity and business advantage of provinces, as well as to solidify the nation's economy, society, healthcare, culture, environment, and natural resources in 2020. 79.31% of the budget set, or a total of THB 39.07 million were utilized for the programme, which was lower than predicted, mainly due to the COVID-19 outbreak which resulted in the mandatory cancellation of MICE events and travel across the region (TCEB MICE Statistics, 2021). Table 2 brings the MICE Visitors Growth.

Table 2: MICE Visitors Growth

Market segment/ Industry	Number of MICE Visitors (persons)				Revenue (THB million)			
	2019	2020	Increase/ (Decrease)	Percentage of Difference	2019	2020	Increase / (Decrease)	Percentage of Difference
M	1,732,410	636,889	(1,095,521)	-63.24%	4,098	1,639	(2,460)	-60.01%
I	202,620	100,481	(102,139)	-50.41%	1,261	527	(734)	-58.21%
C	4,265,162	1,463,389	(2,801,773)	-65.69%	10,175	3,603	(6,572)	-64.59%
E	23,411,821	7,804,363	(15,607,458)	-66.66%	91,514	27,102	(64,412)	-70.39%
Total	29,612,013	10,005,122	(19,606,891)	-66.21%	107,048	32,871	(74,178)	-69.29%

Remark: There were 7,163 online MICE visitors and visitors from the convention segment.

Source: TCEB MICE Statistics (2021)

MICE Cities and Their Objectives

Officially published on October the 11th, 2021, TCEB expanded the areas for MICE cities development nationwide and took pride in its inclusive initiative in developing the lower-tier cities, regardless of the uncertain pandemic. Based on the report by TCEB Annual Report (2021), the 13 primary MICE cities listed (including the tier-one cities) are Songkhla, Phuket, Nakhon Ratchasima, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phitsanulok, Sukhothai, Chanthaburi, Surat Thani, Chiang Rai. Table 3 presents MICE Cities Administered by TCEB.

Table 3: MICE Cities Administered by TCEB

No.	Province	Population as of 2021	City Classification Based on their Infrastructure Development
1	Songkhla	979,000	2 nd Tier
2	Phuket	437,963	1 st Tier
3	Nakhon Ratchasima	783,000	2 nd Tier
4	Pattaya	104,318	2 nd Tier
5	Chiang Mai	1,197,931	2 nd Tier
6	Khon Kaen	516,000	2 nd Tier
7	Bangkok	10,900,000	1 st Tier

8	Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya	453,000	2 nd Tier
9	Phitsanulok	865,247	3 rd Tier
10	Sukhothai	595,072	2 nd Tier
11	Chanthaburi	371,000	3 rd Tier
12	Surat Thani	509,000	3 rd Tier
13	Chiang Rai	149,261	2 nd Tier

Source: City Population: Planning Regions and Provinces (2021)

Holistically, the main objectives of MICE city are to leverage the MICE industry as a whole, as well as support the economic inclusivity and innovations in the MICE and its direct industry like hotel and lodging, restaurants, and travel agencies. Likewise, to expand wider externalities towards locals' creative economies, logistic businesses, technological advancement, and global trust in Thailand as an international event hub as well as avenues towards major foreign investments and alliances, to mention the least. Table 4 presents TCEB Strategic MICE Development as per 2021.

Table 4: TCEB Strategic MICE Development as per 2021

No.	Strategy	Tactics
1	Use the MICE industry to drive the country's economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain and upgrade existing MICE events to achieve stability, and sustainability ● Build new MICE events according to market demand and the country's capability and policy.
2	Use the MICE industry distribute income and stimulate Thailand's regional economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and boost regional MICE events to stimulate the economies of regions, cities and economic zones. ● Developing MICE events decrease social inequality in the regions, cities and economic areas.
3	Promote images of Thailand's MICE industry and TCEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote marketing campaigns and enhance Thailand's image as an international MICE destination through premium services and Thai uniqueness. ● Develop awareness and change the perspective of other organizations toward TCEB's role and image
4	Increase competitiveness and elevate MICE to become a national agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capitalize on in-depth information, IT technology and innovations to create competitive advantages for the Thai MICE industry ● Upgrade the MICE industry through the development of standards among MICE professionals and operators ● Enforce and promote the MICE industry to become a national agenda that covers all aspects of policy, measures and operations ● Forge domestic and international alliances to jointly promote the Thai MICE industry to become the ASEAN hub
5	Enhance the efficiency of TCEB's internal operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhance the capabilities of TCEB personnel to promote further development of the organization ● Leverage innovations, knowledge and internal integration to enhance the efficiency of TCEB's

		operations under the principles of good corporate governance
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Source: TCEB Annual Report (2021)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dynamic Capabilities

Recognizing the distinctive abilities of lower-tier cities is crucial given their potential contributions toward economic growth approaches, yet research evaluations on these communities are sadly lacking. The analysis of "smart cities" has become the primary means by which decentralization initiatives in urban areas are examined. To stimulate urban development, Chong et al. (2018) highlighted the significance of governmental interventions towards development initiatives (in this case, a smart city). In this way the intellectual rationale for tiered cities is inextricably linked to the notion of smart cities' dynamic capabilities. Regarding secondary and tertiary metropolitan cities, Chong et al. (2018) suggested that the smart city dynamic capabilities should serve as a strategic guide for leading communities through the process of urbanization. One of the advantages of smart cities is that they make use of information technology and e-government, which together provide dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Piccoli & Ives, 2005; Klievink & Janssen, 2009). Our thesis statement, therefore, contends that the key capability metrics will remain applicable irrespective of the concepts of smart city management or, simply third-tier cities growth, even though such an analysis into such theories may appear overwhelming. Dynamic capabilities in regard to third-tier cities will incorporate an innovative and financially sustainable economic environment in addition to the flexibility to embrace new possibilities when presented (Dameri & Ricciardi, 2015; Chong, et al, 2018). Besides the evident connection of managerial, societal, legislative, and legal frameworks, the capability approach of a city prioritizes three primary benchmarks (Chong, et al, 2018): 1) The ability to conserve resources (sustainability); 2) The capacity to recover from disturbances and regain stability quickly (robustness); and 3) The flexibility to alter in response to changing situations (agility) (Dameri & Ricciardi, 2015). Furthermore, Beckhard and Harris (1987) discussed the idea that organizational competencies correspond with differing levels of change readiness.

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) sector is a fast-growing segment of the tourism industry that is delivering substantial benefits to the sector's overall economic growth. As a result, areas all over the globe are trying to develop comprehensive MICE destinations and MICE cities as part of their management plans. This is necessary so that destinations and businesses can adapt to the ever-shifting demands of the tourist industry as a

whole, both at home and abroad. The industry's main weakness is its inability to keep up with the ever-evolving needs of the market and its lack of innovative approaches to staying ahead of the competition (Verikios, 2007; Banjongprasert, 2017). In contrast to MICE initiatives, which are tailored to a niche market, the analysis of the business capability model and micro-environment concept are more generally applicable to the tourism and leisure sector as a whole. The strategic management theory provides a framework to observe the capability approach from a most unique perspective. Bearing this in mind, the inadequacy in academic research of MICE potential needs correcting. Therefore, the foundational research into MICE capacities and particularly the progression of MICE cities in complex and unfamiliar third-tier cities within Thailand provide a crucial perspective that informs the pertinent conceptual structures of capability theory for third-tier cities within the ASEAN context, and MICE potential in its surroundings.

Internal Capabilities

Internal factors, which include operational and sales expertise, are the key factors to keep an eye on while arranging MICE events since they affect the company's ability to survive, expand, and establish a competitive advantage (Getz et al., 2012; Barney, 1991; Han, Lee, and Yoon, 2021). A company's unique traits, understanding, and capabilities are irreplaceable resources for increasing the productivity and longevity of the company (Barney, 1991).

With respect to the ERIS model, the aforementioned advantages are enlarged to include expertise, technical and management proficiency, effective engagement with stakeholders, the capacity to monitor the performance of a company's management, and the combination of fundamental resources including financial, human, and societal capital (Lee, Park, and Lee, 2019). In contrast, the MICE event framework primarily covers desired outcomes and organizational methods to streamline a successful MICE event (Getz et al., 2012). It is possible that an event's facilities need to be fiscally and environmentally responsible in order to be designated as a MICE event in the host city. Consequently, events should invest in the creation of unique, high-quality programs to produce benefits for the local community and highlight the unique characteristics of a particular location (Kim et al., 2022). Conversely, they should minimize adverse environmental effects, encourage business and local investment, and remain economically viable (Getz, and Page, 2016).

Additionally, evidence of a MICE organizers' ability to secure outside resources necessary for the organization's success comes from their established connections with other businesses. Fostering positive relationships with important external stakeholders is essential in

MICE management over the long term (He, Lin, and Li, 2020). The commitment of key stakeholders and a MICE event's success are both dependent on the degree of governmental support received, making it extremely important to get backing on a regional and national scale. Obtaining such support enables MICE organizers to not only create a profit but also enhance their reputation, and acquire any required resources (He, Lin, and Li, 2020; Jin, Weber, and Bauer, 2012; Todd, Leask, and Ensor, 2017; Liu et al., 2019).

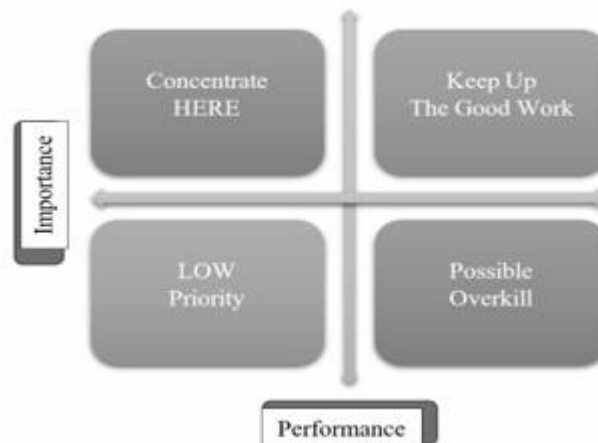
Importance-Performance (IP) Analysis in the Context of Tourism and MICE

In the field of tourism research, the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) is widely regarded as a valuable analytical approach - similarly, in the field of tourist studies, Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) has become a standard research technique (Lai & Hitchcock, 2015; Oh, 2001). It serves to distinguish both the divergence of opinion among stakeholders on essential aspects of an issue and the degree to which stakeholders can manage the problem (Lai & Hitchcock, 2015; Oh, 2001). It also helps identify strategic goals, directing limited resources where they are most required and coordinating action plans to boost efficiency (Azzopardi & Nash, 2013). IPA's continued inclusion in research is likely due to the effectiveness and popularity of the management strategies it offers for travel locations, as well as the clarity and simplicity of the systems overall ease of understanding (Taplin, 2012).

Many areas can benefit from IPA's applicability, including tourism branding (perceptions, satisfaction, service standards, interests, customer service, online reviews (Bi et al., 2019; Deng, 2007; DiPietro et al., 2019; Lee, 2015; Wang et al., 2016; Yuan et al., 2018; Zhang & Chow, 2004; Ziegler, Dearden, & Rollins, 2012; Garbin Praničević, & Mandić, 2020). It is also applicable to management, namely in the areas of sustainable tourism, destination competitiveness, planning, quality of work life, and hospitality (Albayrak et al., 2018; Coghlan, 2012; Frauman & Banks, 2011; Lai & Hitchcock, 2016; Murdy & Pike, 2012; Pan, 2015; Sörensson, & von Friedrichs, 2013; Zhang & Chan, 2016). It may also be used to gauge how effectively a company or location is satisfying the needs of its customers in addition to the value that visitors put on various experiences, services, and products (Boley, et al., 2017; Chen, 2014; Chu & Choi, 2000; Coghlan, 2012; Deng, 2007; Sheng, Simpson, & Siguaw, 2014; Taplin, 2012; Tonge & Moore, 2007; Ziegler, Dearden, & Rollins, 2012). The competitiveness of a destination or sector may also be quantified using a supply-side method, in which professionals within that destination are polled to evaluate the relative importance and performance of key components (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012; Griffin & Edwards, 2012; Murdy & Pike, 2012; Cvelbar & Dwyer, 2013).

As a means of prioritizing the use of limited resources, IPA uses a four-quadrant layout to highlight regions of highest importance (Sever, 2015; Martilla & James, 1977). The quadrants are Q1, "Keep up the good work," Q2, "Possible overkill," Q3, and "Low priority," and Q4, "Concentrate here" (Mandi & Kennell, 2021). Once managers have established the relative weight of various factors, they may redistribute resources to optimize performance based on overall importance (Martilla & James, 1977). Figure 1 presents the standard IPA Plot.

Figure 1: The standard IPA Plot



Source: Boley, et al., 2017; Breiter and Milman, 2006; Go and Zhang, 1997; Kang et al., 2005; Kim and Kim, 2004; Oppermann, 1996; J Whitfield, et al., 2014

There is a growing tendency toward integrating IPA with IPA-related conceptual and methodological perspectives, such as competitor analysis, three-factor theory, fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method, and the analytic hierarchy process, since these have introduced a nonlinear IPA framework (Albayrak et al., 2018, Lai & Hitchcock, 2016; Wang et al., 2016; and Yuan et al., 2018). Abalo, Varela, and Manzano (2007); Azzopardi and Nash (2013); Lai and Hitchcock (2015); Oh (2001); Sever (2015); and Taplin (2012) are just a few of the numerous researchers who have found the IPA-related perspectives to be appealing due to the potentially high benefit and its user-friendliness in the context of tourism planning and development. There is consensus across the studies that IPA is an important resource for guiding management decisions in the tourism industry if it falls within the limits of the assessment (Mandi, & Kennell, 2021).

MICE and Destination Level Attributes

Along with many other countries, Thailand is seeing a significant increase in the meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) market. According to the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB, 2006), the MICE industry in Thailand grew up to four times faster than all other types of tourism combined. The fundamental elements of a MICE event, as described by Whitfield and Webber (2010), are aimed to physically bring distributors and potential customers together. As a component of MICE, conferences have a significant role in fostering a culture of innovation, facilitating the delivery of cutting-edge research, showcasing novel products, and promoting their uses as we move into the future. Increasing the attendee's average length of stay is recommended since it may lead to greater job growth and economic development (Kim & Kim, 2004; Mistilis and Dwyer, 1999; Oppermann, 1996). According to J. Whitfield et al. (2014), MICE attributes are categorized into five sections: category A encompasses exhibition and event attributes; category B includes facility and conference venue attributes (including accommodation); category C comprises destination attributes; category D encompasses facility and destination attributes; and category E includes exhibition and destination attributes; numerous studies have evaluated the categories based on the author's original divisions, each category having its own attributes to conduct more in-depth analysis (J. Whitfield et al., 2014).

The selection of attributes is thought to sufficiently determine convention attendance, backed by relevant assessments of fundamental exposition attributes based on representative samples of participants and representatives (Severt Et al., 2007; Whitfield and Webber, 2010). There are three categories that have been studied in relation to the attributes regarding destinations: (C) destination attributes, (D) facility and destination attributes, and (E) exhibition and destination attributes. Research that examined category C which focuses on destination attributes revealed that both destination and facility attributes are significant, but when combined with studies that examined other types of attributes, including those in categories D and E, the results become less clear (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Chacko and Finch, 2000; Kang Et al., 2005; Oppermann, 1996). Studies within category D analyze both facility and destination level attributes simultaneously, with research revealing that facility attributes result in a bigger impact (Comas and Moscardo, 2005; Crouch and Louviere, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2004).

When analyzing categories C and D, meeting and event organizers place a higher value on attributes related to the facility itself than those related to the destination. Research findings highlight the importance of both facility attributes and destination attributes when surveying event planners and organizers (J. Whitfield et al., 2014).

In the aforementioned study of the prior research, two deficiencies were discovered. The first is the need to address the under-sampling of the respondents indicated in the to-do list as this would likely alter the research conclusions. The second would be to combine several types of attributes (event, destination, and/or facility) into a unified analysis (Yoo and Chon, 2008). Table 5 presents the MICE Attributes as Indicators for MICE Capabilities.

Table 5: MICE Attributes as Indicators for MICE Capabilities

Attributes of MICE Facilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The reputation of the exhibition facilities 2. The atmosphere and environment created by the exhibition facility 3. The standards of service within the exhibition facility 4. The safety and security within the exhibition facility
Attributes of MICE Accommodation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The safety and security within the exhibition facility 2. The standards of service within the accommodation facilities 3. The cost of suitable accommodation at the location 4. The safety and security within the accommodation
Attributes of MICE Accessibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The distance/duration of travel involved 2. The cost of travel to the destination 3. Travel formalities that inhibit travel visas, customs
Attributes of MICE Recreational and Professional Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Entertainment facilities: casinos, restaurants, bars 2. Shopping facilities: malls, affordability 3. Sightseeing: historical sites, attractions
Attributes of MICE Destination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The suitability and standard of local infrastructure 2. The safety and security within the destination 3. The reputation of the destination for holding exhibitions 4. The attractiveness of the destination's surroundings 5. The friendliness of local residents and communities 6. The professional opportunities: business deals, selling, networking

Source: J. Whitfield, et al. (2014)

According to the parameters studied by J. Whitfield et al. (2014) above, the importance of exhibition and destination attributes are jointly considered in attracting participants and representatives. Based on the data collected from representatives attending an expo at a multifaceted MICE venue, it was shown that the attributes of the location are the primary focus for any kind of business event, including a conference or exhibition.

Research significance

This study takes a huge pride towards the scholarship contribution of MICE business capabilities in the emerging economies as the examination touches: (i) the first underpinning of the MICE capabilities analysis from the context of Thailand's lower-tier cities - the research

area that is oftentimes overlooked and consequently lacking; (ii) the overarching exploration on MICE attributes, thanks to J. Whitfield, et al. (2014), from the prominent lenses of Thailand's MICE scholars and professionals - that is believed to be the most fitted sample for this exploratory study; (iii) the responsive and in-depth informed-research for the development of the lower-cities in Thailand - and towards Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)'s initiative; (iv) the offer of fresh MICE capabilities benchmarks for other ASEAN regions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Instrument and Method

The instrument for this research enabled the distribution of purposive sampling to a well-targeted respondent segment within the field of travel, tourism, hospitality, and MICE businesses. This research employed a quantitative methodology where the importance-performance analysis was run (Martilla & James, 1977) - to understand various perceptions of the respondents about MICE's business capabilities in Thailand's lower-tier cities. In the questionnaires, the components of MICE attributes developed by J. Whitfield, et al. (2014) namely (i) MICE Facilities; (ii) Accommodation; (iii) Accessibility; (iv) Recreational and Professional Opportunities; and (v) Destination Attributes were modified to fit in the actual conditions of Thailand's lower-tier cities. The online questionnaires (the indicators of each MICE attribute) were divided into two different sets: one is the aspect of "Importance Analysis" and the other one is "Performance Analysis". Without deviating at all from the indicators proposed by J. Whitfield, et al. (2014) (See: Table 5), the questionnaire statements were adjusted in a narrative manner to guide the respondents towards an understanding of the "importance analysis significance" and "performance analysis significance" respectively within the context of Thailand's MICE cities. The Likert-scale of "least important" (valued at 1) to "most important" (valued at 5), and "perform least significantly" (valued at 1) to "perform most significantly" (valued at 5) is used in the respective survey set.

Data Analysis, Population, Sampling Size and Data Collection

To analyze the data, researchers performed the IP (importance-performance) analysis to interpret the answers and quantify the data collected from the questionnaire by comparing the mean values of important indicators versus performance indicators of the balanced MICE attributes measurement proposed by Whitfield, et al. (2014) in the Table 5. The population of this research comprised one hundred percent of Thai nationals from various different provinces

and were all professionals and scholars in travel, tourism, hospitality or MICE industries, or the combination (See demographic table for provincial areas of respondent origins in Table 6). Consequently, the specific segment of respondents that counted a total of 435 sampling size were (i) tourism, hospitality, MICE, travel, business scholar; (ii) MICE professional; (iii) travel, hospitality and tourism professional; (iv) government officer in travel, tourism and MICE. This decision toward the respondent group is aligned with the theory from Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) justifying that in order to get a piece of sufficient and adequate information on a specific issue, grouping the selection of respondents into an expert pool is essential as they can testify best as compared to a non-expert. The total number of respondents (N=435) was finalized after 4 months of data collection process, from November 2021 - May 2022. The prospective respondents were approached through different numbers of channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook group for tourism and hospitality scholars in Thailand, personal visits to travel, tourism and MICE offices, telephone calls, and post-seminar networking events. However, despite the expertise and extensive knowledge as well as experiences of each respondent, not all of them really reside and/or associate directly in the provinces where the targeted MICE city initiative is proposed. Regardless, the comments summarized did not lose any significance.

RESULT

Demographic Data

The demographic data on gender comprises 145 males, 281 females and 9 others - grouping gender at 33%, 65% and 2% respectively. The age group of the respondents from 20-29 years old at 147 participants, making it 33.79%, followed by the 30-39 group at 149 or 34.25%, then 40-49 group with 107 respondents or at 24.60%, 50-59 age group accounted 25 respondents or 5.75%, and finally the age group of >59 at 7 or 1.61%. The majority of the respondents have a master's degree represented by 179 volunteers or 41%, followed by bachelor's degree with 135 volunteers or 31%, and a doctoral degree with 121 volunteers or at 28%. The level of expertise is dominated by "Tourism, Hospitality, MICE, Travel and Business Scholars" with 196 participants or 45%, followed by "MICE Professional" with 106 participants or at 24%, "Travel, Hospitality and Tourism Professional" counted 84 participants or at 19%, and finally the "Government Officer in Travel, Tourism and MICE" with 49 people or at 11% of the total population. The respondent population came from North of Thailand at 148 respondents or 34%, followed by South of Thailand with 33 respondents or 8%, East of Thailand with 51 respondents or 12%, West of Thailand with 79 respondents or 18%, Northeast

of Thailand with 25 respondents or 6%, and Central of Thailand with the majority of 99 respondents or 23%. Table 6 presents the demographic data.

Table 6: Demographic Data

Gender	N	%	Education Level	N	%	Respondent Origin	N	%
Male	145	33%	Bachelor's degree	135	31%	North of Thailand	148	34%
Female	281	65%	Master's degree	179	41%	South of Thailand	33	8%
Other	9	2%	Doctoral's degree	121	28%	East of Thailand	51	12%
Total	435	100%	Total	435	100%	West of Thailand	79	18%
Age Group	N	%	Level of Expertise	N	%	Northeast of Thailand	25	6%
20-29	147	33%	Tourism, Hospitality, MICE, Travel Business Scholar	196	45%	Central of Thailand	99	22%
30-39	149	34%	MICE Professional	106	24%	Total	435	100%
40-49	107	25%	Travel, Hospitality and Tourism Professional	84	19%			
50-59	25	6%	Government Officer in Travel, Tourism & MICE	49	11%			
>59	7	3%	Total	435	100%			
Total	435	100%						

Importance-Performance Analysis Result

Before running the IP (importance-performance) analysis, we run the t-test to see which attribute has a significant difference between its importance and performance with a 95% confidence level. Table 7 shows that the service in accommodation (Accommodation: service) has the biggest IP gap among all with 0.29 points of difference. The restaurants as recreational spots (Recreational: restaurants) with negative paired differences of 0.13 means that its performance outweighs its importance with 0.13 points, and this attribute is the only one with performance outweighing its importance. Overall, we found 70 percent of all attributes have significant IP gaps, and these 14 attributes were sent to IPA analysis. Table 7 presents the importance-performance analysis result.

Table 7: Importance-Performance Analysis Result

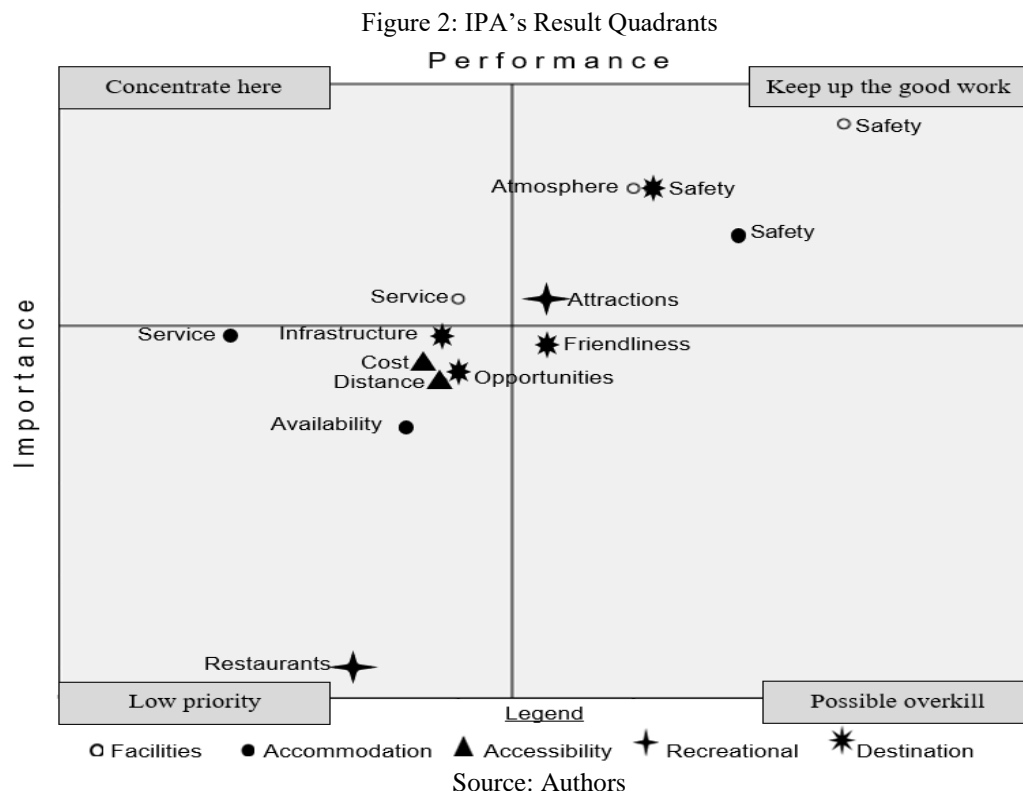
No		N	Importance		Performance		Paired Differences		Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	
1	Facilities: reputation	435	4.0000	1.00689	3.9494	.96109	.05057	1.06785	.324
2	Facilities: atmosphere	435	4.4207	.65819	4.1954	.82639	.22529	.96949	.000
3	Facilities: service	435	4.2966	.71318	4.1034	.84834	.19310	.99281	.000
4	Facilities: safety	435	4.4851	.66971	4.3264	.78823	.15862	.93579	.000
5	Accommodation : availability	435	4.1632	.73336	4.0690	.82575	.09425	.97803	.045
6	Accommodation : service	435	4.2621	.69912	3.9724	.84197	.28966	.97846	.000
7	Accommodation : cost	435	4.1931	.74329	4.1218	.69981	.07126	.88613	.094
8	Accommodation : safety	435	4.3678	.75157	4.2667	.77559	.10115	.90766	.021
9	Accessibility: distance	435	4.2092	.74358	4.0943	.85752	.11494	1.04093	.022
10	Accessibility: cost	435	4.2253	.72786	4.0828	.81887	.14253	1.02184	.004
11	Accessibility: visa	435	4.1264	.80329	4.0943	.76973	.03218	.96667	.488
12	Recreational: restaurants	435	3.9011	.87298	4.0345	.92642	.13333	1.08643	.011
13	Recreational: shopping	435	3.8851	.84550	3.9862	.87715	.10115	1.12936	.062
14	Recreational: attractions	435	4.2989	.70735	4.1471	.79251	.15172	.93324	.001
15	Destination: infrastructure	435	4.2621	.75916	4.0874	.85959	.17471	.98692	.000
16	Destination: safety	435	4.4207	.63684	4.2138	.81053	.20690	.94720	.000
17	Destination: reputation	435	4.1724	.68235	4.1057	.79910	.06667	.89939	.123
18	Destination: surroundings	435	4.2460	.74469	4.1655	.82037	.08046	.92605	.071
19	Destination: friendliness	435	4.2483	.75469	4.1425	.76977	.10575	.88658	.013
20	Destination: opportunities	435	4.2230	.71096	4.0966	.80314	.12644	.95044	.006

Source: Authors

We acknowledged the suggestions from Boley et al. (2017) explaining the advantages and the drawbacks of using data-centered and scale-centered IP analysis. Hence, we attempted the technique. At first, we employed scale-centered analysis and found that some attributes concentrated in Quadrant 2 (Keep up the good work) and Quadrant 3 (Low priority). We, then,

applied data-centered analysis to smoothen the “ceiling effects”. Figure 2 is the results of our study using data-centered IPA analysis.

After 14 attributes were populated for the analysis, the study found two distinctive findings in this IP analysis of MICE in lower-tier cities. (i) The friendliness of tourism destinations around the MICE place (Destination: friendliness) falls on Quadrant 4, which means that the performance overkills the importance; (ii) In contrast, the service in MICE facilities falls in the Quadrant 1, which interprets that MICE business visitors need to concentrate here as the respondents believe that this attribute is very important but underperformed. Whilst, the rest of the attributes are distributed around Quadrant 2 (Keep the Good Work) and Quadrant 3 (Low Priority) (See Figure 2).



DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Discussion

In general, and as for the discussion of this study, the examination of the MICE attribute framework to explain the business paradigm and phenomenon is not a new thing in the MICE, travel, tourism and hospitality literature development. In particular for Thailand scope, the studies of MICE industries are dynamically produced and cited - to name the least: macro outlook of national capabilities of MICE event (Yodsuwan and Butcher, 2022), the evaluation

of Chiang Mai province's convention competitiveness and Eastern economic corridor of Thailand (Pansuwong, 2017; Chaobanpho, et al., 2018), and Thailand's MICE's market segment (Campiranon and Arcodia, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Needless to say, the finding of this study has drawn a novel school of thought wherein the framework of MICE attributes enables internal business capabilities overview and offers an informed-proposal for Thailand's MICE development in the lower-tier cities. Understanding the most pressing issues in the lower-tier cities, especially within development attempts of MICE cities, must have been so complex. In fact, this research is still far from touching the basis of socio-economic phenomenon that looks in-depth into the intersection of tourism planning and policy, organizational theory, and economic sociology. However, to be precise, even being represented by sole micro indicators of MICE attributes, this study has spoken the truth about what is happening in the majority of Thailand's lower-tier cities over their MICE attributes - and surprisingly enough, even before going too far to the assessment of socio-economic of MICE industry trend in lower-cities, it is now clear to us that the imperative concerns are still yet to be solved, (as we go back to the finding). The fact of the underperforming standard services in the MICE facilities of Thailand's lower-tier cities still lingering given its utmost importance of development. Contradictory, as it is deemed overperforming, the incentives from TCEB, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and/or provincial governments on locals' standard grooming, services and friendliness may want to be compensated to develop other important attributes that fall under "Keep up the Good Work" Quadrant such as imposing much clearer and stricter safety procedures of all kinds of force majeure, COVID-19-kind-of-virus preventions and spread, accommodation environmental and energy sustainability incentives, as well as international standard of recreational equipments.

Further research

The further research can be drawn from different angles of external competitiveness analysis (perhaps can be done by examining Porter's Five Forces or PESTEL analysis). This is due to the fact that despite there is widespread agreement that competitor acts have a direct influence on organizations or cities, this study has received little attention in the literature. Bio-ecological niches and niche positioning are excellent lenses through which to study this topic (Lee, 2022). Moreover, the look up into social network and local labor force indicators in the

development of standardized MICE destinations in small cities, internationalization of MICE city destinations, or automation and digitalization of MICE city destinations in the lower-tier cities are also far less trivial. Additionally, as the study regarding MICE destination competitiveness continues, it possibly emerges and considers “MICE data” as a distinctive asset for further improvement as its marketing attempts to evoke business events more frequently than ever (Lee, 2022). On the other hand, as things stand, a destination's productivity and performance gain by specializing in a restricted variety of duties. Akerman and Py (2010) hinted that the amount of specific niche asset dimensions would cover long-term competitiveness, thus, the level and direction of competitiveness are examined in their study and indeed, can be further for Thailand's MICE destination and industry planning.

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